

**“Is It a She or a He?”:
Using Literacy to Explore Gender-/Hetero-Normativity with Second Graders**

BY

Paul Hartman

B.A., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005

M.Ed., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008

DISSERTATION

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction: Curriculum Studies
in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

P. Zitlali Morales, Chair and Advisor
Eleni Katsarou
Rebecca Woodard
David Stovall, Educational Policy Studies
Mollie Blackburn, Ohio State University

Words

Be careful of words,
even the miraculous ones.
For the miraculous we do our best,
sometimes they swarm like insects
and leave not a sting but a kiss.
They can be as good as fingers.
They can be as trusty as the rock
you stick your bottom on.
But they can be both daisies and bruises.
Yet I am in love with words.
They are the doves falling out of the ceiling.
They are six holy oranges sitting in my lap.
They are the trees, the legs of summer,
and the sun, its passionate face.
Yet often they fail me.
I have so much I want to say,
so many stories, images, proverbs, etc.
But the words aren't good enough,
the wrong ones kiss me.
Sometimes I fly like an eagle
but with the wings of a wren.
But I try to take care
and be gentle to them.
Words and eggs must be handled with care.
Once broken they are impossible
things to repair.

Anne Sexton (1975)

This thesis is dedicated to the Others occupying the margins—that they find the words, actions, and resilience to combat the oppressive forces in their worlds; and to Helen Slawinski, my grandma, whose strong work ethic, compassion, toughness, and love will forever inspire me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Committee Chair and Advisor, Dr. P. Zitlali Morales. I thank her for the time and sharp feedback she has given me. Since first taking her class in 2012 I have been impressed and motivated by her deep understanding of language and literacy and am inspired by her commitment to public education.

I am so grateful to have had the privilege of having a group of scholars and activists on my dissertation committee whose work is at once so different from one another, yet is threaded together with a deep commitment to social justice. A million thanks to Rebecca Woodard, David Stovall, Mollie Blackburn, and Eleni Katsarou. Mollie's groundbreaking work with LGBTQ-youth is so very important and inspiring. Eleni—a mentor, colleague, and friend. Our hours of thoughtful discussion have truly been a guiding light as I developed and continue to develop my identity as an educator. I also give many thanks to Kevin Kumashiro, my Masters-level advisor, who helped me understand that “practice makes practice” and that an anti-oppressive pedagogy is never complete, but is always a continual work in progress.

Working toward this Ph.D. has not been easy, especially while maintaining a full-time teaching position. Many thanks to Dr. Grace Pigozzi, a great friend who has helped me tremendously as we both tried to navigate the world of academia. Thank you to my teacher-friends, my comrades in the struggle. Theresa Isaacson—what a pleasure it has been to work across the hall from her for the past four years. Together we learned how to teach in classrooms with far too many students and far too little resources, while at the same time maintaining a sense of order and compassion. Kerry Janes, one of the best middle-school writing teachers I have ever met, has been an important ally and partner as we try so hard to organize our school for educational justice and action.

Of course, I must thank my students. Words cannot express all I have learned from them. Some of my favorite things about my students are to watch them as they develop into independent readers, writers, and thinkers, discussing literature with them, and giving them the floor as they speak to issues of justice and fairness. They have humbled me in so many ways and I am so lucky to have been their teacher.

My friendship with Daniel Drake has been instrumental. Our discussions of queer and feminist theories coupled with nights on the town cannot be beat. George Aslanides has always gotten me thinking, and I am forever grateful for his friendship. Melissa Pearson and Robin Bartram—two of the smartest and coolest people I know. Thank you both for being lovely people and lovely friends. You have offered sharp criticism and feedback to my work, and have been the patient audience during my many run-throughs of presentations. You two are so smart and I have such a profound respect for you and your opinions. I just know that we will be Frumpies forever. I thank my sister Kari, the other black sheep, for always being there for me, and who inadvertently and probably unknowingly taught me the art of perseverance and resilience.

Finally, I would like to thank my boyfriend, Mark. Thank you for being in my life as I wrote, read, thought, and talked your ear off. Your creative take on the world provides a special source of calmness at the times I need it most. I look forward to our continued journey together...

ph

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
CHAPTER I.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Project Overview & Research Questions.....	6
Locating Myself in the Research.....	11
Chicago Public Schools.....	11
A Personal Investment in LGBT Activism.....	15
 CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS.....	 20
Introduction.....	20
Review of Significant Research Related to Gender/Sexuality in Schools.....	20
Moving from an Essentialist Understanding of Gender.....	21
A Perspective on Gender Informed by Poststructuralism.....	24
Feminist Poststructuralism Meets Queer Theory.....	27
“Strategic Essentialist” and “Queer” Approaches.....	31
Critiques and Other Insights.....	33
Key Theoretical Terms.....	35
Primary Literacy & “Deficit Discourses”.....	38
Developing an Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy.....	41
Biesta’s “Functions of Education”.....	42
Kumashiro’s Concept of Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy.....	46
Conclusion.....	54
 CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS.....	 56
Introduction.....	56
Study Design and Procedures.....	56
The Participants & the Researcher-Participant Relationship.....	59
Sara.....	61
Tariq.....	62
Myra.....	62
Javon.....	63
Aliya.....	63
Donald.....	63
Framing the Study.....	64
Data Sources and Analysis.....	65
The Neoliberal Context & Limitations on Teacher-Led Research.....	67
 CHAPTER IV: CRITICAL LITERARY ANALYSIS.....	 70
Introduction.....	70

Previous Critical Analysis of LGBT-Themed Children's Literature.....	71
Conceptual Framework.....	73
Political Issues Related to Gender/Sexuality.....	76
Categorizing Children's Books.....	78
Strategic Essentialism at Work in Children's Books.....	79
Queer Work in Children's Books.....	81
Subcategories of Children's Books.....	83
Ideologies Surrounding Gender/Sexual Identity.....	86
Critical Literary Analysis of Selected Children's Books.....	88
<i>King and King</i>	89
<i>Elena's Serenade</i>	93
<i>The Sissy Duckling</i>	98
<i>10,000 Dresses</i>	104
<i>Jacob's New Dress</i>	108
Conclusion.....	114
 CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE DISCUSSIONS.....	 116
Introduction: Conceptual Framework.....	116
Discourse Categories.....	117
Rejections.....	121
Anti-Bully Discourse.....	122
Reinforcing Gender-/Hetero-Normativity.....	123
Interrogating Gender-/Hetero-Normativity.....	125
Foregrounding Gender/Sexual Identity	127
Analysis of Literature Discussions.....	129
<i>King and King</i>	129
<i>Elena's Serenade</i>	136
<i>The Sissy Duckling</i>	140
<i>Jacob's New Dress</i>	148
<i>10,000 Dresses</i>	154
Conclusion.....	160
 CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION.....	 163
Connections.....	163
Pedagogical Implications.....	163
The Possibilities of Children's Books.....	165
The Narrowing of the Primary Literacy Curriculum.....	168
Children and Agency.....	170
Policy Implications.....	171
Possible Limitations: The Limits of Queer Theory.....	172
Further Research.....	175
Conclusion.....	176
Afterword.....	177
Appendices.....	179
References.....	183
Vita.....	194

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Literacy Club Meeting Schedule.....	57
Table 2: Characterization of Children's Books.....	85
Table 3: Multiple and Conflicting Ideologies.....	87-88
Table 4: Occurrences of Specific Discourse.....	120

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Selecting Children's Books.....	74
Figure 2: Discourse Categories.....	119

SUMMARY

Although there has been a growing amount of research exploring lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer- (LGBTQ) related issues in schools, the context of most of this research is middle and high schools. This leaves a gap in understanding the ways in which normative understandings of gender and sexual identity operate within primary (kindergarten through third grade) classrooms. As part teacher self-study and part critical social research, this qualitative research project examines data from a fifteen-week after-school literacy club with second-grade students led/taught by the author. Drawing from a Foucaultian (1977, 1996) notion of discourse, this project 1) offers a critical literary analysis of children's books that contain themes related to non-normative gender/sexual identities, and 2) critically analyzes the discourse produced in literature discussions of such books. The data is analyzed to understand the ways in which power manifests in the selected children's books and in the talk of the students, specifically paying careful attention to the ways in which the heterosexual matrix—the invisible rules that rely on and reify dichotomous understandings of male/female, masculine/feminine, men/women (Butler, 1999)—is reified, challenged, and disrupted. The findings suggest that such themed children's literature creates important possibilities for children to engage in social justice work and highlights the ways in which the classroom read aloud space can capitalize on the agentic capacities of young children and act as an integral site of discussion, dissensus, and meaning-making.

This timely research calls for more similar research to be conducted in light of contemporary discrimination (*e.g.*, public bathroom laws against transgender individuals) and violence directed toward LGBT-identified individuals (*e.g.*, the largest mass shooting

in the history of the United States which took place at a gay nightclub). This project brings to light the ways in which heteronormativity and homophobia are engrained in the primary classroom, but also offers ways in which teachers and students can disrupt and combat these oppressive forces and hence, create more inclusive classroom spaces.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The teacher's preparation period is a sacred part of the school day. It is the precious time in which the teacher makes copies, puts finishing touches on lessons for the day, or examines student work. In my school, my classroom of second grade students have their "specials" class (Physical Education, Music, Art, Library, or Technology) during my preparation period, but usually, because of lack of space in our overcrowded school, these classes are held in the homeroom classroom and the specials teachers must bring their equipment and materials to each class they visit. Not only is this a disadvantage to the teachers of these "specials" classes—the art teacher does not have an art room to teach in, etc.—it also infringes upon the classroom teacher's preparation time. And more importantly, the students are cooped up in the same classroom all day long without adequate access to appropriate materials and space.

On one such day, my students were having music class in our homeroom as I was preparing for the rest of the day. My attention shifted from the opera the music teacher was teaching the students to what I was trying to plan on the sidelines of the classroom. As I walked to the front door of the classroom to make copies, I glanced at a student's desk and noticed a coloring sheet with a cartoon drawing of the opera's main characters. The image on the sheet was of a large, elegant woman—perhaps she was some kind of royalty—and she was kissing a man, who looked like a prince or a king, on the cheek and there were little hearts surrounding them. I watched as the children contentedly colored their sheets while listening to the opera, and I wondered how they made sense of that image. Though I do not remember the exact opera the students were studying, I came to

learn through my casual listening that the storyline was very similar to a traditional love story. These two characters—a woman and a man—fell in love and got married. I leaned over to ask a girl to explain the picture to me, and she earnestly explained that these two people were getting married because they loved each other.

This comment made me wonder how the students would react if a similar image was portrayed to them, but instead of a man and woman character, two women or two men were kissing. Or, what if one or both characters expressed their genders in undistinguishable manners? This was definitely not the first time I had such wonderings, and in fact, I had blurry memories of past instances in which the representation of non-heterosexuality and non-normative gender expressions surfaced in my classroom, and remembered the kind of lively and charged discussions that ensued.

Throughout my teaching career, I have always been interested in the double standard that seems to exist in the elementary classroom. Gender-/hetero-normativity is accepted as a part of the primary classroom context—from the ways in which love and desire are represented in children's books, to the gender stereotypes associated with common classroom activities. This (often hidden) curriculum casts expressions of sexual/gender identity that fall out of dominant understandings of masculinity and femininity (*i.e.*, queer, sissy, tomboy) as wrong, taboo, and sexually inappropriate. This project serves as a small investigation with the hopes of addressing and combatting this double standard.

Statement of the Problem

Much research has been done that documents the experiences of, and the policies and practices that govern the lives and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgendered, queer (LGBTQ) and gender nonconforming youth in public schools. Though a significant amount of this research has shown how LGBTQ-related bias has negative impacts on LGBTQ individuals in schools, including lower attendance rates, lower grade point averages, strong links to depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts (O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004; Poteat & Espelage, 2007), less research has documented the agentic capacities of LGBTQ youth, showcasing their resiliency at challenging and combatting heterosexism through activism, writing, and speaking out in schools (Blackburn, 2011).

Nearly all research related to gender and/or sexuality in schools focuses on students in middle and high school. The scant, yet crucial work that focuses on gender/sexuality in the primary school setting (grades kindergarten through third grade) documents the ways in which young children actively “do” gender in schools and how oppressive gender dynamics are situated and perpetuated in classrooms (Blaise, 2005; Davies, 2003; Thorne, 1993). Research has documented how LGBTQ-related issues are often either rendered invisible in many elementary teacher preparation programs, or are deemed as less important than other identity-related issues in education (Sears, 2010). In the primary classroom specifically, this “discourse of desire” (Fine, 1998, 2008)—the discourse that provides crucial knowledges and understandings to children regarding gender and sexuality—is absent, even at the same time statistics overwhelmingly document the presence of homophobia/heterosexism in U.S. public schools.

A 2014 report conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that 56% of LGBTQ students in grades six through twelve felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation; 38% because of their gender expression. 71%

of LGBTQ students frequently or often heard “gay” used in a negative way; 33% of LGBTQ students frequently or often reported hearing negative remarks about transgender people, like “tranny” or “he/she.” 74% of LGBTQ students were verbally harassed/36% physically harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation; 55% verbally harassed/23% physically harassed in the past year because of their gender expression. When looking at the experiences of LGBTQ students of color, the numbers sharply increased, indicating these students experience additional race-based harassment at school.

GLSEN published a similar report in 2015—this time focusing on the climate of elementary schools in which students in grades three through six and teachers of grades Kindergarten through grade six were surveyed. It reports that 46% of elementary students always or sometimes hear others make comments like “that’s so gay,” 26% always or sometimes hear others make comments like “fag” or “lesbo,” and 26% hear others say bad or mean things about people because of their race or ethnic background.

Though these facts are no surprise to many public school teachers, attempts at combatting such bias and violence is problematic, and teachers who attempt to challenge/disrupt homophobia and/or gender-/hetero-normativity in the classroom do not do so without struggle. Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan (2015) for instance, write about approaches teachers can take to address LGBTQ issues and recount questions preservice teachers often posed about addressing such issues: *Would administration allow it? Aren’t these books banned? Is it appropriate for kids to talk about those topics in schools? What about the parents?* These questions are very important to ponder before attempting such work, and perhaps, “stem from fear and perhaps their own discomfort with LGBTQ

topics, but also from the knowledge that, when it comes to teaching, especially about identity and difference, *context matters*” (p. 436). I can relate to the fears embedded in these questions posed by these pre-service teachers and heard them echoed amongst myself and the pre-service teachers I have taught. This kind of teaching is often deemed “risky” (Sears, 1999) for the simple fact that it explicitly questions heterosexual assumptions, and therefore, teachers must take into account the context in which they think about addressing LGBTQ-related issues. In many schools, LGBTQ-related issues are never discussed amongst staff, and thusly, there cannot be any explicit support for such endeavors. Teachers in such contexts who wish to address these topics run the risk of being alienated, misunderstood, harassed, and possibly even fired from their jobs.

In addition to the challenges mentioned above that often face teachers who attempt to address LGBTQ-related issues in their classrooms, I argue that teaching for social justice in the primary classroom—particularly in regards to gender/sexualities equity—has become difficult, if not nearly impossible, in the current climate of public education that is overwhelmingly governed by neoliberal imperialism. Draconian teacher accountability mandates, over-testing, and the intense focus on the “basics” in the primary classroom all narrow the scope of what is included in the primary school curriculum. This reality demonstrates the ways in which the literacy curriculum in public schools acts as a sort of ideological filter (Dyson, 2015), therefore, erasing non-dominant childhoods and experiences. Primary literacy teachers who teach students from non-dominant backgrounds are mandated to teach such narrow curricula, administer an exorbitant amount of one-on-one testing, and are left with little time to engage students in creative and critical thinking. With this current climate of public education in the United

States taken into consideration, it is imperative that the teaching towards gender/sexualities equity be taught in an intersectional manner that seeks to explore the interlocking nature of systemic oppressions students face related to race, socioeconomics, ability, language, gender, sexuality, etc. Any kind of teaching for social justice must be done in a manner that seeks to challenge this neoliberal turn in public education.

Project Overview & Research Questions

This qualitative research project—part teacher self-study, part critical social research project—explores the ways in which literacy can be used as a tool to challenge and disrupt gender-/hetero-normativity with second graders (children who are seven- and eight-years-old). In this project, I conducted a literary analysis on the five children's books used in the study that have themes related to non-heterosexuality and/or non-normative gender expression. Then, I read these five books, along with other books, to a group of six second-grade students and analyzed the talk during the literature discussions. With the influence of previous research on gender/sexuality in primary classrooms, I argue that children not only engage in discourses of heterosexuality, but they also have the agentic capacity to challenge/disrupt these discourses, particularly via the use of literacy. This assertion challenges dominant discourses of innocence that surround children, particularly in the primary classroom, and insists that teachers, researchers, policy makers, and adults in general, must not let the discourse of innocence that seems to govern the gendered lives of children dominate the ways children are understood and taught in public schools. This project encourages a shift of focus from what *is said about children*, e.g., children in primary grades are too young and innocent to discuss such issues, to the *words and actions of children*, e.g., examining the ways second graders

actively construct discourses of heterosexuality in their classroom, and seeks to highlight such agentic capacities of young children.

With the influence of work inspired by feminist poststructuralist theory (Davies, 1993; Blaise, 2005; Cullen & Sandy, 2009), this project showcases my attempts as teacher-researcher to equip children with the capacity to deconstruct narratives and subjectivities, specifically around gender and sexuality, with their classmates and with me, their teacher, in a space that encouraged the sharing of opinions/views, and that welcomed dissensus. This project highlights my attempt to create a classroom environment in which children could explore the ways subjectivities are privileged and/or silenced in various contexts. The major research questions for this project are:

1. How do themes related to non-heterosexual identity and/or non-normative gender expression emerge in such themed children's books?
2. What discourse is produced during literature discussions of children's books that contain themes related to non-normative gender and/or non-heterosexual identity?
 - 2a. Based on the characterizations of children's books that emerged from question #1, what are the beneficial/problematic aspects in using books characterized in each way?

Though the aforementioned research questions are at the core of this project, it is of importance to note that my attempt to develop a pedagogy that strives for gender and sexualities equity in the primary classroom is enmeshed in a larger and more complicated

understanding of what it means to teach for social justice. My analysis is placed in an intersectional context of understanding the politically contested terrain of public education in the United States; a framing that believes sexualities and gender equity cannot be conceived of in a vacuum—it can only be achieved in a manner that seeks to understand the complex interlocking nature of oppressions.

The data was collected from a fifteen-week after-school literacy club that met one time per week for one hour in which I was the teacher/facilitator of the group. Sources of data include a selection of children's books and audio recordings of literature discussions. The literacy club consisted of six children (three boys, three girls) between the ages of seven and eight. During the literacy club meetings, participants read, discussed, and analyzed a wide array of children's literature—all of which contained themes related to fairness, identity, and agency. Of the ten texts we read, five of them contained themes related to gender nonconformity and/or characters that were LGBTQ, which is the focus of this project.

I am informed by an intersectional approach—drawing from queer, feminist, poststructuralist, and anti-racist cultural theories. Since this project explored the use of *literacy* as a tool to disrupt gender/hetero-normativity, I approach literacy from a sociological perspective (Gee, 2000) and view the language arts curriculum in schools as something that acts as a sort of ideological filter—casting particular modes of communication (*e.g.*, what is talked about in school) and language (*e.g.*, African American Vernacular English, non-Standard English, etc.) that fall outside of white,

middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender¹ norms as wrong, less valued, and defective. This perspective forces me to examine the white-ness and class-based biases my presence—along with the race- and class-based biases of the larger institution of public education—may inadvertently bring to this work.

This project makes contributions to the fields of critical early childhood studies, scholarship that focuses on gender- and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ)-related issues in schools, expands the field of the teaching and learning of literacy in the primary grades, and helps to re-conceptualize the primary literacy curriculum.

Though there are many commendable and impressive moments from the study that demonstrate the agentic capacities of children in which they disrupt oppressive discourses surrounding gender/sexuality, I was also struck by the ways in which hegemonic discourses of masculinity and femininity prevailed and were re-inscribed by the children. As the teacher of the group, I encouraged dissensus amongst the group and was committed to making the classroom a space where students could share their opinions—and hence, open up the classroom to queer² possibilities. Because this project/learning sequence explicitly sought to challenge/disrupt gender/hetero-normativity, I found it necessary to analyze the ways in which this approach fell short and to examine the ways gender/hetero-normativity prevailed.

¹ Cisgender is used to refer to individuals whose experiences of their own gender align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

² The term “queer” is used here from a perspective informed by feminist poststructuralist and queer theory. Queer, in this sense, is used as a descriptor of non-normative identities and politics and problematizes binarism and normativity. This term is further explained in the next chapter.

Immediately following this overview, I provide a contextual analysis of this project. First, I locate myself in this project by contextualizing my own personal history and draw parallels to the ways in which my own history and identity fit into this larger struggle. I contextualize my teaching career in the Chicago Public Schools – a context that has proved to be a personal site of struggle, resistance, and empowerment. I explain how this research project, and this line of social justice work, fits into these historical and politically charged contexts. In chapter two, I give an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this project. I reflect on the insights offered from previous research that looked at the ways young children construct concepts surrounding gender/sexuality and the ways in which previous researchers document the ways in which discourses of heterosexuality surface in the primary classroom. I then explain the theoretical underpinnings of how I understand literacy and the literacy curriculum in the primary classroom. Chapter two continues to explain the evolution of the development of my own anti-oppressive pedagogy. Merging the work of curriculum studies scholars Gert Biesta and Kevin Kumashiro, I articulate a personal anti-oppressive pedagogy through which to challenge oppression in my classroom. In chapter three, I explain the methods at work in this project. I give an overview of the participants in this study, the timeline, and a description of the activities involved in the after-school literacy club. I also explain the sources of data and the ways in which the data was coded. Chapter four explains the heuristic I used to critically analyze the children's books that contain themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression. In this chapter, I categorized the five books used in this study by the ways in which gender and/or sexuality surfaced in the books. This chapter serves as a backdrop for the analysis of the talk of the literature

discussions of these texts. In chapter five, I use critical discourse analysis to closely examine the discussions of these texts and pay careful attention to the ways gender/hetero-normativity is challenged and/or reified through the children's talk. Finally, in the conclusion, I reflect on the pedagogical implications of this project, offer recommendations for future research, discuss the findings of this work, and offer suggestions for change in the primary classroom.

Locating Myself in the Research

In this section I offer a personal history in order to explain the context of this research project. I begin with an overview of my life as a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools and explain how this experience has shaped my views on educational justice as I develop an anti-oppressive pedagogy. I then explain my personal commitment to LGBT-activism with the hopes of weaving together the personal with the political, and to expose the interlocking nature of the ways I conceptualize social justice work within the elementary classroom. This personal history also serves as a backdrop as I reflect on my own reactions during the discussions of books that take up issues of non-heterosexuality and/or non-normative gender expression.

Chicago Public Schools

Upon receiving my undergraduate degree and teaching certification, I immediately began teaching in the Chicago Public Schools district. Throughout my first three years of teaching, I taught as a fourth and fifth grade self-contained classroom teacher and for two years as an eighth grade writing teacher in a school that was in a neighborhood mostly populated with families who had recently emigrated from Mexico. My work in this neighborhood – specifically the work teaching eighth grade writing in

overcrowded classes (one of my classes had 41 students) inspired me to learn not only about second language acquisition, but also about the socio-political forces that created the conditions of the neighborhood and school in which I taught, and the disadvantages that have become associated with that. As a new teacher, I was quickly learning how to best teach writing to five groups of students whom I only saw for forty-five minutes each day. To help further develop my teaching capacity, I concurrently earned a Masters degree focusing my studies on literacy and second language acquisition. After teaching eighth grade writing for two years, I was assigned as a second grade classroom teacher and have continued to be a second grade teacher ever since.

At that time, the Board of the Chicago Public Schools was going through, and still is, a political battle with educational activists, progressive politicians, and the Chicago Teachers Union—a battle that began decades ago. Charter schools were opening at nearly the same rate regular neighborhood schools were closing, and government subsidized housing projects were getting demolished—displacing thousands of low-income people of color—all while the city’s downtown and wealthier neighborhoods prospered. The “turn around” policies (the act of turning “failing” neighborhood public schools to private charters) were masks for transferring public education over to the private sector, decimating the teachers union, and further disenfranchising poor communities of color (Caref *et al.*, 2012). The stark contrast between the rich and poor in Chicago was as obvious as ever now, and I remember the anxiety my school community felt—along with other schools labeled “at-risk”—for fear of being closed and/or turned over to charter schools.

In 2010, the Chicago Teachers Union had recently changed leadership. Our union was now lead by the the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE). CORE's elected president, Karen Lewis, sought to redefine the union. Instead of relying on a top-down approach to governance, CORE relied on a grassroots approach that focused on broader social justice issues related to public education in Chicago (Uetricht, 2014). When Karen Lewis won the election, she immediately let her members and the city know what kind of political platform the Chicago Teachers Union now had:

Corporate America sees K-12 public education as a \$380 billion trust that, up until the last ten or fifteen years, they haven't had a sizeable piece of... Our union ... didn't point out this simple reality: What drives school reform is a singular focus on profit. Not teaching, not learning—profit (Canon, 2010).

It was at this point that I was elected union delegate of my school and became deeply involved in this kind of teacher-activism. Around the city, schools—particularly schools whose students were poor, Black, and Brown—were on edge at the end of each academic school year to hear whether or not their school would be slated to close. It was just a matter of time before this fear turned to reality at my school.

In spring 2012, the anxiety described above turned to dread when the principal of my school announced that a charter school was going to open a few blocks away from our school. This new school would fracture our school community—enrolling nearly half of our student population, which would force us to close our annex building and lay off/displace nearly half of our teaching and auxiliary staff, and in turn, dismantle the years of work the school community had put into curriculum planning, community

engagement, and school programming. We decided to organize though, and our efforts proved fruitful.

Through the organizing efforts of the union, the neighborhood association, parents, students, and teachers, we held numerous rallies and town-hall meetings—all with the hopes of stopping the expansion of this charter school, and demanding that the new school become an extension of our current school. In the end, the new building did become an extension of our neighborhood school, and our school community remained intact. As the union leader of my school, I was at the forefront of these organizing efforts. These experiences—the profound connection and solidarity I felt with my students, students’ parents, fellow teachers, and the greater community of the school—deeply shaped my perspective of what it means to be a teacher in Chicago’s public schools. I spent six years teaching at that school, and as a cultural outsider (*i.e.*, White, middle class), I felt I was just beginning to really understand my students and greater school community.

The following fall though, I moved to a new school in a very different neighborhood, and joined my fellow teachers in Chicago’s first teachers’ strike in over twenty years. At that time, the political platform of the Chicago Teachers Union became evident to the city. We were fighting against austerity, demanding equity in school funding, and for our students to gain access to a well-rounded curriculum. Since I have been teaching at this new school, I have grown not just in terms of my understanding the socio-political nature of public schooling in Chicago, but I also began to fine-tune my literacy teaching skills.

During the 2013-2014 school year, I worked toward my National Board Certification in literacy teaching, and became certified in 2014. This year-long process taught me the importance of self-reflection, careful planning, and using engaging teaching methods. I began to think about how I could use the teaching and learning of literacy as a tool that works toward social justice. I became frustrated learning about “best practices” in literacy that were void of addressing issues related to culture and sought to develop a personal praxis that spoke to this frustration. This project is one culmination of this professional progression.

A Personal Investment in LGBT Activism

In Chris Mayo’s (2014) review of LGBTQ issues related to youth and education, she describes a tension that emerges. She asks, “Should LGBTQ students’ experiences of bullying and exclusion take center stage or should the ability of LGBTQ students to negotiate, resist, and create new possibilities for alliance and community be the primary focus?” (p. 4). The first question is asked because if research takes this angle, it has the potential of positioning LGBTQ youth only as victims and can miss the important ways these individuals have made their way through public schools. The second question is posed because if we only focus on the ways LGBTQ youth have built communities and resiliency, then we may think that all of the work has been done, and that there are no problems in schools faced by LGBTQ individuals. I cite Mayo here, because I see aspects within my own history that fall into both camps, and that also fall somewhere in between. I acknowledge how both the marginalization I encountered in my life, along with the ways I remained strong and resilient in spite of this, have shaped the work in which I now embark.

I grew up on the fringes of Chicago's far southwest side and was the youngest of four children. The neighborhood I grew up in was middle-class, nearly completely White, and very blue collar. My parents opted to send the four of us to Catholic elementary and high school. I specifically remember the first day of school in sixth grade because there was so much talk of sex—something that was never uttered before in school. It was also the school year when I first heard insults like *sissy*, *fag*, and *homo*. Because these slurs were sometimes directed toward me, it was the first time the dissatisfaction of others directed toward me had explicit connections to homophobia and heterosexism. Within my immediate context, I felt marginalized, unaccounted for, and excluded. These experiences drove me to determinedly create a journey of making sense of my experiences and to attempt to set myself free from the oppressions I felt, but I was not sure how I could do this at such a young age. The context of my high school was not one in which I felt supported and affirmed either. I rarely was exposed to literature or histories that interested or resonated with me. In fact, I do not ever remember reading books by authors other than heterosexual, white men. Along with a tinge of constant homophobia and heterosexism, my high school environment was very white-centric. Not only was this unfortunate, it was also very boring.

When I was a fourteen-year-old freshman, my cousin, four years my senior and who identifies as lesbian, gave me a handful of CDs at our family Christmas celebration. Within the mix were albums by Bikini Kill, Sleater-Kinney, Bratmobile, and Pansy Division—all bands in the *riot grrrl* and *queercore* movements of music. The music was punk, and was purposefully political—with strong roots in feminist and queer activism. Throughout my youth I was told, either explicitly or implicitly, that my identity was

wrong. When I became exposed to a community of thinkers and activists who called into question some of the power structures that I felt had been major negative influences in my life, I felt affirmed and excited. I was also surprised that there was a community of people who experienced similar things that I did, and that they wrote about and challenged the oppression they experienced. I attribute this exposure as a turning point within my life, as well as a major source of resiliency. This exposure also guided me in coming out as gay to my family and those in my immediate surrounding.

Skipping ahead, and leaving out a lot, I came out as gay when I was sixteen-years-old, which catapulted me even further into this new world of punk, feminism, and queer life. The riot grrrl and queercore movements had long since fizzled out, and I had been fortunate enough to make a few great friends through my experiences. It was at this time when I made a strong and conscious effort to critically glance at my own context and to call into question the various structures I once thought were stable (gender, sexuality, norms in general). These structures were questioned because I felt they were the norms that policed my identity and experiences, and that had placed me on the margins of my immediate context and socio-culture.

By the time I had reached the end of my high school career, I had devoted nearly every free opportunity I had to immerse myself in this new community I had found, and I became staunch in my feminist and queer views. Even though the community I had found through music and art as a youth had been actively against and critical of sexism and homophobia, it was a community that was comprised of predominantly white, middle-class individuals. It was not until I ventured into college and into the teaching profession that I really grappled with my own privileges—particularly my racial and class

privileges—and had to think about the ways my identity must be negotiated in different contexts. I had no idea how nuanced the theories I had earlier constructed needed to be until my experiences in college and as a beginning teacher.

I moved out of my parents' home shortly after I graduated from high school. I knew that I was going to attend the University of Illinois at Chicago for my undergraduate experience and was excited to do so. Along with taking required general education courses, I began to take courses in gender studies, and soon began my coursework in elementary education. I had been learning about educational policies, critical race theories, and first encountered the ideas of neoliberalism.

As I progressed through college, I took more elementary education coursework and began practicums in teaching. I knew I wanted to try and provide contexts for my future students where I would be able to incite some kind of excitement and action toward some kind of personal betterment, fulfillment, and social justice. Though I had been used to being a minority in the culture of my upbringing, I had never been in a situation where most of the people around me were people of color. This was a learning experience for me, and it made me aware of how my whiteness and middle-class status, and the biases within each, had to be acknowledged and worked through. Poverty and racism were things I never had to deal with in my life, and I saw how these two oppressive power structures impacted the lives of my students. As a cultural outsider, it took me several years to just begin to understand the community in which I worked. Through the process of learning about the communities in which I have been a teacher, I have tried to pay careful attention to the interlocking ways oppression plays out. My experiences play an integral role in the research in which I embark with this project.

In addition to my personal history, it is important to note the history of school employees who have transgressed stereotypes. Jackie Blount (2000 & 2005) documents the ways in which the gender/sexual identities of public school workers in the United States during the twentieth century have been overtly policed. From school boards firing LGBT-identified teachers, to moral panics surrounding the presence of male teachers in the primary grades, or of “spinsters” not being good enough teacher role models for young children, Blount recounts the multitude of ways in which school employees have transgressed norms associated with gender in public school employment. This history, along with my own, enrich the context in which this research project is placed. Non-normative gender and sexuality has been policed and under scrutiny throughout the history of the United States, and work surrounding these issues today must acknowledge this history. This project is a very personal one, and captures one of the productive ways I have been able to channel the energies from being marginalized as a LGBT-identified individual.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Introduction

The first part of this chapter provides a review of the research on gender and children in schools that have influenced my work. Through this review, I explain key theoretical positions that undergird this project related to gender, sexuality, and young children. I then define a concept of primary literacy that drives this project, and end with a theorizing of my own pedagogical stance.

Review of Significant Research Related to Gender/Sexuality in Schools

There are many theories in the social sciences regarding gender and sexuality. Some are grounded in biological and essentialist views of gender – the idea that individuals are born with a fixed and unchangeable gender and sexuality. Others are informed by socialization views of gender – the idea that young children are simply passive recipients of gender norms and are pressed into particular gender roles that they learn from observing important adults in their lives and from the media. The research reviewed here, however, understands gender and/or sexuality from a feminist poststructuralist and/or queer perspective. This perspective regards individuals, including young children, as active agents who engage in, embrace, and/or resist the discursive practices that constitute our gendered and sexually-oriented selves. The theories of gender that initially informed the first work are informed by second wave feminist theories (roughly from the late 1960s-1970s). As the research on gender and/or sexuality and children evolves, so do the theories that inform the research. Later works are influenced by poststructuralist theories, and then feminist and queer readings of

postructuralist theories. At the end of the review, I will define the key theoretical terms that I employ in this project and overview my theoretical foundation for this project.

Moving From an Essentialist Understanding of Gender

Barrie Thorne's *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (1993) includes observational research she conducted in the 1976-1977 school year in a fourth/fifth grade combined classroom in a Michigan suburb, and from her 1980 fieldwork with children in a kindergarten and second grade classroom in a small coastal city in California. As a trained sociologist, she observed how boys and girls in schools rarely integrated across gender lines, and instead separated – both physically and psychically. At the beginning of her research, Thorne discusses the ways in which her perspective on gender was informed by feminist psychological theorists like Carol Gilligan (1982), who claims that girls have a “different voice” when dealing with moral dilemmas, and Deborah Tannen (1990) who argues that boys and girls grow up in what are essentially different cultures. Thorne notes that this “different worlds” framework is overwhelmingly reinforced by observational research that claims, among other things, that boys are more aggressive than girls, or that as a group, boys tend to publicly break rules more than girls. She sought to understand how and why this gender separation and integration was shaped by the social norms of the classrooms and schools where she worked. In her writing, she notes how teachers' use of “boys and girls” as a verbal marker for gender, the gender geography of lunchroom tables, the forming of lines, teasing, gossiping, and playground divisions around gender all had a profound impact on how children integrated, but usually separated, boys from girls.

Part of her observations and analyses focused on children who defied norms, and participated in “gender crossing” activities. She observed the impact of children who crossed gender lines (like a girl who insisted on playing baseball with boys, or a boy who insisted on jumping rope with a group of girls) at times and in contexts that were considered “abnormal.” She questioned whether or not these acts of gender line crossing did anything to challenge gender boundaries. In the younger grades of elementary school, children who did this were considered “tomboys” if girls, or “girly” if boys, and she concluded that this gender-crossing did, initially, challenge gender boundaries, but that the “teasing and labeling [of children who cross gender lines] can be seen as strategies for containing the subversive potential” (Thorne, 1993, p. 133). By the time children had reached fourth grade, labeling and name-calling of such students began to incorporate a layer of homophobic insults, particularly for boys who attempted to cross gender lines. Thorne draws from the work of Lynn Segal (1990) to assert that homophobia “represses the ‘feminine’ in all men as a way of keeping men separated off from women and keeping women subordinate to men” (Thorne, 1993, p. 125). It was at this point in the research that Thorne began to question her own understanding of gender.

These observations complicate the “different worlds” lens through which Thorne first understood gender and began this project. Upon reflection of her observations of children crossing gender lines, Thorne turned to an ethnography conducted by R. W. Connell and his colleagues (1982) of class and gender in an Australian secondary school that argues that there are:

multiple masculinities, some hegemonic and others submerged or marginalized;
the patterns are contradictory and continually negotiated...there are also varied

forms of femininity, ranging from ‘emphasized’ – a term chosen because masculinity claims ultimate hegemony over femininity – to less visible forms... Although powerfully symbolic, ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘emphasized femininity’ are not necessarily the most common patterns. This pries open unitary notions of masculinity and femininity and raises the question of why and how some forms come to be seen as masculinity and femininity in general (p. 31).

Thorne realized that the “different worlds” framework creates a dualism in which the children who crossed gender lines were rendered invisible. She concluded that this framework also reinforces essentialist views of gender – implying that there are only two worlds in which children can exist – a boy’s world, or a girl’s world.

The labeling and name-calling that gender line-crossers endured connects to Connell’s concept of “hegemonic masculinity” (1987) and also draws upon the research of Ellen Jordan’s (1990) work in an Australian primary school whose research focused on a primary school staff committed to nonsexist education. Jordan concluded that teaching that ignores or plays down gender differences may result in unintended consequences and that “without guidance and positive intervention, boys adopt definitions that set masculinity in opposition to femininity and reproduce male dominance... adults should demonstrate to kids that there are a variety of ways of being male, many of them admirable—none need to depend on being different from and superior to girls and women” (p. 169). This suggestion for teaching serves as a starting point for gender and sexualities equity in the classroom.

It is important to note the place the “different worlds” framework of gender has in history. Prior to the 1970s, the vast majority of work that researched the lives of children

focused solely on the experiences of boys and ignored or marginalized girls' experiences. The feminist movement of the late 1960s-1970s helped scholars to focus on girls and to interrupt sexist stereotypes and the devaluing of girls/women. When it emerged and became widely used, the different-worlds framework was an important feminist reevaluation of things associated with femaleness. However, as Thorne (1993) reflectively asserted, "the contrastive framework has outlived its usefulness, as has the gender ideology that it builds on and perpetuates" (p. 108). Overall, Thorne insisted that we must grapple with the dualisms and the deviance (the "sissy" and the "tomboy") that trouble gender. She suggested things schools and teachers can do to challenge the gender binary, like grouping students using criteria other than gender or race, or having students work in small, heterogeneous groups to promote collaboration across differences. She ended her reflection suggesting, "friendship and equity are a much better basis for intimate relationships than mistrust and a sense of being strangers... A more complex understanding of the dynamics of gender, of tensions and contradictions, and of the hopeful moments that lie within present arrangements, can help broaden our sense of the possible" (p. 173). This reflection explains how her perspective on gender evolved through her work.

A Perspective of Gender Informed by Poststructuralism

Informed by a perspective of gender complexity similar to the one used by Thorne, Bronwyn Davies (2003) also suggested that we must challenge the binaries related to gender, and her project shifted attention to the discourses and narrative structures that constitute gender. Unlike Thorne though, Davies began her project from a perspective on gender informed by poststructuralism. The position that she explored in

her book is that, “sex and gender are at one and the same time elements of the social structure, and something created by individuals and within individuals as they learn the discursive practices through which that social structure is created and maintained” (p. 13). Davies conducted ethnographic case studies in the late 1980s with eight children in four different preschools in Australia, and paid careful attention to the ways boys and girls constructed and asserted their “femaleness” and “maleness.” She read feminist stories to the children as a way to challenge hegemonic notions and discourses that surround masculinity and femininity, and she researched with and analyzed how these children made sense of the stories’ meanings. Through the explanation of her theoretical foundations, Davies first offered a thorough critique of the shortcomings of essentialist/biological views of gender, as well as a critique of sex-role socialization theory. She, too, turned to the work of R.W. Connell (1983, 1987) to conceptualize the range of femininities and masculinities she observed the preschoolers assert. Additionally, her work pays careful attention to the ways in which young children’s genders are constituted by discursive practices and is highly informed by poststructuralist theory. There are three key concepts that drive Davies’ work: discourse (or discursive practices), social narrative structures, and positioning theory. She uses Foucault’s (1972) concept of discourse as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (Davies, 2003, p. 19) to examine the ways in which children engage in discourses related to gender. She reminds us that there are multiple poststructural theories, and she uses poststructuralism in a way that, “is the recognition of the ongoing nature of the constitution of self and the recognition of the non-unitary nature of self that

makes poststructuralist theory different from social construction theory” (Davies, 2003, p. xii).

Davies views children as active engagers of gender discourses. She sees these gender discourses as fluid, unfixed, and highly contingent on specific context. Her research is also informed by positioning theory (Harré, 1979), and she asserts that individuals use language to position themselves and other people. This positioning greatly depends on the context, the dominant narrative social structures that exist in a particular culture, and on particular facets of identity and desired outcomes of the individuals involved. Davies (2003) contends that:

Much of the adult world is not consciously taught to children, is not contained in the content of their talk, but is embedded in the language, in the discursive practices and the social and narrative structures through which the child is constituted as a person, as a child, and as male or female. Poststructuralist theory allows us to recognize that what children learn through the process of interacting in? the everyday world is not one single, non-contradictory language and practice—and it is not one single identity that is created through those practices...Rather, children learn to see and understand in terms of the multiple positionings and forms of discourse that are available to them. More, they learn the forms of desire and of power and powerlessness that are embedded in and made possible by the various discursive practices through which they position themselves and are positioned (p. 4).

It is from this standpoint that Davies analyzes the discursive practices of preschool children during their interactions with each other and through their reactions to feminist

stories. Davies' analysis of young children's sense-making of feminist stories reveals much about the ways power is embedded in the discourse that surrounds the gender order. The overall findings of her research urged early childhood teachers to create classrooms that give children "access to discourse that frees them from the burden of the liberal humanist obligations of coming to know a fixed reality in which they have a unified and rationally coherent identity separate and distinct from the social world" (Davies, 2003, p. 167). Davies' findings also fall into an equity paradigm—the idea that individual's understanding of gender must change in order for equity to be actualized—, and offer suggestions for early childhood teachers to change their teaching practices, like offering possibilities of gender expression that fall outside of dominant understandings of masculinity and femininity to their young students.

Feminist Postructuralism Meets Queer Theory

Influenced by poststructural theory as described above, Mindy Blaise (2005), uncovered the gender discourses in which children engage in a kindergarten classroom in New York City, but goes a step further by drawing the connection of gender discourses to what Butler (1990) describes as the heterosexual matrix, which "designates that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (Blaise, 2005, p. 22). Blaise explained that, "the heterosexual matrix regulates gender and gender relations so that heterosexuality becomes the 'normal,' right, and only way to be" (Blaise, 2005, p. 22). She used postructuralism to explain that poststructuralism "becomes feminist when matters of gender and a commitment to change are of central concern. Therefore, feminist poststructuralism is used to understand the complexities of gender discourses in order to create opportunities for equity and justice in all children's lives"

(Blaise, 2005, p. 15). Blaise used feminist poststructuralism to inform the concepts of language, discourse, subjectivity, agency, and power. Drawing from Weedon (1997), she believes that language creates all meaning, and that it is a political site of struggle. She explained, “if meaning is created through language, then it is neither fixed nor essential” (Blaise, 2005, p. 15). This is a crucial way in which Blaise’s work builds upon poststructuralist views of gender. She explained how subjectivity is a product of language, and that it refers to “an individual’s conscious and unconscious thoughts, sense of self, and understanding of one’s relation to the world” (Blaise, 2005, p. 17). Blaise is interested in the agentic capabilities of children and draws on Davies’ (2004) idea that agency is the way an individual can resist, embrace, and change discourses. Of course, issues of power are embedded within gender and sexuality (refer to Connell’s [1987] work on hegemonic masculinity, for instance), and Blaise draws from Foucault (1980) to explain that “individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). She also explains the importance of understanding how “power works, or the strategies, tactics, and techniques of power, not simply who has or does not have power” (Blaise, 2005, p. 19). Blaise used this lens to analyze the ways children in a kindergarten classroom negotiate power, in terms of gender, in the classroom setting.

It is at this juncture of feminist poststructuralist understandings of gender that queer theory emerged. Blaise examined how queer theorists (Butler, 1990; Rich, 1980; Sedgwick, 1990) used poststructuralist theories to examine heterosexuality and its position vis-à-vis gender constructions. Using the ideas of Warner (1993) and Britzman (1995) to enrich her theoretical stance on gender and sexuality, Blaise stated, “by recognizing and questioning concepts of normalization and privileges found within

heterosexual culture, queer theory helps deepen understandings of the social construction of gender” (20). Blaise used Connell’s (1987) concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphatic femininity to demonstrate how the heterosexual matrix is maintained. She built on Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity and explained that it “is the cultural expression of the dominant form of masculinity that regulates and subordinates other patterns of masculinity and femininity...The most important feature of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, which shapes the structural order of all gender relationships” (Blaise, 2005, p. 21). Blaise identified hegemonic masculinity in the kindergarten classroom as the most desirable and powerful way to be a boy. She also identified examples of emphasized femininity in the classroom. Again, she drew from Connell (1987): “there is no femininity in our present society that is hegemonic. Instead, there is a type of femininity called emphasized femininity, which is defined around the compliance with subordination and is oriented around accommodating the interests and desires of men” and goes on to explain that “‘hegemonic’ and ‘emphasized’ signify positions of cultural authority, not total dominance, therefore allowing other forms of femininities and masculinities to persist” (Blaise, 2005, p. 21). In her research, Blaise identified hegemonic masculinity and emphatic femininity amongst children and observed students engage in discourses that expressed other forms of masculinities and femininities, describing how the heterosexual matrix regulated the social positioning and marginalizing of children with such discursive practices.

A queer understanding of gender also rejects the notion that biological sex determines gender. Butler (1990) views gender as a performance, in that it is not about individuals choosing what gender one will be, but rather “it is about the effects of

repeating, performing, and embodying gender norms through language and actions” and “as a social construct, gender is based on the idea of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’” (Blaise, 2005, p. 22). She uses the idea of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) and views heterosexuality as a form of sexism that disempowers women and other marginalized groups. It is important to note that Blaise makes the distinction that “critiques of heterosexism are not attacks on heterosexual practices per se, but rather the discourses of heterosexuality and how they have become embedded into the foundations of our thoughts; subsequently manifesting and maintaining power over females and others” (Blaise, 2005, p. 23). This is an important point because it reveals how a difficult topic, like heterosexism, becomes easier to identify and challenge in a primary classroom. The connection of gender to discourses of heterosexuality, and the fact that they work together, creates a space for us to examine these issues with young children.

Based on her analysis of the gender and heterosexual discourses that surface in a kindergarten classroom she urges early childhood researchers and teachers to question the dominant framework that drives early childhood education, which she refers to as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). She critiques DAP, with its knowledge base informed exclusively by developmental psychology, and builds on the argument (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Mallory & New, 1994) that DAP is a modern, middle-class, and Western discipline that is biased universalizes childhood. Rather, she calls for “postdevelopmental” approaches to early childhood education. She defines postdevelopmentalism as a set of alternative theoretical perspectives that question modernist assumptions of truth, universality, and certainty; that, “postdevelopmental pedagogies are needed in order to create early childhood

classrooms as places where children who want or need to transgress gender boundaries can do so” (184). In a later work, Blaise & (2009) expands on her original (2005) call for postdevelopmental approaches to early childhood education. Building on Ryan & Grieshaber’s (2004) review of different critical perspectives in early childhood education Blaise suggests that teachers embrace the idea that “post-developmentalism rejects the idea that gender is simply an expression of sex, or that gender and sex are biological or natural traits that are inside us” (Blaise, 2005, p.452). For Blaise, gender equity cannot be accomplished without paying attention to the ways gender is regulated by the heterosexual matrix. It is the very discursive practices that reinforce the heterosexual matrix that teachers need to challenge so that new possibilities can be created within the early childhood classroom. Some of the recommendations Blaise offers (2012) to practitioners are to pose analytic questions to young children about gender, or to include snippets from discussions related to gender in a weekly newsletter to parents.

“Strategic Essentialist” and “Queer” Approaches

Blaise’s work demonstrates the potential of using feminist poststructuralist and queer theories in research on early childhood education. The next research project under review strives for sexualities equity in primary schools and encounters an important tension in the theories that underlie the work. A federally funded project (2006-2008) in the United Kingdom, the *No Outsiders* project, was a multi-year participatory action research (PAR) project that consisted of university researchers as well as primary school teachers who created and implemented a curriculum promoting sexualities equity in the primary classroom. The team released three books edited by Renee DePalma and Elizabeth Atkinson, both university researchers involved in the project, that tells of young

children's experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities in UK primary schools (2008), the team's struggle to challenge heteronormativity and gender conformity (2009a), and a companion for teachers to use, which includes contributions of teaching strategies from teachers on the *No Outsiders* team, to combat heteronormativity and gender conformity in primary schools (2010). Through this project, the team discussed the many possibilities of anti-homophobic (negative attitudes and dispositions toward non-heterosexuality) teaching and teaching that challenged heteronormativity. The team agreed that they wanted to challenge the silent acceptance of bullying that was rooted in perceived sexuality and/or gender nonconformity. Similar to Blaise (2005), the team sought to further explore and deconstruct what Butler (1999) defines as the heterosexual matrix: the collection of normalizing discourses (Gee, 1996) that maintain heteronormativity in all social contexts. DePalma writes, "while we describe homophobia here as being grounded in the normalizing discourse of heteronormativity (both within and beyond school settings), one of the central tensions in the project relates to the distinction between anti-homophobia and counter-heteronormative work" (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b, p. 839). DePalma and Atkinson (2009b) refer to anti-homophobia work, or strategic essentialist work, as work that might highlight lesbian and gay histories, might include literature that includes families headed by lesbian or gay individuals, or that might include gay role models in the form of teachers' own lives. They define counter-heteronormative work as work that seeks to trouble the binaries in the very categories of lesbian/gay, or boy/girl. In other words, counter-heteronormative work troubles the very norms that define the homosexual/heterosexual binary. Queer theory questions if a strategic essentialist approach troubles heteronormativity since it can

privilege some sexualities over others. Some in the team argued that “this kind of identity work implicitly reinforces discourses of victimization and tolerance, [while] others have made strong cases for more equalities-based strategic essentialism, drawing consciously upon essentialist categories of gay and straight as a way to render transgressive sex and gender identities less exotic and threatening” (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b, p. 840). The nature of the project, rooted in PAR, encouraged the team to have extensive debates about whether a lesbian/gay representational approach or a queer approach is more productive in producing primary schools that encourage sexualities equity. The team decided to embrace their disagreements, and went into the project with an intentional “dissensus.” They draw on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) idea that a community of practice thrives on heterogeneity and is based on the assumptions “that members have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold varied viewpoints” (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009a, p. 97). When the funding for this project ended, the team reflected extensively about sexualities equity in primary schools. The tension between the strategic essentialist approach and the counter-heteronormative approach has been unresolvable and is extensively written about by the group.

Critiques and Other Insights

Souto-Manning and Hermann-Wilmarth (2008) conducted a PAR study that focused on the representation and inclusion of gay and lesbian families in early childhood education, and accomplished this by using children’s literature. They heed the call sent out by Mollie Blackburn (2006) for the necessity of educators to combat homophobia and

heterosexism in their classrooms.³ They refer to the value of an edited volume called *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue about Sexualities and Schooling* (Letts and Sears, 1999), but note that “the title of the book might put off some teachers unaccustomed to the term ‘queer’ as anything but a gay slur and/or unfamiliar with queer theory” (p. 265). Though there may be merit in that presumption, my critique of the article is that the authors do not discuss what “queer” is, nor do they explain how researchers have employed it. The authors only reference works in the volume that I would argue come from the gay/lesbian- representational, strategic essentialist framework (as explained by the *No Outsiders* project) for combatting homophobia. Though the work is valuable, and it exposes children’s dissatisfaction with families that are headed by lesbian- or gay-identified adults, the authors do not engage with “queer” at all and immediately cast it as uncomfortable and difficult, without engaging in the possibilities and usefulness of such an approach. In a piece for early childhood classroom teachers, Blaise and Taylor (2012) are blunt in their definition of queer theory and explain to the reader that:

Queer theory is a new theory about gender. It is relevant to early childhood educators who wish to find new ways of understanding and challenging persistent stereotypes. The theory links gender stereotypes to the norms of heterosexuality. It is definitely not a theory about gay and lesbian identity. Queer theory is queer

³ Blackburn (2012) conducted a PAR with LGBTQ high-school students in which they used literature to combat homophobia and heterosexism. She offers recommendations to encourage youth to assert their agency on these issues and ways to create alliances between teachers and students in the name of combatting homophobia and heterosexism. Though her work is with much older students, the strategies she suggests, particularly in terms of children’s agency, and use of literature to combat homophobia/heterosexism, is helpful.

because it questions the assumption that there is any “normal” expression of gender. (p. 88).

This concise definition can ease the minds of those who may initially be “put off” by the term “queer.”

Key Theoretical Terms

My own theoretical foundations regarding gender and sexuality and young children are deeply influenced by the works of Thorne, Davies, Blaise, and the *No Outsiders* team. I see the benefits that feminist and queer readings of poststructuralism can have on my perspective of gender and sexuality, and the impact such a perspective can have on early childhood teaching. I agree with Blaise that gender equity can only be imagined and achieved when we radically change our understanding of gender and its relationship and regulation by the heterosexual matrix. I seek to expand the discourses made available to children so that gender and sexualities equity can begin to be a possibility. The possibilities of queer theory are important to explore, and I adhere to a sort of personal dissensus and embrace the tension I have with a strategic essentialist approach and a queer approach. I also understand that there has not been much research on queer approaches to combating (hetero)sexism, and hope to explore what possibilities may emerge from my future research that seeks to develop and implement such approaches.

Below is an alphabetical list of key theoretical terms I use in this project. After the list of definitions, I explain my theoretical stance of gender and sexuality and the way it is understood in this project.

Discourse – Rimes (2009) describes discourse and “language in use” and that it is comprised of the three dimensions:

- (a) social context – the social factors *outside the immediate interaction* that influence how words function in that interaction,
- (b) interactional context – the sequential or other patterns of talk within an interaction that influence what we can and cannot say and how other interpret it within classroom discourse,
- (c) individual agency – the influence an individual can have on how words are used and interpreted in an interaction (p. 20).

Additionally, Foucault (1980) explains that discourse is not just the use of words in particular contexts, but rather it is a theoretical grid of power and knowledge that constitutes individuals.

Emphasized Femininity – Connell (1987) asserts that there is not a form of femininity in our culture that is hegemonic (unlike masculinity). Because emphasized femininity is not hegemonic, it does not define and regulate other forms of femininities. Rather, it exists and is constructed to maintain hegemonic masculinity. Connell theorizes three types of emphasized femininity, but the most explicit of these is concerned with femininity that is defined around subordination and that is oriented around accommodating the desires of men, particularly the hegemonic male.

Gender – In this study, gender is viewed from a queer and feminist poststructuralist perspective. Rather than seeing gender from a biological view or sociological perspective, I view gender from a standpoint in which individuals, including children,

actively engage in discourses related to gender and sexuality. It is this engagement in gender discourses that constitute the gendered subjectivity of individuals.

Hegemonic Masculinity – Connell (1987) defines hegemonic masculinity as the cultural expression of the dominant form of masculinity that regulates and subordinates other patterns of masculinity and femininity. An important feature of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, which shapes the structural order of all gender relations. In the classroom, this can be understood as the most powerful and desirable way to be a boy.

Heteronormativity – The deeply engrained and normalized assumption that heterosexuality is the only acceptable and/or most desirable sexual orientation.

Heterosexual Matrix – This term is closely related to the concept of heteronormativity. Butler (1990) defines this as a term used to “designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized” (p. 151). This means that the heterosexual matrix regulates gender in such a way that heterosexuality becomes normalized and considered the only, and most desirable and appropriate way to be.

Feminist poststructuralism – Poststructuralism does not refer to a singular theory, but it is used to describe how power operates and the ways power and meaning are organized through our use of language. Poststructuralism becomes feminist when issues related to gender and a commitment to gender equity is of central concern. In particular, feminist poststructuralism challenges biological and sociological perspectives of gender and sexuality. Instead, feminist poststructuralism views individuals as creators and re-creators of gender. In general, poststructuralism sees all meaning as being constituted through language. Because all meaning is created through the use of language, meaning, and particular meanings of gender, are not biological or essential to us. I use feminist

poststructuralism in this project to understand the complicated nature of gender discourses, to challenge the power embedded within gender, and to strive for new ways to redefine and interpret meanings and language related to gender (Weedon, 1997)

Power – I use Foucault’s (1980) idea that “individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (p. 98). Therefore, I am interested in paying careful attention to the ways power (particularly in relation to gender) work. I am less interested in only identifying the individuals who have or do not have power, but rather, I want to understand the strategies that *maintain* power related to gender.

Queer Theory – Queer theory is a theory that emerged from gay, lesbian, and bisexual studies. Whereas branches of lesbian studies and gay liberationist perspectives were rooted in biological/essentialist perspectives of gender, queer theory emerged in the context of poststructuralism. This means that queer theory was a new way of thinking about gender from a perspective that challenged biological determinism and saw power located in the language that surrounded gender and its construction (Jagose, 1996). By understanding and questioning the concept of heteronormativity, deeper understandings of gender emerge (Britzman, 1995).

Primary Literacy & “Deficit Discourses”

Since the books in this project are read aloud by me to the participants in this study, it is imperative to discuss what influences my own approach to reading and literacy in this regard, and in particular, to the classroom read aloud. Louise Rosenblatt (1994) views the act of reading as a “transactional” process that involves the text and the reader as equal partners. She claims that the meaning of a text does not merely exist in the text alone. Rather, the meaning of a text is enacted when a reader interacts with it,

bringing their personal experiences and opinions in motion with the words the text offers that particular reader.

Lawrence Sipe's (2008) extensive overview of the perspectives of the read aloud in the primary classroom is integral to this study. He conceptualizes five categories of children's responses to read alouds: *the analytical* (when children deal with the text as an opportunity for meaning-making), *the intertextual* (when children connect their ideas about a text to other texts in the world), *the personal*, *the transparent* (when the children's responses/world seem to mirror the story), and *the performative* (when children tried to enter the world of the story and come up with ideas like solutions to problems). Each category encompasses the wide array of experiences and responses children have with texts and must be taken into consideration as I engage children in literature discussions. As I engaged the students in read alouds in this study, I acknowledged the array of responses the children had to the literature, while paying careful attention to the ways in which power is embedded in their talk—particularly in regards to gender and sexual identities.

It is commonly thought that the primary grades are meant to teach “the basics” to children—spelling basics, phonics, decoding, surface-level comprehension, etc. In classrooms across the nation, particularly in classrooms whose students' first language are not English, or who come from non-White and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, a disproportionate number of students who do not master these basics are deemed “at risk” and “failing.” The influx of accountability and standardized tests in the primary grades fuel these terms and reinforce “proper” ways of using language.

I use Woolard's (1998) idea that language ideology is the intersection of socially and politically influenced attitudes about groups of people and contend that these ideologies become naturalized over time. Dyson (2007) argues that:

...schools are highly selective in its choices of what kinds of linguistic and cultural resources are appropriate for use "in public," that is, in the official or teacher-governed sphere: "We don't speak that way"; "We don't write about that"; "we don't talk about that in school." Thus the language arts curriculum functions as a kind of ideological filter. (p. 37)

Standardized tests in public schools are emblematic of a particular set of social and political norms—particular those associated with White, middle-class norms. Children whose literacy practices fall outside of these norms are thought to have a language deficit and are immediately cast as "at risk", usually even before they enter school. Dyson (2015) challenges the notion of "deficit discourse," that is, the ways in which "assumed deficits of whole groups of children become taken for granted, and, simultaneously, resources and strengths are 'erased'" (p. 199). Dyson conducted several ethnographies (2007, 2015) that highlight the complex language structures children with "at risk" backgrounds engage in (specifically, speakers of African American Vernacular English). She contends however, that because of the influx of standards-based testing in the primary classroom, the literacy curriculum has narrowed to include only dominant uses of literacy in the classroom, which erases the languages capabilities and strengths of children who come from non-Standard English speaking homes. In her 2015 research, Dyson calls on educators to recognize the important ways in which children use:

literacy as social tools linked to social membership, including membership in a given race, class, and gender... In our own participation in education as a field, we must protect writing's—and children's—potential for constructing an included self from the excluding harm of the destructive discourse of deficits. (p. 206).

I agree with her call to action, and wish to further it. The perspective of language and literacy as described above is crucial to my project. As a literacy teacher of second grade students, I place my own pedagogy within a framework that challenges the “deficit discourse” as explained by Dyson. I attempt though, to push this conception of literacy teaching and learning further, and believe that such a perspective on literacy teaching and learning in public schools also creates a space for challenges and disruptions to gender- and hetero-normativity to be actualized. If we take seriously the idea that the language arts curriculum acts as a sort of ideological filter in terms of casting certain language practices as good and desirable, and others as bad, wrong, and in need of correction, then I argue that a similar process operates in regards to norms associated with gender and sexuality. Primary literacy teachers have the capacity to use literacy—through book selections, discussions, writing activities—to not only challenge the idea of deficit discourse as it relates to particular language use (Standard English, non-Standard English, African-American Vernacular English, etc.), but also to expand the discourses that are allowed to enter into the classroom as they relate to gender and sexuality.

Developing an Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy

It is at this point where I turn to ideas of anti-oppressive education. This section should be read and understood within the neoliberal context that was written about in the introduction. The first part of this chapter expounds upon the concepts put forth by Gert

Biesta and Hannah Arendt to help clarify the multidimensionality and functions of education. The second part of the chapter will synthesize these functions of education with Kevin Kumashiro's theory of anti-oppressive education. This helps me to develop an anti-oppressive pedagogy in which sexualities and gender equity can begin to be enacted in the primary classroom, and also serves as an analytic lens in which I analyze the data.

Biesta's "Functions of Education"

The development of an anti-oppressive pedagogy is best conceptualized when the dimensions, or functions, of education are understood. Biesta (2010) conceptualizes the three main functions of education: *qualification*, *socialization*, and *subjectification*. He defines *qualification* as a function of education that teaches students to do something specific, like learn the foundations of reading, or how to multiply. He reminds us that "the qualification function is without doubt one of the major functions of organized education and constitutes an important rationale for having state-funded education in the first place" (p. 20). The *socialization* function of education may be actively pursued by institutions, or it may be unintended or hidden. This function has to do with the ways in which, through education, we "become part of particular social, cultural and political orders" (p. 20). The *subjectification* function of education has to do with the process of how one becomes a subject. This function is different than the socialization function of education because it is "*not* about the insertion of 'newcomers' into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders" (p. 21). Drawing from the works of Freire (1970), and Giroux (1981), Biesta argues that:

What matters more...is the “quality” of subjectification, i.e., the kind of subjectivity—or kinds of subjectivity—that are made possible as a result of particular educational arrangements and configurations... Any education worthy of its name should always contribute to processes of subjectification that allow those educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting. (p. 21).

Biesta argues that education should not be reduced to just one or two of these functions, but that the three functions of education should best be represented in a Venn diagram and “the more interesting and important questions are actually about the intersections between the areas rather than the individual areas per se” (p. 22). Additionally, it is important to note that the research I reviewed in chapter I pay particular attention to the subjectification process of education, and that standardized tests, and the teaching to these tests, focus primarily on the qualification function, and also the socialization function, but in a more hidden way. When education does not engage with the subjectification function of education, an important piece is missing. Biesta (2006) argues that schools need to pay more attention to the subjectification function of education, and that this function of education can become invisible, particularly in a climate that overly emphasizes the measurement of outcomes in education.

To better understand the subjectification process better, I turn to Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization of ideas like *coming into the world*, *freedom*, and *uniqueness*, and explain how these key concepts help understand Biesta’s call for a “pedagogy of interruption.” This pedagogy is concerned with the subjectification function of education, but also works with and through the qualification and socialization functions of education.

Arendt (1977) argues that each individual is born with a “distinct uniqueness.” She believes that the action of calling this uniqueness into being is tied to human freedom and links freedom to a way “to call something into being which did not exist before” (Arendt, 1977, p. 151). This coming into the world can also be seen as a kind of beginning, and Biesta argues that we “continuously bring new beginnings into the world through our words and deeds” (Biesta, 2010, p. 82). Arendt believes these new beginnings are connected to freedom and cannot be enacted in isolation; rather, the process of subjectification (becoming an individual) requires interaction with others. The act of calling something into the world is only half of the process; the other half has to do with the ways in which those who we display our uniqueness to take up our initiatives. Arendt writes, “the agent is not an author or producer, but a subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely one who began an action and the one who suffers from and is subjected to its consequences” (Arendt 1958, p. 184). Biesta embraces this idea and discusses that the ways others take up our initiatives are unpredictable thereby making it impossible to try and measure the outcomes of this subjectification process. However, because of the unpredictability and inability to measure, this does not diminish the importance of this function of education. In fact, Biesta builds off of Arendt’s ideas and argues that the process of interacting with what another individual calls into the world is the very point in which the individual grows and experiences a disruption of their uniqueness. At this point, the individual learns something new, and his/her subjectivity is changed by it. It is also this very unpredictability and inability to measure its effects, that Biesta claims the subjectification function of education has become nearly invisible in discussions about what constitutes “good” education. Biesta (2010) sees that the process

of coming into the world, or the process of subjectification, is contingent on the interactions with Otherness—specifically with Otherness that challenge or interrupt the normal order of our lives. Biesta claims that “as soon as we erase plurality—as soon as we erase otherness of others by attempting to control how they respond to our initiatives—we deprive others of their actions of freedom, and as a result deprive ourselves of our possibility to act, and hence of our freedom” (Biesta, 2010, p. 84). In other words, individuals grow, learn, and move toward freedom by working through disruptions to what is normal to their lives. Education that focuses only on one or two functions of education, and that ignores the subjectification process, inhibits the growth and freedom of the individual. At this point, Biesta calls for a *pedagogy of interruption*. Biesta writes:

A pedagogy of interruption...is a pedagogy that aims to keep the possibility of interruptions of the ‘normal’ order open... A pedagogy of interruption is not a ‘strong’ pedagogy; it is not a pedagogy that can in any sense guarantee its ‘outcomes.’ It rather is a pedagogy that acknowledges the fundamental weakness of education vis-à-vis the question of subjectification. This ontological weakness of education is at the very same time its existential strength, because it is only when we give up the idea that human subjectivity can in some way be educationally produced that spaces might open up for uniqueness to come into the world. (p. 91).

The concept of a “pedagogy of interruption” is helpful in the conceptualization of my own anti-oppressive pedagogy. My research project seeks to explore the subjectification function of education, particularly as it relates to discourses that surround gender and

sexuality. I embrace the difficulty (or impossibility?) of measuring these outcomes, and am open to the possibilities that emerge from such pedagogy. At this point I turn to Kumashiro's (2000, 2002) concept of queer teaching. It is through this conceptualization of queer activism and anti-oppressive education that provides me with a variety of tools to help enact uniqueness, freedom, and coming into the world.

Kumashiro's Concept of Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy

First, it is important to explain Kumashiro's (2000, 2002) use of the term *queer*, as I borrow from its use. He uses queer as a kind of umbrella term to refer to one's sexual orientation that is other than heterosexual – "gay, lesbian, bisexual, two-spirited (a term specific to Native Americans), transgendered, intersexed (neither male nor female), questioning, or in other ways different because of one's sexuality or sexual orientation" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 10). He acknowledges that the term is not limited to sexuality because of the connections of sexuality to gender and the connections of heterosexism and gender oppression (similar to the connections Blaise (2005) made). Kumashiro also uses the term *queer* in a broader sense of the non-normative, and explains its use by some queers as a way to reject normative sexualities and genders; some use *queer* as a term to reclaim their identities and as a term that is self-empowering. He goes on to say that the term *queer activist* could expand to those who don't identify as queer in terms of one's sexualities/gender identity, but who seek to challenge heterosexism and gender oppression. He states, "All of this is to say that this disruptive, discomforting term, with its multiple meanings and uses, seems appropriate for research on changing oppression" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 10). Kumashiro uses feminist and queer readings of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis to expand upon what he sees as four dominant

frameworks in the research of anti-oppressive education, and explains how these perspectives can help expand our understanding of identity/subjectivity, and of anti-oppressive education. It is important to note the two ways Kumashiro employs queer here – as a way to shed insight onto our perspective on gender and sexuality, and also the general challenging, or “queering” of binaries in the more general sense. He also warns, “my exploration of these frameworks should not imply that these theories are the best theories for anti-oppressive education, since this body of writing is but one of many possible frameworks that can be helpful of such research” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 9). I will briefly explain the four dominant frameworks of anti-oppressive education as conceptualized by Kumashiro: *Education for the Other*⁴, *Education about the Other*, *Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering*, *Education that Changes Students and Society*. Kumashiro’s conceptualization toward a queer pedagogy makes me think of the tensions and “dissensus” that the *No Outsiders* team embraced in their work for sexualities equity in primary schools. The team conceptualizes a “strategic essentialist approach” and a “queer approach” to addressing sexualities equity, and I believe the ways Kumashiro conceptualizes the four dominant frameworks of anti-oppressive education can help expand how the *No Outsiders* team framed their tension, and it also informs how I conceptualize my own anti-oppressive pedagogical stance. Within each description, Kumashiro explains how oppression is conceptualized, what it means to bring about change, and offers critiques of the approach. I take the time to explain these frameworks and will give an example of anti-oppressive pedagogy related to gender/sexualities equity

⁴ Kumashiro uses the term *Other* to refer to “those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, i.e., that are *other than* the norm, such as students of color, students from under- or unemployed families, students who are female, or male but not stereotypically “masculine,” and students who are, or perceived to be, “queer” Kumashiro, 2000, p. 26).

(though each approach can and is used to combat oppressions of all forms) informed by each framework to show how this impacts the development of my own pedagogy.

Education for the Other

Under this framework, researchers have conceptualized oppression in schools in two ways. First, schools are spaces where the Other is treated in harmful ways. This approach highlights the mistreatment of students of particular marginalized groups and points to the “recognizably harmful ways in which only certain students are treated in and by schools” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 27). The second way of conceptualizing oppression within this framework is by looking at assumptions teachers and/or schools have for the Other. An example of an oppressive behavior under this conceptualization is that some teachers may not value gender nonconformity and discourage and/or cast it as deviant or abnormal.

Under this approach, the ways to bring about change is conceptualized in two ways. The first way responds to the idea that schools are harmful spaces for the Other, and calls for schools to either be a safe space for marginalized groups, or to provide safe and affirming spaces for marginalized groups. An example of this would be to provide safe spaces for queer students, or the forming of gay-straight alliances. The second way responds to the harmful dispositions of teachers and calls for teachers to respect and teach to all students in culturally relevant ways. An example of this calls teachers to “acknowledge and address the fact that students do bring sexuality into schools for a variety of reasons, such as to resist norms (Walkerdine, 1990) and to denigrate Others (Epstein & Johnson, 1998) and that students are not all heterosexual” (Kumashiro: 2000, p. 29).

Though this approach exposes and attempts to teach to the great diversity of students in schools, Kumashiro sees at least three limitations to the approach. First, he argues that this approach implies that “the Other is the problem; it implies that, without the Other, schools would not be oppressive places” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 30). Second, “a form of education that is ‘for the Other’ requires defining and addressing groups whose identities and boundaries are difficult to define because they are fluid, contested, and constantly shifting” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 30). Third, this approach assumes that “educators can accurately assess the needs of their students, especially their Othered students... [this] approach is necessary to work against the harmful effects of oppression, but in helping only the Other (and in presuming to know the Other), it alone is not enough” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 31). This approach is connected to the work of the *No Outsiders* project’s strategic essentialist approach.

Educating About the Other

This approach draws from research that looks at knowledge that produces harm of the Other by others in dominant or privileged positions. An example of this would be when harassment of Others in school goes unnoticed or unacknowledged by teachers – like the teasing of gender nonconforming students or of students who are perceived to be non-heterosexual. The second kind of knowledge this approach examines is the knowledge that gets produced when individuals internalize negative messages about their Otherness.

One way to combat the oppression of the Other under this approach is to include lessons and/or units about the Other within the curriculum. An example of this in the early childhood classroom might be to include a unit on families, using literature that

includes the representation of families that are headed by gay/lesbian-identified individuals. The second approach calls for educators to integrate lessons on the other throughout the curriculum and school year; rather than having a month or a few weeks that focus on the Other. This could be done in the early childhood classroom for example, by carefully wording math problems to incorporate Otherness.

A strength of this approach is that it can bring the experiences of the Other to the attention of students and can also increase their empathy and disposition towards the Other. Kumashiro offers three critiques of this approach. First, “teaching about the Other could present a dominant narrative of the Other’s experience that might be read by students as, for instance, ‘*the queer experience*’ or ‘*the Latina/o experience*’” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 33). Kumashiro acknowledges how this singularizing focus on Otherness has an essentializing effect – those who appear to be a part of the learned Othered category must have the same history and/or experience. In other words, children may use the dominant narrative presented to them and apply it to similar situations in the future, which can have the possibility of Othering and marginalization of those who do not fit into that dominant narrative. Secondly, when teaching about the Other, students who may represent the identity or community being taught may be viewed as the expert and the “go-to” person when that culture or issue comes up in the classroom. Third, “the goals of teaching about the Other and working against partial knowledge are based on the modernist goal of having a full knowledge” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 34). Kumashiro refers to Haraway (1988) to show her argument that the only form of knowledge that is possible is “partial” or “situated.” This critique connects to the ways Thorne (1990), Davies (2003), and Blaise (2005) use feminist/queer poststructuralism to conceptualize

identity/subjectivity. This critique exposes the complicated nature of identity and draws attention to the ways each individual's identity is unique, partial, and situated in a particular context and history. Identity is not fixed, but rather, it shifts and fluctuates, depending on who is involved and in what context.

Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering

Research that embraces this approach argues that oppression must be understood in a way that calls individuals to examine not only how some groups are Othered, but also how some groups are privileged and normalized and that “this dual process is legitimized and maintained by social structures and competing ideologies” (Kumashiro, 2000, 36), and that social structures and competing ideologies must be examined in schools. Kumashiro draws from Britzman (1998) to explain that under this approach, oppression of queer students needs to move beyond “homophobia and its humanist psychological discourse of individual fear of homosexuality as contagion to consider heteronormativity and how the production of deviancy is intimately tied to the very possibility of normalcy” (Britzman, 1998, p. 152).

This approach to working against oppression calls for a “critique and transformation of hegemonic structures and ideologies” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 36). This would play out in schools when teachers encourage their students to look closely at social structures, like the ways in which hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity police gender and define what is considered normal and deviant. Through this process, students not only examine how some groups are Othered, but they also examine the ways in which some groups are privileged and normalized – students, depending on which aspect of identity is being discussed, can explore the ways in which their own selves may

be Othered and/or privileged, and how this may change depending on the specific context. This process can help students develop a critical consciousness about their world. Kumashiro explains that students first need the knowledge of this privileging and Othering process and examine how it works, and that second, drawing from Ellsworth (1992), students need to be taught the “analytic and critical skills for judging the truth and merit of propositions, and the interrogation and selective appropriation of potentially transformative moments in the dominant culture” (Ellsworth, p. 96). This approach is reminiscent of Freire’s idea of consciousness-raising in that it entails learning “to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire: 1970, p. 17).

Kumashiro explains that a strength of this approach is that it calls teachers to not only teach about oppression – how groups are Othered, how groups are privileged, and how this process is maintained – but it also calls for action and promotes change. One critique of this approach is related to the intersectionality of our identities. Kumashiro argues that the conceptualization that “oppression is structural in nature implies that oppression has the same general effect on people. However, because all individuals have multiple identities, not all members of the same group necessarily have the same or even similar experiences with oppression... A framework that allows for a more situated understanding of oppression is needed” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 38). Another critique of this approach is that teaching about the Othering and privileging processes does not always lead to action. Here Kumashiro draws again from Britzman’s (1999) idea that all learning requires some kind of unlearning. Particularly when one examines his/her own privilege,

the moment of unlearning may entail a moment of crisis, and the unlearning process cannot be forced upon individuals from the outside.

Education that Changes Students and Society

Researchers from this approach have turned to poststructuralism to conceptualize the nature of oppression, with particular attention to discourse (Davies, 2003; Blaise, 2005). Kumashiro draws from work that uses the idea of citation – that individuals cite particular discourses, which “frame how people think, feel, act, and interact... oppression is the citing of harmful discourses and the repetition of harmful histories” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 40).

Kumashiro explains there are not many concrete examples of educators who make use of insights informed by poststructuralism in their classrooms. Kumashiro draws from Bulter (1997) and his earlier work (1999) and explains:

The prohibition and/or the critical awareness of the repetition of harmful associations/histories do not actually change them. What does work is a particular kind of labor. When activists labor to supplement harmful associations they are participating in altering them... When enough members of a community participate in this kind of labor citational practices [or discourses/discursive practices] (especially the repetition of harmful citations) change. (p. 42)

Kumashiro turns to feminist and queer readings of psychoanalysis to explain barriers that can prevent social change – in terms of the labor and supplementation as explained above needed for change under this approach. Drawing from Luhmann (1998) and Britzman (1998), individuals have an “unconscious desire for repetition and a psychic resistance to change” and that it could be argued that we “unconsciously desire to learn only that

which affirms our sense that we are good people and that we resist learning anything that reveals our complicity with racism, homophobia, and other kinds of oppression” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 43). This crisis can perpetuate resistance to change, or it can be a moment for teachers to help students through this moment of crisis. Teachers must provide a safe classroom and build a strong sense of community (hooks, 1996; 2000; 2013) so that students can feel safe to authentically go through this process.

CONCLUSION

As I attempt to develop my own theory of anti-oppressive education, I embrace Biesta’s notion of a pedagogy of interruption and reflect on the three functions of education—qualification, socialization, subjectification. I realize that this project is concerned with the function of subjectification in education, but am also curious about and seek to explore the ways a pedagogy of interruption can work *through* the areas of qualification and socialization. A pedagogy of interruption requires a disruption of the normal order. My project seeks to identify and challenge the heteronormativity of the first grade classroom, and then based on the findings, create a unit that seeks to “interrupt,” or respond to, the gender discourses of the classroom. Through the lens of Arendt’s and Biesta’s theories, it is at this point of confronting otherness in which an individual “comes into the world” and in which an individual can experience freedom. Kumashiro’s analysis of the four main approaches to anti-oppressive education helps solidify the ways in which a pedagogy of interruption can be enacted. As the unit in this project is developed, each aspect of it will be analyzed through the four main approaches as explained by Kumashiro, as well as through the definition of strategic essentialist and queer approaches to teaching as used by the *No Outsiders* team.

I see many parallels between the four approaches Kumashiro analyzes for combatting oppression and Biesta's concept of a pedagogy of interruption. Examining the theories put forth by Arendt and Biesta have helped me make a case for the need for such a pedagogy; whereas Kumashiro calls for an amalgam of the four approaches that seek to combat oppression, particularly as it relates to gender and sexuality. I embrace a feminist and queer poststructural nature of subjectivity—that subjectivity is multi-dimensional, in flux, and unpredictable. In specific regard to gender and sexuality, I strive to suspend and broaden sexual and gender identities rather than essentialize and underscore them (Jagose, 1996). Rather, I go into this project with a pedagogy that embraces the unpredictability of the outcomes of a pedagogy of interruption that uses strategies rooted in the four approaches described by Kumashiro. I seek to explore the possibilities that such a pedagogy can produce, and examine the ways the disruptions of the normal order have impact on students and everyone involved in the research process.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

This project functioned as an after-school enrichment program for children who were interested in reading, discussing, and writing about books. LGBT-related issues were embedded within the books used in the after-school club. The project took place between February 2015 and May 2015—during the time I took an academic leave of absence from my own teaching position in the Chicago Public Schools—and met one time each week for one hour. The six participants were all in second grade (between the ages of seven and eight) and they all attended the same elementary school in a large Midwestern urban area. Their parents were informed of the project’s details if their child expressed interest in participating in the after-school club. I will first discuss the research design, followed by an explanation of the procedures, description of participants, data analysis, and end with a discussion of how the design of the research had to change due to limitations within the school district that reflect larger impacts of neoliberalism on what teachers have the space and freedom to do in their own classrooms.

Study Design and Procedures

All literacy club meetings took place after regular school hours and the literacy club met each week at a room in a local community center, which had much resemblance to a regular classroom. I was the teacher/facilitator of the group. The literacy club met for fifteen consecutive weeks. During sessions two through eleven of the literacy club meetings, I read ten different picture books aloud to the students and facilitated discussions of the books. Five of the books I read aloud contained themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression, while the other five took up

other themes related to social justice and fairness. During the last four meetings, I engaged students in a writer's workshop; students used the books we read and discussed as mentor texts as they created original works of fiction that attempted to teach the reader some kind of lesson related to social justice. Table 1 below describes the activities of each after-school literacy club meeting.

Table 1. Literacy Club Meeting Schedule

3:30-3:40	Snack/Bathroom Break
3:40-3:45	Afternoon meeting (Check-in/Debriefing of the week)
3:45-4:20	Read Aloud/Discussion (sessions 2-11)—or writing workshop (sessions 12-15)
4:20-4:30	Writing about reading—or independent reading

During our first meeting, students spent their time getting acquainted with the other students in a smaller setting. I asked the children to fill out interest inventories during this first session (see Appendix A). The next ten weeks were focused on teacher read aloud and discussion of children's literature. The theme of the unit was on the issue of fairness/equity and discussions centered on several key questions:

- How is someone being mistreated in this text?
- How did this individual overcome their mistreatment?
- How can others help a person in a similar situation?
- What lesson does this text teach the readers?

These questions were posted on an anchor chart and information was added after the reading and discussion of each of the texts. This chart was used as a reference tool so

students could compare/contrast the nine different texts we read, but also begin to think about and examine the interlocking nature of inequity and mistreatment individuals may experience. The books we read aloud are listed below. The first five books are the ones that explicitly contain themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression. See appendix C for a brief description of the books that do not explicitly address issues of non-heterosexuality and/or non-normative gender expression.

King and King, by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland

Elena's Serenade, by Campbell Geeslin

The Sissy Ducking, by Harvey Fierstein

10,000 Dresses, by Marcus Ewert

Jacob's New Dress, by Ian Hoffman and Sarah Hoffman

Only Passing Through, by Anne Rockwell

Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon, by Patty Lovell

Each Kindness, by Jacqueline Woodson

Chato Goes Cruisin', by Gary Soto

Frederick, by Leo Lionni

During the planning phase of the project I thought about the order in which I should read the books and wondered whether or not I should read the “easier” and less controversial book *Elena's Serenade* first, and then engage students in discussions of issues I thought the students would find more controversial like in *10,000 Dresses*. In the end though, I decided to arrange the order of the reading of the books in a manner in which every other book we read dealt with issues of non-heterosexuality and/or non-normative gender expression. The order of the texts we read are as follows:

1. *Frederick*, by Leo Lionni
2. *King and King*, by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland
3. *Chato Goes Cruisin'*, by Gary Soto
4. *Elena's Serenade*, by Campbell Geeslin
5. *Only Passing Through*, by Anne Rockwell
6. *The Sissy Ducking*, by Harvey Fierstein
7. *Each Kindness*, by Jacqueline Woodson
8. *10,000 Dresses*, by Marcus Ewert
9. *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon*, by Patty Lovell
10. *Jacob's New Dress*, by Ian Hoffman and Sarah Hoffman

The Participants & the Researcher-Participant Relationship

Six children—three boys, three girls—participated in this study. All students were in second grade and were between the ages of seven and eight during the course of this project. I had known each of the participants and their families for about six months before the study began, and the relationships I formed with the participants and their families were integral to the success of this project. Some of the subject matter of the books used in the study—particularly in regards to gender and sexuality—is politically charged and controversial. Therefore, during the time I gained informed consent from the parents and verbal assent from the children, I explained the subject matter of the books and expressed to the children's parents that I wanted to learn more about the ways children think about gender so that elementary teachers could better teach their students. As I gained this informed consent, I thought about the double standard I explained in the introduction of this dissertation. When thinking about the ways in which heterosexual

norms are embedded into the everyday in elementary classrooms, teachers never have to get approval or permission to discuss (whether explicitly or implicitly) heterosexual identity with their students. But, when issues of non-heterosexuality and non-normative gender expression come to the forefront, the reverse usually holds true. In fact, whenever I would discuss this kind of work with colleagues, friends, and family, I was usually asked the question, *What about the parents?* This question always seems difficult to answer because of course, as a teacher, I always want as much parental involvement as possible in the classroom. However, because of the wide array of, and unfortunately at times oppressive views of issues of non-normative gender expression and non-heterosexuality and particularly, their placement within the elementary classroom, this kind of work can be easily stymied. This being said, this kind of project speaks to the importance of relationships between the researcher and the participants. I feel I developed a trusting relationship with these students and their families and upon reflection, my orientation to the discussion and infusion of these types of issues/topics in the literacy curriculum of this project was not much different than the ways I normally teach in my classroom.

During the literature discussions, there were many difficult times for me—particularly when students expressed homo-/trans-phobic and sexist views. Even though the children in this study were young, these opinions were not easy to hear. However, I tried to remain open to the opinions and views of all participants, and encouraged student-led debate/discussion. In fact, I found that the participants seemed to gain much from moments of disagreement and debate. On the flip side, I was impressed and assured

with the moments in which children advocated for fairness and worked against oppression.

It is abundantly clear, as the data from this project exposes, that more discussion on how to address LGBT-related issues and issues related to non-normative gender expression is necessary. How do teachers embark on this kind of social justice work, particularly if they work in school districts that impose discriminatory practices like banning LGBT-themed books, or refusing students to use the bathroom that aligns with their self-proclaimed gender identity? And, with anti-bullying initiatives being enacted in school districts across the country, how can thoughtful discussions of these initiatives be had that are critical of privileging other facets of identity over others in order to normalize homosexuality?

Below is a brief description of each of the participants, with some information I gained from the interest inventories (see Appendix A) I asked the children to fill out during our first literacy club meeting. I also asked each child's parent/guardian to fill out a voluntary information sheet (see Appendix B) before beginning the literacy club. Each child provided his/her verbal assent to participate in this study, and the parents/guardians gave their informed consent for their children to participate in this study. Each child was assigned a unique pseudonym.

Sara

During the course of this project Sara was eight years old. She is first generation Mexican-American and is the middle child—she has one older and one younger brother. Sara speaks both Spanish and English at home. She indicated that she likes reading chapter books, she likes doing hard math problems, and going to the park with her family.

She also said that she likes helping her mom do things around the house and that her favorite restaurant is Red Lobster. Throughout the course of working with Sara I noticed that she has a mild manner and she easily expresses her opinions. She was a respectful listener during literature discussions and had a knack for responding to the statements the other children made.

Tariq

Tariq was seven years old during this project. Tariq was born in the United States, and his parents emigrated from Senegal in 2007. Tariq speaks Wolof and English at home and lives with his two siblings, mother, and father. He has one older brother who is in high school and a baby sister. Tariq said that he liked to spend time with his cousins, he likes to skateboard, and that his favorite subjects in school were science and reading.

Myra

Myra was eight years old during this project. She and her family moved from Somalia via Kenya when Myra was four years old. Myra speaks Somali and English fluently. She also speaks Swahili, which she spoke while she was very young and living in a refugee camp in Kenya. Myra is considered an English Learner, though she has a strong command of the English language. Myra indicated that she loves to read and likes art class. Myra has four siblings—two older sisters and one older brother, and one younger sister. Myra's family practices Islam and she wears hijab—a headscarf, long dress, and shirts with long sleeves. In addition to regular school, Myra attends Muslim school several days each week.

Javon

Javon was seven years old during this project. He is African-American and lives with his mother and little brother. Javon only speaks English. Javon said that he loves sports, especially basketball. He said his favorite part of school is when he gets to write funny stories and when he gets to play with his friends during outdoor recess. He said that he likes to spend time with his grandmother and helps her cook dinner sometimes. Javon indicated that his favorite things to read were books about science. He also likes to sing at church.

Aliya

Aliya was eight years old during this study. Her mother is African-American and her father emigrated from Nigeria several years ago. Aliya speaks English at home and has a limited knowledge of Yoruba, which is spoken by her father and his side of the family. Aliya has two older brothers and indicated that she loves spending time with her family. Her favorite subject is art and reading. Aliya indicated that she likes to play with her friends and that she loves going outside for recess.

Donald

Donald was eight years old during this study. He was born in the United States and both of his parents emigrated from Nicaragua. Donald speaks both Spanish and English at home. He has three siblings—one younger sister, and two older brothers. Donald indicated that his favorite subjects were reading and math. He also indicated that he likes to use his tablet at home and loves to watch videos on YouTube. He said that he

likes having races on his scooter with his brother in the park and that his favorite place is Chuck. E. Cheese's.

Framing the Study

As a critical social research project (Harvey, 1990), I sought to uncover the ways in which gender discourses operate via the use of literacy in a primary classroom setting. I also consider this project in part as a teacher self-study. In addition to meshing the insights of both Biesta (2016 & 2010) and Kumashiro (2000 & 2002), I also continually reflect of my own practice during this project in the hopes of developing a “powerful pedagogy” (Brandenburg, 2008) to utilize as I teach for social justice in the primary classroom.

It is important to note the power imbalances within this research paradigm. Though I am deeply informed by anti-racist critical theories as well as queer and feminist readings of poststructuralism, I must acknowledge the privileges I brought into the classroom. First, the inherent power imbalance between children and adults must be addressed and analyzed as part of the research. Second, my presence as a white, middle-class man, must be acknowledged throughout the entire research project. Throughout the research project, I paid careful attention to the ways my identity informed my position, stances, and interpretations. As Daphne Patai (1991) reminds us,

Although exploitation and unethical behavior are always a possibility when research conducted with living persons, this danger is increased when the researcher is interviewing “down,” that is, among groups less powerful (economically, politically, socially) than the researcher herself. (p. 137).

I acknowledge my outsider stance – both as a researcher, and as a middle-class white man. The bulk of the activities in this project takes place within literature discussions. This gives the participants an opportunity to critically discuss the issues that arise within the texts we read, inviting moments of collaborative discussion, critical meaning-making and dissensus. The model of research I employ does help in beginning to dismantle the power imbalance of researcher/researched, and I hoped to evolve my own and the participants' understandings of gender and sexuality throughout this project. I remain transparent and descriptive of these details, and attempted to explain the possible effects they may have on the project.

I recognized my influence and role as the researcher because I am the one who chose the texts we read and discussed. As teacher/facilitator of the group, I attempted to facilitate a safe environment where our dissenting views could be expressed and respected (hooks, 2013) within the arena of the classroom read aloud. Through the reciprocal nature of the project, I wanted to examine the feelings all participants encountered throughout the course of the project, and analyze what impact they had. Here again, a feminist poststructuralist methodology supports this work, as the project participants are working together to understand the ways children's gender and heterosexual discourses are produced, reproduced, and challenged by their talk and interactions with one another (Walkerdine, 1986).

Data Sources and Analysis

The data for this project come in the form of 1) children's literature—specifically the five children's books with themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression, and 2) the audio recordings/transcripts of the literature discussions of

the five books containing themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression.

I treat all data as discourse and conduct a Foucaultian (1973, 1980) analysis of the data. That is, each piece of data was analyzed to understand the systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak (Foucault, 1973, 1980). Rymes (2009) highlights the multidimensionality of discourse, or what she calls “language in use”:

Social context: the social factors *outside the immediate interaction* that influence how words function in that interaction,

Interactional context: the sequential or other patterns of talk within an interaction that influence what we can and cannot say and how other interpret it within classroom discourse,

Individual agency: the influence an individual can have on how words are used and interpreted in an interaction (p. 20).

When conducting the critical literary analysis of the five children’s books that contain themes of LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression, I will analyze and code the types of language ideologies that surface within the books. When analyzing the discourse produced in the literature discussions, I will analyze both student-student interactions and teacher-student interactions, specifically paying careful attention to the ways in which the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990)—the invisible rules that rely on and reify dichotomous understandings of male/female, masculine/feminine, men/women—are reified, challenged, and disrupted. In chapter V I give a more detailed

explanation of the methodological approach as I analyzed the discourse produced in the literature discussions.

The initial data analysis was ongoing while I simultaneously collected more data in the field. The process allowed me to shape the project and allowed me to remain focused throughout the process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The audio recordings were transcribed, coded, and critically analyzed as a whole after the completion of the project. I analyzed the ways in which the heterosexual matrix (1999) was challenged, disrupted, or reified in each of the children's books and in the children's talk. I turn to Foucault's notion of discourse (1977)—the grids of specification that unconsciously impact our words, actions, thoughts, and being—as I began to locate the power that was embedded within the discourse of the literature discussions. In the next two chapter, I explain my approach to the critical literary analysis of the five children's books containing themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression, and then the analysis of the children's talk during the discussions of these texts.

The Neoliberal Context & Limitations on Teacher-Led Research

For this dissertation project, I had first planned to conduct a participatory action research project with a first grade classroom teacher and her classroom in a Chicago Public School that took up similar issues as this project does. I was going to be a participant-observer in her classroom, the teacher and I were going to read about how a perspective of gender informed by feminist poststructuralism and queer theory can create new spaces in primary classrooms, and we were going to co-create a literacy unit similar to the one used in this project. However, the research review board of the Chicago Public Schools rejected the proposal and the project was not possible.

I then attempted to use my own classroom for a research project designed in a similar manner to this one, but again, the proposal was rejected. This left me no option but to take a leave of absence from my teaching position in order to conduct this research project outside of my own classroom and to reflect on the restrictions placed on teachers who wish to conduct formalized, possibly publishable, research within their own classrooms. Teacher-researchers have the capacity to shed light on critical social issues that would otherwise be blind to outsiders, yet these kinds of restrictions censure the production of new knowledge from a teacher's perspective.

Again, this speaks to the ways in which the elementary literacy curriculum and in turn, the concept of what it means to be a teacher, has narrowed. With the over-reliance on test scores and the tracking of children's literacy progression, only particular forms of literacy are deemed worthy of research. In fact, as I reflect on the kinds of district-led "professional development" I have had in the past few years as a teacher, I mostly remember looking at graphs, plots, and other data points charting the growth (or lack thereof) of students' literacy performance. This has done nothing but dehumanize and reduce the teaching and learning process and not only ignores so many of the important factors that influence how children learn, but also defines and reduces what is deemed as valuable, measurable, and worthy of teaching and learning in elementary classrooms. This makes me reflect on the question Biesta (2012) poses: *do we measure what we value or do we value what we measure?* As I progressed through the National Board Certification process I learned the importance of self-reflection and careful planning. However, this kind of self-reflection was only focused on the ways in which children can attain high standards related to the norms of Standard English. Cultural issues were not

in focus during this process and the invisible hurdles children from non-dominant backgrounds must jump when learning literacy in schools was ignored. I believe that the censorship of teacher-led classroom social research projects must be resisted, and teachers should be afforded the opportunity to share their insight on critical social issues in their classrooms.

CHAPTER IV: CRITICAL LITERARY ANALYSIS

Introduction

From *Heather Has Two Mommies* (1989), to *Daddy's Roommate* (1991), to *And Tango Makes Three* (2005), children's books containing LGBTQ characters and/or themes and that take up the issue of non-normative gender expression have been around for decades. Though the majority of these books portray families headed by non-heterosexual parents as "normal" and legitimate to the reader, and do so in a non-threatening and palatable manner, these books have been confronted with resistance across the United States. Just as there is a long history in the United States of school boards negatively reacting to the presence of gender nonconforming and LGBTQ-identified teachers, there is a similar such history of moral panics surrounding children's books containing LGBTQ-related themes. One such recent reaction was reported in October 2015 in Monroe, Michigan, just outside of Detroit. The school board decided to pull the book, *Captain Underpants and the Sensational Sag of Sir Stinks-A-Lot*, by Dav Pilkey, from their district's book fair because the book contains a main character who ends up being gay. The plot is that the fourth-grade main characters, George and Harold, travel twenty years into the future and see their thirty-year-old selves. Harold is gay and married to a man named Billy, and they have kids. When asked to explain the school board's rationale, the Monroe Public Schools superintendent, Barry Martin, explained, "Most of the kids come in and then buy books and the parents aren't part of the selection. In this case, we felt it was necessary that if this book was going to be purchased, the parent needed to be involved in that" (M.W., 2015). This example—one of many—demonstrates the fear that often accompanies the exposure of non-heterosexuality and

non-normative gender expression to elementary-aged children. It also demonstrates an example of agency being stripped away from children and the ways in which censorship contributes to the deeply engrained gender- and hetero-normativity of our social fabric.

I examined children's books that incorporate LGBTQ-related themes and/or themes related to non-normative gender expression to find out the ways in which power, privilege, and gender-/hetero-normativity are reproduced or challenged in these books. This chapter answers the first question of this dissertation:

1) How do themes related to non-heterosexual identity and/or non-normative gender expression emerge in such themed children's books?

1a) What ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity emerge in the texts?

The aim of this examination is to analyze the qualities and political nature of these books in order to figure out their possible place in my own and other elementary literacy teachers' literacy curricula. I start by giving an overview of influential research that has critically analyzed children's literature, then I explain how I went about my own literary analysis for this study.

Previous Critical Analysis of LGBT-Themed Children's Literature

As I designed this study, I was first mainly focused on the kinds of discourse that children would produce in response to reading LGBT-themed literature. However, as I simultaneously analyzed data while collecting it from the after-school literacy club, I realized it was imperative to analyze the ways in which power, in relation to gender and sexual identity, surfaced in the children's books I read aloud to the children in the study. I realized that the ways in which children reacted to LGBT-identified characters and/or

themes was highly contingent on the ways in which these themes/characters were represented in each text. This led me to review previous work that analyzed children's books with such themes. Not only is there a scant amount of young children's literature that address these themes, but the research that critically analyzes this literature is also limited, though crucial.

Lester (2014) offers a thorough critical analysis of a large selection of LGBT-themed picture books to expose the ways in which they reinforce heteronormativity and celebrate "homonormative, nonthreatening LGBT characters that conform to expected gender roles, have a vested interest in parenting, and are White and upper middle class" (p. 244). Her work is helpful in that it highlights the importance of applying critical analysis to LGBT-themed children's literature. Teachers who want to incorporate LGBT-themed literature into their curricula may include texts with these themes without critically analyzing them first, hence possibly missing the ways in which homosexual identity might be normalized at the expense of other identities (non-white, women, etc.), and her research offers a way to begin to frame such critical analysis.

Additionally, other researchers (Hermann-Wilmarth & Sauto-Manning, 2007; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013) have used queer theory to critically analyze the ways in which LGBT-themed children's literature can be complicated in order to open them up to queer, more complicated, possibilities. For instance, Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth (2013) examine the ways in which a queer perspective can be used to analyze previously written books that are often used within elementary literacy classrooms. They argue that a queer reading of these classics can open up more possibilities for children to express their gender/sexual identities.

Hermann-Wilmarth (2014) use a similar analytic framing (and also similar to Lester's [2014]) as they complicate instances of homonormativity in children's books.

This previous research was influential on my own approach to literary analysis of the books used in this study. Below, I explain how this research, along with other research, inspired me to develop a heuristic for analyzing children's literature with LGBT-related themes and themes related to non-normative gender expression.

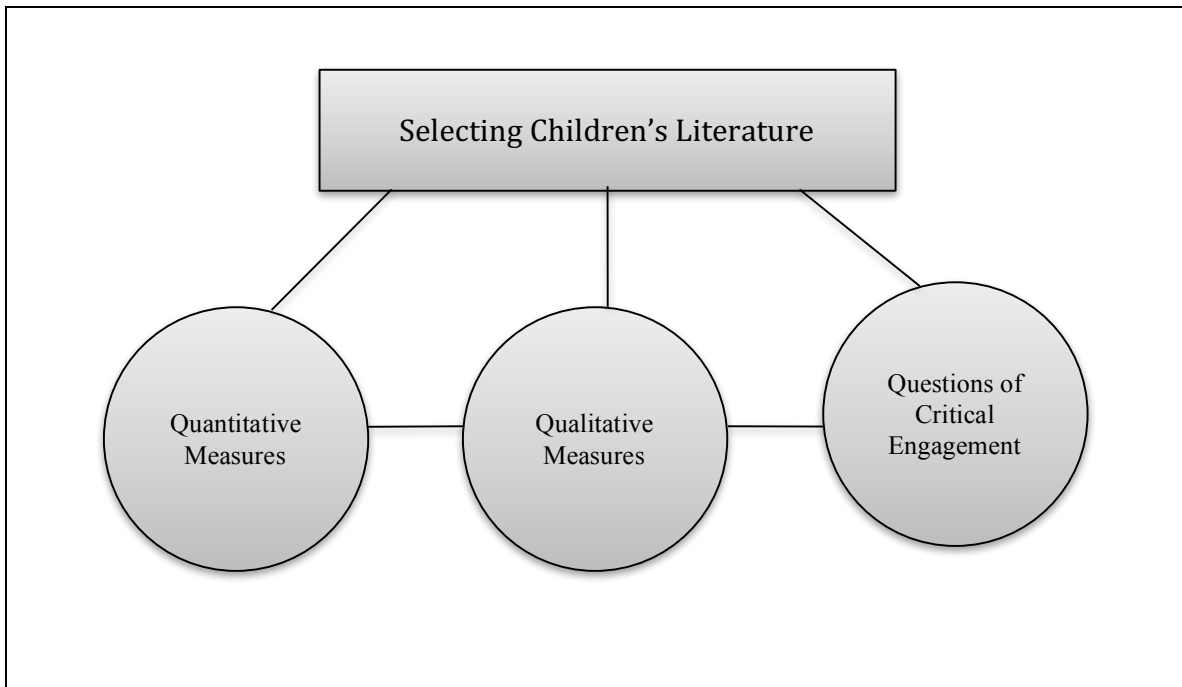
Conceptual Framework

To begin to answer these questions, I developed a heuristic for analyzing children's books that contain characters with non-normative gender expressions and/or LGBTQ-related themes. Once I analyzed and categorized these books in this chapter, I used this literary analysis as a backdrop to examine the discourses produced during discussions of these books in the after-school literacy club of this project in the chapters that follow. The analysis of these children's books helped me chart the ways in which power and privilege—in relation to gender and/or sexuality—surfaced in these books. To organize the categories, I utilized ideologies of gender/sexuality identity—particularly informed by essentialist and poststructural understandings of identity—as differentiating and defining characteristics of the children's books.

As a literacy teacher of young children, I am always on the lookout for books of high literary quality, and I contend that a book's literary quality can hinder or hurt the intended political message of a text. My school district, as well as most school districts across the nation, has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for language arts. With the onset of the CCSS for language arts comes the demand for children to be able to read and comprehend more complex texts. Teachers across the country have been

trained to select complex texts based on their quantitative and qualitative attributes. Through my personal professional development surrounding the selection of complex texts, I have witnessed the ways in which teachers seem to be overly pushed in the direction of choosing texts solely based on their quantitatively measured complexity (*i.e.*, the reading level of texts), as opposed to also examining how texts could be used in a manner that encourages critical discussion and critique of social norms. When teachers select texts solely based on their quantitative and qualitative text complexity, while ignoring issues related to power and privilege, a type of “hidden curriculum” may be enacted in which particular ideologies are normalized and go unchallenged in the classroom. Figure 1 below represents the three main components I argue that should be taken into consideration when choosing texts for classroom use.

Figure 1: Selecting Children’s Literature



Simply put, quantitative measures refer to the reading level of a text—the decodable level at which a text is written. Qualitative measures of text complexity “refer to those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands” (NGA & CCSO, 2010, p.4). To help select texts based on their qualitative attributes, I reference the work of Fisher, Frey, & Lapp (2012) and use their “qualitative measures of text complexity rubric.” This rubric is divided into four main components: levels of meaning and purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; knowledge demands. The qualitative dimensions of a text do not remain constant for a text. In fact, because the background of the reader is such an important component of a text’s qualitative complexity, this level of complexity changes depending on the background of each reader. This rubric is used as a gauge to anticipate the aspects of each text that students may struggle with so that I can appropriately address these needs in my teaching and during read aloud time.

The remainder of this chapter demonstrates my attempt to forge a more complex heuristic for analyzing texts to use in the classroom that allows teachers to not only model and teach essential complex reading behaviors to their students, but at the same time, provide a forum for their students to discuss and debate issues related to power and privilege—in this case, related to issues of gender and sexual identity. I argue that when selecting texts, as I do in this project, teachers must adhere to both political questions when choosing texts—issues related to power and privilege—as well as to questions of literary quality and text complexity.

Political Issues Related to Gender/Sexuality

Analyzing the complexity of children's books is an integral complement to the analysis of power and privilege in children's books. In fact, I argue that these two components of text selection should not be thought of as separate components—with one being more or less important than the other. Annika Stafford (2009) reminds us that the way a political message works its way throughout a story is contingent on the literary quality of the text; therefore, any attempt that begins to address issues of power and privilege in texts should do so in a manner that meshes together these arenas of literary analysis. In what follows, I mesh the insights that both Stafford's (2009) and Blackburn *et al.*'s (2015) research offer to develop my own analytic tool for critically analyzing the children's books used in my study.

In examining heteronormativity in children's picture books, specifically looking at the ways in which families headed by same-sex parents are represented in children's story books, Anika Stafford (2009) asks some important questions that adults can use when choosing such themed books to read with children. The books which Stafford analyzes are oriented to very young children—from birth through about kindergarten age. Additionally, the books which Stafford analyzes are solely focused on the topic of families headed by non-heterosexual parents. Although the texts in my project do not solely focus on the topic of non-heterosexual headed families, Stafford's analytic questions helped me critically analyze the texts I used. I adapted Stafford's analytic questions to suit the needs of this project: 1) "Do the picture books recreate power hierarchies from the dominant culture such as gender expression, race, and class in order to normalize homosexuality?" 2) "Is homo-[and/or trans-] phobia dealt with in a way that

shows homo[-and/or trans-] phobia as the problem to be challenged? (Stafford, 2009, p. 171). Although the selection of books Stafford analyzes is orientated to a younger audience than my second-grade students, the analytic framework she employs informs my own and will be used as I describe and analyze each text later in this chapter.

Blackburn, Clark, & Nemeth's (2015) research examines queer elements and ideologies that surface in young adult literature. Their research examines the books used in a young-adult book club and seeks to answer the questions, "What does queer literature look like?" and "What particular resources do queer books offer that are distinct from the broader category of literature with LGBTQ themes?" (Blackburn *et al.*, 2015, p. 12). Many of the texts in their study feature characters who are coming out as gay or lesbian, or who experience some kind of non-heterosexual romantic engagement. While Blackburn & Clark's previous work (2011) analyzed the talk that occurred in a book club, allowing them to identify the differences and overlaps of LGBTQ-inclusive and queer discourses, the literary analytic heuristic developed by Blackburn *et al.* (2015) identifies and analyzes the qualities of characteristically queer books (*i.e.*, books that disrupt norms and/or represent gender/sexual identity as fluid and unfixed). The books in my study, however, are more focused on issues related to gender identity and non-heterosexual identity in a more general sense. The books in my study are not all characteristically queer (which I will clarify later), and therefore my heuristic also examines the elements of LGBTQ- and/or gender nonconforming-inclusive books (or what I call *strategic essentialist*) as well as characteristically queer books.

The texts that are selected and critically analyzed for this project are very specifically "second-grade texts." This is not to say that they cannot be used in other

grade levels. However, I have used my judgment as an experienced primary literacy teacher and have taken the generalized developmental level of seven- and eight-year-olds into consideration, as well as the literary qualities that best lend themselves to teach in a second grade literacy classroom. In the sections that follow, I explain the categories I used to analyze the children's books in my study. Once each book is categorized, I examine in the ensuing chapters how each type of book operates in a classroom setting by paying careful attention to the discourse that is produced during literature discussions of each book.

Categorizing Children's Books

In developing categories in which to analyze children's books that incorporate themes/issues related to non-normative gender expression and/or non-heterosexuality, I revisit here the concepts of *anti-homophobia work*, and *counter-heteronormative work*, or *queer work*, as used in the No Outsiders project (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009b), as they developed curricula/pedagogy that strove for sexualities equity in the primary grades. Put simply, *anti-homophobia work* enacts a type of "tolerance discourse"—the idea that LGBTQ-identified individuals should be tolerated and should not be treated unfairly, and that such acts as gender expression- and sexual identity-rooted bullying is wrong and unacceptable. *Counter heteronormative*, or *queer work*, is work that actively seeks to disrupt heteronormativity (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009)—that is, calls into question dichotomous understandings of what it means to be a boy or a girl. I link this work to the work of Blackburn *et al.* (2015), as they use similarly related categories when they analyze the queer young adult literature in their study. My own categories of literary analysis are deeply informed by these two projects, and the two main categories I place

the books in my study are: *strategic essentialist* (SE) (linked to the *anti-homophobia* work of the *No Outsiders* project) and *queer* (Q) (linked to the *queer* category of young adult literature developed by Blackburn *et al.* and the *counter heteronormative*, or *queer* work of the *No Outsiders* project). Additionally, I adapt questions that drove Stafford's (2009) literary analysis of lesbian- and gay-themed children's books and will use these questions to help explain the power and privilege related to gender and sexuality that surface in the children's books of this study.

In the first round of analysis of young adult literature used in their own work, Blackburn *et al.* (2015) borrow characterizations to categorize the books in their study that were created by Cart and Jenkins (2006) who they believe to be "the only scholars to date who have developed a heuristic of young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content" (Blackburn *et al.*, 2015, p. 13). Cart and Jenkins (2006) created three categories to place literature with LGBTQ content: homosexual visibility (HV), gay assimilation (GA), and queer consciousness/community (QC). Once I categorized each book as either *strategic essentialist* or *queer*, I subcategorized them into categories I forged based on the three categories conceived by Cart and Jenkins (2006): HV, GA, QC. In the sections that follow, I first explain in more detail the *strategic essentialist* and *queer* categories each of the books in my study are characterized as, and then secondly explain the subcategories under which each text falls.

Strategic Essentialism at Work in Children's Books

An essentialist view of identity "ascribes a fundamental nature of biological determinism to humans" (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996, p. 336). In other words, this view of identity conceives of gender and sexuality as aspects of identity in

which we are born with and that remain fixed throughout our lives. This is similar to the “different worlds” (Tannen, 1990) framework, which insists that boys and girls inherently exist in different fixed worlds and that they have a monolithically unifying, distinctly different voice from each other. Literacy work that views identity from a biological/essentialist perspective may make highly generalized recommendations that reinforce binaries. Take, for instance, the website “guysread.com.” The website makes such claims like, “boys are slower to develop than girls and often struggle with reading and writing skills early on,” and that, “the action-oriented, competitive learning style of many boys works against them learning to read and write” (www.guysread.com). Such claims essentialize the concept of “boy” and create a singular and overly generalized understanding of boyhood, and hence erase the experiences of boys whose gender expression may fall outside of these dominant understandings of masculinity/boyhood.

Essentialist understandings of identity become “strategic” when issues of power emerge and are addressed (Spivak, 1995). Mary Bucholtz writes, “a researcher may deliberately engage in essentialist analysis for specific political or intellectual purposes, such as calling attention to identities that would otherwise be ignored” (2004, p. 376). In other words, Bucholtz reminds us that strategic essentialist work may purposefully bring up power issues related to identity in an oversimplified manner “in order to initiate a discussion that will later become more nuanced” (2004, p. 376). Synonymous with *strategic essentialist work*—*LGBTQ-inclusive work*, or *anti-homophobic work*—is work that may incorporate literature that represents families headed by same-sex parents, that may insert aspects of LGBTQ history into the curriculum, or that may address homophobic bullying. Usually these representations are presented to the reader in a non-

threatening manner and attempt to portray to the reader that LGBTQ individuals are “normal.” Though the intentions of such works are to combat homophobia, some unintended consequences may be produced. This kind of work may only provide a “sentimental education” (Britzman, 1995, p. 158) that insists that gay people are just like straight people and can erase significant difference amongst people—particularly those whose identities fall outside of dominant, binary understandings of gay/straight, boy/girl, etc. Additionally, this kind of identity work “implicitly reinforces discourses of victimization and tolerance” (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009b), and may only portray LGBTQ individuals as powerless and in need of acceptance by straight people which can ignore the heteronormative processes underlying such discrimination. Blackburn *et al.* (2015) remind us that such inclusive discourses often:

reinforce heteronormativity and binary constructions of sex and gender: that is, the social understanding that there are two distinct genders, women and men, that are synonymous with two distinct sexes, female and male, and that the expectation of being a woman (female) is to desire men (males), both emotionally and sexually, and vice versa (p. 12).

Queer Work in Children’s Books

The second category in which the children’s books in this study can be categorized is *queer*, or *counter-heteronormative* work. When issues of gender and/or sexual identity surface in a queer manner in children’s books, gender- and/or heteronormativity may be challenged by the actions of the characters. A queer lens challenges the boy/girl, hetero-/homo-sexual binaries and seeks a more nuanced non-binary understanding of gender and sexuality. While queer theory views sexual and gender

identities as fluid, social, and multiple and allows for movement within and through these categories, it also allows for movement outside of these categories (Jagose, 1996).

Because heteronormativity seems so normal, it is often difficult to recognize, let alone combat. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998) precisely articulate the ways in which heterosexuality is constructed as normal and superior and point to:

The institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than a sense of tightness produced in contradictory manifestations—often unconscious, immanent to practice of to institutions (p. 548).

In other words, heteronormativity reinforces the status quo and “the way things are”—in terms of gender expression and sexual orientation. Blaise (2012) describes queer theory as a theory that “links gender stereotypes to the norms of heterosexuality. It is definitely *not* a theory about gay and lesbian identity. Queer theory is ‘queer’ because it questions the assumption there is any ‘normal’ expression of gender (p. 88). In my own analysis, I categorized books as *queer* if a character experiences gender or sexual identity in multiple or fluid ways and/or in a manner that challenges the status quo. Additionally, a book is categorized as *queer* if the character disrupts norms related to gender/sexual identity within the world of the story, and in which the characters are exposed to a new,

more nuanced understanding of gender/sexuality that was not present earlier within the world of the story.

Subcategories of Children's Books

As noted above, in the first stages of developing their own heuristic, Blackburn *et al.* (2015) use Cart and Jenkins' (2006) characteristics of LGBTQ-themed young adult fiction: homosexual visibility (HV), gay assimilation (GA), and queer consciousness/community (QC). Each of these characteristics of young adult literature could fit under the larger categories of either *strategic essentialist* or *queer* work, yet surface in slightly different ways. Because the content of the books in my project is different, and oriented toward a much younger audience, the categories Cart & Jenkins (2006) and Blackburn *et al.* (2015) use to analyze the young adult fiction do not seamlessly transfer when analyzing books geared toward a younger audience. Next, I explain how Cart & Jenkins (2006) and Blackburn *et al.* (2015) use these terms, and how I forge my own similarly related categories that are more orientated to the children's books used in this project.

Cart & Jenkins (2006) and Blackburn *et al.* (2015) use the HV category to classify books whose main characters are identified as LGBTQ. These stories portray “a character who has not previously been considered gay/lesbian comes out either voluntarily or involuntarily” (Cart & Jenkins, 2006, p. xx). None of the characters in the books in my project declare or proclaim an LGBTQ identity—though peripheral characters may implicitly or explicitly identify as such, which will be taken up with the next category. However, some of the main characters in the selected texts do display some kind of struggle in regards to their gender expression, which compliments Cart &

Jenkins' HV category. To characterize books that highlight such a struggle experienced by characters, I use the category *struggle with gender expression* (SGE) to highlight such characteristics.

Cart and Jenkins use the GA category to represent “the existence—at least in the world of the story—of a ‘melting pot’ of sexual and gender identity. These stories include people who ‘just happen to be gay’” (2006, p. xx). Books that portray characters in such a manner attempt to challenge homophobia merely by inserting the presence of LGBTQ characters. In addition to the presence of LGBTQ peripheral characters in the selected books of my study, some main characters in the books exhibit gender in non-conforming ways. I use the category gender expression assimilation (GEA), to represent books in the study that portray characters merely as individuals who just happen to be LGBTQ, or who just happen to express their gender in non-normative manners, without this fact ever being explicitly addressed throughout the story.

Cart & Jenkins (2006) use the QC category to refer to books that “show [LGBTQ] characters in the context of their communities of [LGBTQ] people and their families of choice” (p. xx). None of the books used in my project contain such characters and therefore such alliances are impossible. However, there are alliances formed amongst characters in some of the books—though each character does not explicitly identify as LGBTQ and/or is gender nonconforming. Therefore, I adapt Cart & Jenkins QC category to queer ally (QA)—one that represents books in which a character expresses their gender in non-normative ways, or who is presumed to have an LGBTQ-identity, is offered support by another character who acts as an ally, but who is not LGBTQ-identified or who does not have a non-normative gender expression.

The three subcategories developed thus far—struggles with gender expression (SGE), gender expression assimilationist (GEA), and queer ally (QA)—can all be subcategorized under either larger category of *strategic essentialist* or *queer*. Refer to Table 2 below to see the categorization and sub-categorization of the books used in this study. The nuances of such categorization will be explained during the analysis of each book. In the next section, to further explore the nuances in the ways in which themes of non-normative gender expression and/or LGBTQ-identity emerge in these books, I explain how varying ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity emerge in this particular selection of children’s literature.

Table 2—Characterization of Children’s Books

<p>Definition of Key Terms: <i>Struggle with Gender Expression (SGE)</i>: character experiences mistreatment because of their gender expression <i>Gender Expression Assimilationist (GEA)</i>: Characters who are LGBTQ or gender-nonconforming just happen to be present in the story. <i>Queer Allies (QA)</i>: One or more characters helps another character who experiences struggle/mistreatment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.</p>		
Texts read and discussed in literacy club	Characteristics (Strategic essentialist [SE], Queer [Q])	Subcategories (Struggle with gender expression [SGE], Gender Expression Assimilationist [GEA], Queer Ally [QA])
Nijland, S. & de Haan, L. (2002). <i>King and King</i> . Berkeley, CA: Bicycle Press.	SE	GEA, QA
Fierstein, H. (2005). <i>The Sissy Duckling</i> . New York: Simon & Schuster.	Q	SGE, QA
Ewert, M. (2008). <i>10,000 Dresses</i> . New York: Seven Stories Press.	Q	SGE, QA
Hoffman, S. (2014). <i>Jacob’s New Dress</i> . Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman & Co.	Q	SGE, QA
Geeslin, C. (2004). <i>Elena’s Serenade</i> . New York: Athaneum.	SE	GEA

Ideologies Surrounding Gender/Sexual Identity

Blackburn *et al.* (2015) explain three ways of understanding, or ideologies, that govern our thinking about gender/sexual identity: *essentialist (E)*, *developmental (D)*, and *poststructural (PS)*. They analyzed the ways in which these ideologies emerged in the books they categorize as *queer*. To draw the distinction between an essentialist and developmental view of identity, Blackburn *et al.* write, “When one embraces an essentialist notion of identity, one emphasizes the true, core, inherent identity and glosses over the process of getting to it. When one embraces a developmental model of identity, the reverse is true; that is, one focuses on the processes of coming out to an identity, which is assumed, but not discussed as fixed” (2015, p. 15). To further enrich a queer understanding of identities, they explain how a *poststructural* approach to understanding identities is useful. With a poststructuralist understanding of identity, “there is no assumed true identity. Rather, a person or here a character, experiences emotional...desires...and performs gender, but these cannot be captured with a single, stable sexual or gender identity. Instead, sexual and gender identities are understood as multiple, variable, and even at times, conflicting” (2015, p. 15). I use this framework to analyze the texts in this study to understand the ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity that emerge.

Once I read the books several times and categorized and subcategorized them, I reread them a number of times to analyze what kinds of ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity emerged. Borrowing from the method used by Blackburn *et al.* (2015), I created an analysis table and found different aspects of each book in which particular ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity emerged. Table 3 below is an

excerpt of the cross-book analysis I created when each book was analyzed based on ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity. Just as Blackburn *et al.* (2015) found in their analysis of books they categorized as queer, “none of these books is purely essential, developmental, or poststructural. The lack of purity is arguably more aligned with queering than pure poststructuralism in that it offers multiple, variable, and conflicting ideologies” (2015, p. 24). I, too, see a similarity in the books in my own study. In the next section, I offer a summary of each text with an accompanying analysis of the ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity that emerged.

Table 3—Multiple and Conflicting Ideologies

Multiple and conflicting ideologies	<i>King and King</i>	<i>The Sissy Duckling</i>	<i>10,000 Dresses</i>	<i>Jacob's New Dress</i>	<i>Elena's Serenade</i>
Conceptions of identity: Essentialist (E), Developmental (D), and Poststructural (PS)	The queen proclaims that she is tired of ruling the kingdom and demands that “the prince will marry and become king before the end of the summer... ‘I’ve had enough! You’re getting married and that’s all there is to it!’” “Very well, mother. I’ll marry. But I must say, though, I’ve never cared much for princesses.” (E). After meeting several princesses and expressing	“Yes, Elmer was one happy duckling doing all the things he loved to do. Unfortunately, there wasn’t a single other little boy duckling who liked to do ANY of the stuff that Elmer did. Not one.” (E). “‘I want to make one thing perfectly clear: I am the same duck I have always been. I have not changed. I am a BIG SISSY and PROUD of it!’ Drake took a step forward. ‘You haven’t changed, but maybe I have.’” (PS).	Throughout the story, Bailey identifies as a girl and the omniscient narrator uses the pronoun “her” to refer to Bailey. When Bailey is addressed by her mother, father, and brother, they all refer to Bailey as a boy. (PS). Laurel, Bailey’s neighbor and ally, “You are the coolest girl I’ve ever met, Bailey!” (PS).	“‘The dress-up corner is where we come to use our imaginations,’ Ms. Wilson said. ‘You can be a dinosaur, a princess, a farmer—anything!’” (PS). “Christopher shook his head. ‘I asked my dad, and he says boys don’t wear dresses.’” (E) “Christopher, I made this dress, I’m proud of it, and I’m going to wear it!” (PS).	“You are too little, Elenita, and the hot glass might burn you. Besides, who ever heard of a girl glassblower?” (E) “Since girls aren’t supposed to be glassblowers, I’ll pretend that I am a boy.” Elena travels to Monterrey, disguised as a boy, and learns to be a glassblower. When she comes back home, she appears before her father in her boy disguise and shows him what she has learned. (D)

	<p>disinterest, the last princess arrives with her brother, Prince Lee.</p> <p>“At last, the prince felt a stir in his heart. It was love at first sight... The wedding was very special. The queen even shed a tear or two. The two princes are known as king and king, the queen finally has some time for herself, and everyone lives happily ever after” (D).</p>	<p>“Over the years Elmer learned that he was not so very different after all. Out in the world he met lots of other ducks just like himself. No, Elmer was not so different, but he always did remain <i>special</i>” (D).</p>			
--	---	--	--	--	--

CRITICAL LITERARY ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHILDREN’S BOOKS

In this section, I give an overview of each book used in my study and explain how each book is categorized and subcategorized and also explain what ideologies surrounding gender/sexuality are predominant in each book. Because these are picture books meant to be read aloud to children, in many cases, the illustrations offer more meaning than the written words do. I chose each of the books because they each challenge norms associated with gender/sexual identity in unique and interesting ways. As I analyzed these books, the process became more difficult than I thought it would be. When I thought about stories that disrupted norms, it became evident that this process depends on the audience reading the stories—what is normal for one may not be for another. However, as a way to deal with this, I decided to focus solely on the world of the story. That is, I paid careful attention to the norms that existed in the world of the

story and proceeded with my analysis accordingly and analyzed if particular norms were or were not disrupted throughout the course of the story. I begin my analysis with books that are broadly characterized as *strategic essentialist* and then analyze the books characterized as *queer*.

King and King

I chose this book because the storyline is one that is familiar to most students. Because of this familiarity, I was interested to see how the children in the study would react to a possibly unfamiliar subject (a gay wedding) embedded within a familiar story structure. In the story, an unnamed prince is told by his mother, the queen, that he must get married and become a king because she is tired of ruling the kingdom. The queen plans for a series of young princesses from around the world to come and visit the prince and entice him to marry them. The last princess who visits the prince arrives with her brother. The prince and this other prince fall in love with each other and get married immediately (actually, they get married on the very next page of the book). When the two princes get married, there is no conflict with any of the characters. The gay wedding is accepted with no question and celebrated by all of the characters in the book. The book has *strategic essentialist* qualities, as the presence of a gay marriage emerges in the book without it ever being discussed. This marriage takes place without any conflict and fits tidily into the plot of the story. The book is subcategorized as *gender expression assimilationist (GEA)* because the presence of the two married kings seems to just emerge and is immediately accepted within the world of the story. It is also subcategorized as *queer ally (QA)* because the queen (the one king's mother) and princess

(the other king's sister) attend the two princes' wedding in a content and supportive manner.

At the beginning of the story, the queen demands that her son get married because, "Every prince in these parts is married. Every one of them but you! When I was your age, I'd been married twice already!" At this point, an essentialist ideology emerges, as the queen implies that getting married is just what all princes do, and therefore, he must abide. Additionally, at the beginning of the story the prince agrees to search for a partner in marriage after pressure to do so from his mother: "By evening, all that talking had made the prince dizzy. 'Very well, Mother. I'll marry. I must say, though, I've never cared much for princesses.'" In this snippet, the prince implies that he has always had the identity of "not caring much for princesses," which can easily be interpreted to signify a gay identity—an identity the prince asserts he has always had. Again, this is characteristic of an essentialist ideology of gender/sexual identity.

Once the prince agrees to search for a partner in marriage, the queen then arranges for a number of princesses/prospective wives for her son to visit the prince. After rejecting all of the princesses, something changes when the last princess arrives and vies for the prince's love and hand at marriage. When this last princess, Princess Madeleine, came to visit the prince, she arrived with a companion—her brother, Prince Lee. "At last, the prince felt a stir in his heart. It was love at first sight... At last, the prince felt a stir in his heart. It was love at first sight." This moment in the story reveals developmental ideology of sexual identity—the idea that the prince's desire was inside of his heart all along and that it was finally actualized when the prince met his right mate, Prince Lee.

Additionally, at the same time, this moment reinforces the hegemonic notion of “love at first sight.”

Throughout the story, the presence of homosexuality is never cast as a problem, nor is it ever explicitly addressed. At the moment the two princes meet and each proclaim, “What a wonderful prince!” the illustrations reveal a love connection between the two male characters—both characters are surrounded by hearts, and the queen and the princess are seen in the periphery looking on as the two princes stare intently at each other. Both the queen and the princess have flat expressions on their faces, and it is difficult to interpret what they are thinking or feeling at that moment. The next page fast-forwards to the wedding day of the two princes: “The wedding was very special. The queen even shed a tear or two... The two princes are known as king and king, the queen finally has some time for herself, and everyone lives happily ever after.” At this point the illustrations show other characters relaxing together by a pool, while the kings (and their cat) play chess together. Though there are only two pages of the story that highlight the marriage of the two princes, the marriage emerges in the story as something that just happens—there was no conflict that any of the characters experienced in the story, particularly as it relates to the gay wedding. Also, the fact that they lived “happily ever after” reinforces the notion of eternal love and that it is sanctioned by the institution of marriage. Though the norm of heterosexual marriage was momentarily disrupted in this story—the queen says, “Every prince in these parts is married. Every one of them but you!”—a gay marriage was immediately accepted and normalized once the princes proceeded with their marriage.

Next, I turn to Stafford's analytic question "Do the picture books recreate power hierarchies from the dominant culture such as gender expression, race, and class in order to normalize homosexuality?" (2009, p. 171) as a tool to further examine this text. The most obvious hierarchy of power in this story is the existence and perpetuation of a monarchy. Though the two kings disrupt the norm of what kinds of individuals (heterosexual) should rule a kingdom, they inherently recreate a hierarchy and presumably rule over the subjects of their kingdom. Additionally, when the various princesses came to visit the prince, they were all objectified. They were merely shown to the prince and he was afforded the opportunity to dismiss or accept them at his will. The princesses had no sense of agency, and it appears that their only reason for existing (in the world of this story, anyway) was to try to win the affection of the prince. This message is inherently sexist and limits the experiences and choices of girls/women.

The one non-white princess who visited the prince from Mumbai was made fun of by the prince, "'Boy, those long arms will certainly come in handy when waving to the people' said the prince." This moment in the story further objectifies and denigrates the princess, a woman of color. While the marriage of two men was normalized in the world of the story, other identities—women in general, and women of color—were marginalized and thus, a new hierarchy emerged and the homosexual marriage was normalized in the story at the expense of denigrating others—in this case women in general, and non-white women in particular. When I first read the book, I immediately thought the book should be categorized as *queer* because of the very presence of a gay wedding and love connection between two men. However, I would argue that this story fits neatly within a discourse of tolerance. The intention of the book seems to be to

portray the idea of gay marriage as normal to the reader, and no norms seem to be challenged and disrupted throughout the course of the story. In fact, the storyline did not have much substance, and was quite short. The fun, feel-good quality of the text seems to oversimplify the events of the story and does not engage or explicitly challenge any norms related to gender/sexuality.

Elena's Serenade

In this book, the main character, Elena (or Elenita), wants to be a glass blower, just like her father. However, in the town she is from in Mexico, it is unheard of for girls to enter into this line of work and therefore, Elena is presented with a problem she must grapple with: how can she achieve her dream of learning to be a glass blower given these constraints? Overall, this book is categorized as *strategic essentialist*. Elena smartly navigates the male-dominated glass blowing world by disguising herself as a man so that she can have access to her dream. However, once she learns the trade of glass blowing, she removes her disguise and reveals her true, female identity.

At the beginning of the story, Elena is seen admiringly watching her father doing his work as a glassblower: “I ask him if he will teach me to be a glassblower too, but he shakes his head. ‘You are too little, Elenita, and the hot glass might burn you. Besides, who ever heard of a girl glassblower?’” At this point in the story, Elena’s father exhibits an essentialist conception of gender—girls do not do things such as glassblowing. Elena, on the other hand, thinks differently: “Even though I am as mad as a wet hen, I don’t let Papa see my tears.” Elena confides in her brother, Pedro, about her problem. Pedro encourages Elena to follow her dream: “‘Monterrey is where the great glassblowers are,’ Pedro says. ‘You should go there.’ Should I? I’m scared to leave Papa, but maybe I

should.” The next page jumps to Elena as she seemingly made the decision to leave for Monterrey. The image shows her wearing Pedro’s pants and she hides her hair under the hat on her head. Elena (who is also the narrator of the story) declares, “Since girls aren’t supposed to be glassblowers, I’ll pretend that I am a boy.”

At this point, Elena travels throughout the desert to get to Monterrey and she makes some friends on her way—all of whom mistake her identity for a boy. Throughout her journey, she learns that as she blows into the pipe she has brought with her (presumably the one she will use in Monterrey to learn to blow glass), beautiful music comes out:

To pass the time, I puff out my cheeks and blow my pipe. What is that? A pretty sound comes out! Ever so gently I blow again. The notes get higher, *pree-tat-tat pree-tat-tat*. I can hardly believe my ears—my pipe is making music!

This newfound skill of playing music helps the different characters she meets along her journey to Monterrey. She plays a song called “Burro Serenade” to help a burro she meets trot along pleasantly to the rhythm of the song. Burro likes the music so much he offers to give Elena a lift to Monterrey. Next, Elena meets a roadrunner that seems to have forgotten to run. She plays a tune from her pipe and the roadrunner is inspired to run again and encourages Elena after learning where she is travelling: ““You play such a fine march, certainly you’ll make a fine glassblower.”” The next character Elena meets is a coyote that is discouraged because he feels everyone hates his singing voice as he howls to the moon. Then, Elena plays a sweet tune for the coyote, and he is able to sing beautifully again. Once again, Elena gains encouragement as Coyote responds, ““If you could teach me to sing, you can do anything!”” Through her journey, Elena realizes that

she has a gift of making beautiful music with her pipe—something that will work to her advantage in the future, and something that seems to be representative of her “true,” female identity.

In the next part of the story, she arrives in Monterrey and finds the glassblowing factory where she asks to learn the art of glassblowing. She enters the factory:

In front of me, four big men stand stiff as soldiers, puffing on long pipes... “What do you want?” their boss yells at me. I cough and in a low voice I say, “*Por favor, señor...* I want to be a glassblower.” The men laugh. The boss winks and says, “Okay, *muchacho*. Let’s see what you can do.”

At this point in the story, it appears that the men in the factory are aware of Elena’s disguise, but humor her by letting her try to blow glass. When she blows for the first time in front of the men, a song comes out: “When the men hear the music, they laugh even harder.” Elena remembers how she impressed the characters she met on her way to Monterrey, and she continues to blow in her pipe. This time, a star comes out at the end of the pipe. The men try to replicate what Elena—still in her man-disguise—does, but they are unable to do so: “The men try to blow music too, but only burping noises and crooked bottles come from their pipes.” This snippet hints that Elena’s feminine quality of being able to make beautiful music/glass stars out of her pipe is distinctly different than the glass blowing abilities of the men. Elena is welcomed by the glassblowing men and continues to make her unique and beautiful glass stars: “As soon as the children in Monterrey see them, they all want one. The stars sell faster than I can blow them.”

After staying in Monterrey blowing glass for some time, Elena decides she wants to go back home after she expresses that she misses her father, and that she wishes her

father could see her ability to blow such beautiful glass. Now, Elena blows a glass bird from her pipe that she uses to fly her back home. Once she gets home, Elena, still disguised as a man, surprises her father in his glassblowing factory:

“*Buenos días, señor,*” I say, in an old man’s shaky voice. “I am a glassblower, come all the way from Monterrey.” “Why grandfather,” Papa says politely, “You aren’t as tall as your pipe. How can you blow glass?” I twirl hot glass on to the end and begin to play a song called “*La Mariposa*,” about how pretty butterflies are. A glass butterfly floats from my pipe and flutters about, its wings chiming.

“*Qué bonita!*” Papa exclaims. “If only my daughter were here to see this.”

At this point, Elena takes off her disguise, revealing her long hair—another stereotypical feminine trait, and tells her father all about how she learned to be a glassblower in Monterrey. The story ends with an image of Elena and her father blowing glass together: “Now every day Papa and I work side by side at our great furnace. Papa blows bottles and pitchers and drinking glasses. I blow birds, stars, butterflies, and songs.” Though now an accepted glassblower, it can be inferred that the fruits of Elena’s glassblowing labor are confined to stereotypically feminine attributes: birds, stars, butterflies, and songs. Her father’s glassblowing abilities are also confined, but in a different manner. He is only able to create functional objects like glasses and pitchers. As I was rereading the story, I kept thinking of the concepts of *hegemonic masculinity* and *emphasized femininity* (Connell, 1987). Elena’s father and the male glassblowers in Monterrey all embody hegemonic masculinity, as their masculinity is the dominant form of masculinity that regulates and subordinates other patterns of masculinity and femininity. Elena’s navigation and eventual access to the glassblowing trade is characteristic of emphasized

femininity because it is not hegemonic and does not define and regulate other forms of femininities. Rather, it exists and is constructed to maintain hegemonic masculinity. In this case, Elena gained access to the glassblowing world, but she did so in a manner that upheld hegemonic masculinity—the men were the ones who made functional objects like pitchers and glasses, while Elena made things that were less functional and more decorative and meant for enjoyment.

Since this book is categorized as *strategic essentialist*, the content allows for a later, more nuanced discussion related to gender roles and stereotypical expectations of boys/men and girls/women. Though Elena worked within the confines of the male/female binary, she was very strategic with how she went about this. There appeared to be no way for Elena to learn to be a glassblower if she exhibited a female gender identity—nobody would even consider helping Elena reach this goal. So, Elena thought of the next best idea—to disguise herself as a boy/man so that she could gain access to the glassblowing world. At the end of the story, Elena reveals that she disguised herself as a boy to reach this goal, and reveals her true identity as a girl, but now as a girl glassblower—something that seemed like an impossibility to everyone at first. But, because Elena is indeed a girl, she is clearly marked as different than the male glassblowers. Her glassblowing abilities seem to have an inherently stereotypically feminine touch to them—a conceptualization that emphasizes an essentialist conceptualization of gender identity. This book has potential for fruitful discussions about gender roles and ways in which to navigate sexist undercurrents in many facets of our cultural fabric. Everyone in Elena's context, with the exception of her brother, found it problematic for a girl to be a glassblower. Elena (and her brother) though, thought the

idea of girls not having access to the glassblowing trade was problematic. In the world of the story, Elena navigated this constricting reality the best way she thought possible—though it was done in a way in which she had to assimilate to meet the norms of her context. Though the sexist context was cast as problematic by Elena, she had to navigate this world in a manner in which the role of girls was defined for her.

I slightly adapt Stafford's (2009) analytic question, "Is homo[- and/or trans-] phobia dealt with in a way that shows homo[-and/or trans-] phobia as the problem to be challenged?", to, "are gender stereotypes dealt with in a way that shows gender stereotypes as the problem?" Throughout the story, Elena's gender was deemed as a problem—not gender stereotypes. That is, she was unable to be a glassblower because of the simple fact that she was a girl. The gender stereotypes were not directly challenged in this story. Rather, Elena had to strategically traverse this male-dominated profession in order to gain access to it.

Though this book does not directly take up issues related to LGBTQ-identity, it is connected to LGBTQ-related issues/struggles because deals with the unfairness related to sexism and gender stereotypes—all of which regulate and reify the norms of heterosexuality.

The Sissy Duckling

I decided to use this story because I thought the experiences of the main character, Elmer, were relatable to the children in the group. This story also brings up the issue of non-normative gender expression in a manner in which second-graders can easily access and grapple. This story captures the experiences of a young boy duck named Elmer whose gender expression falls outside of dominant understandings of masculinity and

boyhood. I categorize this book as *queer* because Elmer and his gender expression disrupt the norms in the story and expand the notion of what it means to be a boy within the context of the story. In fact, Elmer reclaims the identity and label of a sissy in a self-affirming manner. The book is subcategorized as *Struggle with Gender Expression*, as Elmer's struggle with his gender expression is at the crux of the story. A brief overview of the story is that Elmer experiences conflict with other characters—his father, classmates, other members of his flock—because he has a stereotypically feminine gender expression and engages in activities that are stereotypically aligned with “girl activities.” Throughout the course of the story, Elmer tries to figure out ways to deal with his mistreatments. At the end of the story, Elmer does not change from his sissy identity, but rather, the characters who inflicted the mistreatment on Elmer end up changing and expand their understanding of what it means to be a boy.

The beginning of the story explains some of the activities Elmer likes to do: he either plays alone or with the girls, helps around the house, and likes to cook. The cover shows a picture of Elmer, front and center, as the members of his flock look at him from the background, and he is wearing a pink backpack with flowers on it, along with hot pink, heart-shaped sunglasses. Judging by the looks on their faces, the characters in the background appear to be gazing at Elmer in disapproval.

As the story progresses, a clear tension becomes apparent, “Unfortunately, there wasn’t a single other little boy duck who liked to do ANY of the stuff that Elmer did. Not one,” and Elmer’s father pushes him to play baseball—something he has no interest in doing. The narrative of the story is similar to common “coming out” stories, and highlights a gender nonconforming male character struggling with bullying and

disapproval of peers and family because of his feminine gender expression. In this sense, a developmental ideology emerges, as it demonstrates Elmer finding and self-affirming his own gender identity. Elmer's father expresses dismay with his son because Elmer does not live up to the expectations of gender expression set forth by his father. Elmer's father complains to Elmer's mother: "Elmer was getting ready for bed when he heard his papa shouting in the living room. 'Sissy! They called him a Sissy! Now I am the laughingstock of the whole flock.'" At this point, Elmer quickly figures out the meaning of the word *sissy* and seems to internalize the surmounting disapproval of his father and others. Another factor that forces Elmer to recognize that his gender expression is considered wrong by others is the bullying he experiences throughout the story:

"No sissies allowed in MY school,' Drake squawked. Elmer faced him down, bill to bill. 'You are just angry because I do things differently. But one day I will amaze you all!' 'Who fed you that line?' Drake chuckled. Elmer bellowed back, 'My mama!' 'What a sissy!' Drake howled, and the other ducklings joined in teasing Elmer...

The very "sissy" presence of Elmer is disruptive to the norms of the story—particularly because Elmer defends his identity as he casts his self as different.

After being bullied by classmates and after hearing his father call him a "sissy," Elmer decides that the best choice is for him to run away from home. This presents a problem for Elmer because winter is approaching, and all of the ducks were preparing to fly south for the winter. Elmer bravely decides to stay in the forest against all odds—no duck has ever survived a winter by him/herself. Elmer capitalizes on his stereotypically feminine qualities and makes a very comfortable and cozy home in an old hollow tree.

As the rest of the ducks prepare to fly south for the winter, Elmer secretly watches in sadness. As the ducks take off, gunshots from hunters can be heard, and Elmer's father is shot and falls to the ground. Elmer rescues his unconscious father by carrying him back to his new home and nursing him back to health throughout the cold winter. Up until this point in the story, the reader is moved to feel sympathy for Elmer. At this point, Elmer shows his strength in a couple different ways—by carrying his father on his back, back to his home, and by persevering and being the first duck in his flock to make a home and survive a winter in the forest. It is at this turning point in which the people in Elmer's life change, and in which Elmer continues to own his sissy identity in a self-affirming manner.

During the winter stay at Elmer's new home, Elmer's father realizes how wonderful his son is:

“Oh Son, what have I done to you?” “Don't worry, Papa,” Elmer chided. “We're gonna have fun!” And he was right. All winter long they played games and told jokes and made things and laughed and talked and got to know each other.

From the illustrations in the book, it is clear that Elmer and his father are enjoying their time together. Instead of partaking in forced activities, Elmer shows his father the talents and interests he had that his father was blind to at the beginning of the story: painting, cooking, playing games, keeping a cozy home, etc.

When spring came and the ducks came back for the warm weather, Drake Duck, the duck who bullied Elmer, asked the flock to have a moment of silence for the ducks who had died and got shot by the hunters, as they had no idea that Elmer's dad was

rescued by Elmer. In fact, they all had no idea where Elmer was at that point. At that moment, Elmer's mom called out:

"And Elmer, don't forget, we lost my Elmer, too." Drake responded, "Now who could forget Elmer? That little sissy!? The other ducks joined in the laughter until a voice boomed forth, "If Elmer is a sissy, then I wish I were a sissy too!" The voice was that of Papa duck. Once all of the ducks realized that Elmer had saved Papa, they all cheered for his bravery and loyalty and ingenuity.

In the final pages of the story, Elmer takes control of the situation and owns and reclaims his sissy identity in a self-affirming manner:

Elmer took a deep breath and then spoke his mind. "I want to make one thing perfectly clear: I am the same duck I have always been. I have not changed. I am a BIG SISSY and PROUD of it!" Drake took a step forward. "*You* haven't changed, but maybe *I* have."

This is an important point in the story because it demonstrates how the flock's normative understanding of male gender expression had been disrupted. Here, Drake breaks his binary understanding of what it means to be a boy/girl and admits that his thinking about the subject has changed. This is representative of a poststructural ideology of gender expression, as Drake now has a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a boy, and fits the non-normative gender expression of "sissy" as an acceptable way to be a boy. At the same time, this proclamation by Elmer demonstrates an essentialist identity, as it implies that Elmer considers that he has always been a sissy and that he has not changed at all.

Overall, the book is characteristically queer as it disrupts the norms of what it means to be a boy within the world of the story, and Elmer's claiming of a sissy identity disrupts and nuances the notion of gender within the world of the story. Elmer did find an ally in his mother, who attempts to help Elmer feel pride in who he is and hence, the subcategory QA emerges. Elmer's very presence disrupts the gender normativity of his flock, and though he experiences mistreatment because of this, he not only remains unapologetic to his true sissy identity, but also stands up for himself in spite of his mistreatment. In thinking about Stafford's (2009) analytic question: "Is homo[- and/or trans-] phobia dealt with in a way that shows homo[-and/or trans-] phobia as the problem to be challenged?" I realize I had to slightly adapt the question to, "Is non-normative gender expression dealt with in a way that shows mistreatment because of non-normative gender expression as the problem to be challenged? Put simply, though Elmer's gender expression is cast as problematic, he does not assimilate to appease those who are displeased. Rather, Elmer remains the same and others change how they think about what it means to be a boy duck. The last page of the story shows an illustration of Elmer cheering, holding a pompom and megaphone and reads,

Over the years Elmer learned that he was not so very different after all. Out in the world he met lots of other ducks just like himself. No, Elmer was not so different, but he always remained *special*.

As I read this page, I questioned who the intended audience is of this book. There are aspects of the text that seem to attempt to teach a lesson to the reader—that bullying and treating someone unfairly because of their gender expression is wrong. There are also aspects of the story—particularly the last page, that send the possible message to readers

with non-normative gender expression that if they are experiencing similar things as Elmer does, they should remain strong, and that things will get better once they get “out in the world.” This last page may reveal a developmental understanding of gender expression as it implies that there are people just like Elmer, somewhere in the world, waiting to be found. I found this ideology to be in conflict with another that emerged: “‘I want to make one thing perfectly clear: I am the same duck I have always been. I have not changed. I am a BIG SISSY and PROUD of it!’ Drake took a step forward. ‘*You* haven’t changed, but maybe *I* have.’” This excerpt seems to represent a poststructuralist ideology, as it highlights the fluidity in understanding gender. Another critique of the book is that it can send the message that the only way an individual who exhibits a non-normative gender expression may be accepted by their community is if they act in some kind of extraordinary manner. In this book, Elmer seemed to have been accepted by his flock only because he had done things that no other duck in his flock has done before—survive a winter in the forest, make a beautiful home in a tree, rescue his father, etc. However, what if Elmer had not done these things? Would the others accept Elmer if he was just an ordinary duck? This sends the message that if one has a non-normative gender expression, they must compensate for this by acting in an extraordinary way. Overall though, the book balances a sense of agency and pride in Elmer and encourages the reader to act in similar ways. The idea that things got better once Elmer left home is prominent in the book, which can send mixed messages to young readers.

10,000 Dresses

In this story, clothing choice plays an important role in the main character’s gender expression. I chose it because I have observed the children in the group talking

about their likes and dislikes in clothes, and I thought the topic was accessible topic in which they could easily relate. In the story, the main character, Bailey, is assigned a male gender when they⁵ were born, but feels and self-identifies as a girl. The cover of the story shows an illustration of a child whose gender is ambiguous, standing and wearing a dress. The storyline tells of Bailey's desire to wear dresses and at the same time, shows the disapproval of this desire from Bailey's mother, father, and brother. Throughout the story, Bailey struggles with this mistreatment from her family, but finds an ally at the end. Her neighbor, Laurel, affirms Bailey's identity and seems to create a safe place for Bailey to actualize who she wants to be/feels she is. The book is categorized as *queer* as it disrupts gender norms in the story. It is sub-categorized as SGE because Bailey's non-normative gender expression is the focus of the story, and QA because Laurel, Bailey's older neighbor, is an ally to Bailey as she struggles with her gender expression.

The first ideology surrounding gender/sexual identity that is apparent in this story is a poststructural one. Throughout the story, Bailey self-identifies as a girl and the omniscient narrator uses the pronoun "her" to refer to Bailey. However, when Bailey's mother, father and, brother address her, they all refer to Bailey as a boy. In the beginning of the story, Bailey has a dream about all of the beautiful dresses she could wear—"10,000 dresses in all, and each one different! ... With all her heart, Bailey loved the dress made of crystals that flashed rainbows in the sun." Upon waking from the dream, Bailey goes downstairs to talk with her mother:

"Mom, I dreamt about a dress," said Bailey. "Uh-huh," said her mother. "A dress made of crystals that flashed rainbows in the sun!" "Uh-huh." "And I was

⁵ I use the pronoun "they" both in a singular and plural form to refer to individuals whose gender identity is not singular, or that changes.

wondering if you would buy me a dress like that?” “Bailey, what are you talking about? You’re a boy. Boys don’t wear dresses!” “But... I don’t feel like a boy,” Bailey said. “Well, you are one, Bailey, and that’s that! Now go away...and don’t mention dresses again!” Bailey went to her room. Now she would never have a dress made of crystals that flashed rainbows in the sun.

In this segment, Bailey’s agency is stripped from her, as her mother decides/assumes Bailey’s gender for her. Even after Bailey expresses that she does not feel like a boy, Bailey’s mother squashes the idea. An essentialist understanding of gender identity is apparent in Bailey’s mother; she believes that Bailey is a boy, always was a boy, and always will be a boy. A poststructural ideology of gender identity emerges in Bailey however; she acknowledges that even though others think she is a boy, she does not feel like one, and wishes to be identified as “not a boy.”

During the next sequence of the story, Bailey has a very similar interaction with her dad, and she expresses her desire to wear dresses to him. The same ideologies surface in this interaction—Bailey expressing that she does not feel like a boy, and her father responding, “Well, you are one, Bailey, and that’s that! Now go away, and don’t mention dresses again!” Feeling dejected, Bailey’s dream of wearing a dress is diminished: “Bailey went to her room. Now she would never have a dress made of lilies and roses, with honeysuckle sleeves.” That night, Bailey had yet another dream about beautiful dresses.

She woke up and decided to tell her brother about her dream—which seems like yet another attempt in finding an ally to support her. After telling her brother, he responds, “‘You dream about DRESSES, Bailey? That’s gross. You’re a boy!’ ‘But...’

Bailey said. ‘But nothing. Get out of here, before I kick you!’” Once again, another family member rejects Bailey. It is of importance to note that before Bailey expresses her dream of dresses to each family member, they are each engaging in normative and stereotypical gendered behavior: mother is cutting coupons, father is cutting the grass outside, and her brother is playing soccer with some kids. Bailey’s presence and desire to wear dresses disrupts the gender normative behavior of each family member—an important characteristic of the *queer* category.

After the rejection by her brother, Bailey ran to a house at the end of the block and found an older girl sitting on her porch with a needle and thread. It turns out that the older girl, Laurel, was making dresses. Bailey asks to help and Laurel approves with delight. Bailey expresses the dreams about dresses she had as Laurel listens with an attentive and accepting ear:

Together the girls made two new dresses, which were covered with mirrors of all shapes and sizes... “You’re the coolest girl I’ve ever met, Bailey!” said Laurel.

“Hey, do you think you can dream up of any MORE dresses?” Bailey grinned. “I think I can dream up of 10,000!”

Laurel is the first person in the story to accept Bailey and acknowledge her the way she would like to be acknowledged: as a girl. This moment of the story characterizes a poststructural ideology of gender expression, as the shift from boy to girl is fluid, acknowledged, and accepted by both Bailey and Laurel.

I wondered about the intended audience as I read this book. It is clear that there is a major change in the emotional well-being of Bailey once she is acknowledged and affirmed as a girl by her neighbor, Laurel. One possible lesson to be learned from the

story is that one should not define others against their desires and wishes; rather, individuals should be asked how they wish to be identified, and this desire should be accommodated. Stafford's (2009) analytic question was useful here: "Is homo[- and/or trans-] phobia dealt with in a way that shows homo[-and/or trans-] phobia as the problem to be challenged?" Throughout the story, all of the characters, with the exception of Laurel, had an issue with Bailey's gender expression. However, the main focus of the story, was to demonstrate how Bailey persevered and eventually was able to embrace her gender expression as she wished. Though the ending is a happy one—Bailey now has an ally, Laurel, who encourages and affirms Bailey. At the end of the story, I was left wondering if Bailey's family was going to change at all, or if when Bailey returns home, she will experience the similar kinds of rejection and mistreatment she had experienced earlier in the story. It made me wonder what message this sends to a child who may identify with Bailey. What is a child to do if he/she is in a similar situation *i.e.*, is rejected by their family because of their gender expression? Though an ally is an important and urgent element in Bailey's life, the fact is that she has to return home to a possibly unsupportive environment. This unfortunately, is a sad reality.

Jacob's New Dress

This book's main character is Jacob, who is presumably in kindergarten. Though the characters in this book are a bit younger than the kids in this study, I chose it because the story events and the setting—a classroom—are relatable to the children in the study, and I found the content worthy of discussion and debate amongst the children. The story starts off with Jacob in the dress-up corner of his classroom. He usually wears dresses during make believe time, and some students express a problem with this. Throughout

the story, Jacob is adamant about his desire to wear dresses and asks his mother to help him make a real dress to wear at school. Jacob's parents, though reluctant at first, accept Jacob's wishes and accommodate his desire to wear dresses. Throughout the story, Jacob struggles with asserting his self-pride in being a boy who wears dresses. This book is categorized as *queer* as it challenges the gender norms within the world of the story. It is sub-categorized as SGE, as Jacob grapples with his gender expression throughout the story. It is also sub-categorized as QA because both of Jacob's parents, his teacher, and his classmate, Emily, all support Jacob's decision to wear dresses. Overall, Jacob asserts his agency as he embraces his choice in clothing—one that challenges the norms of boyhood in the story.

In the beginning of the story, the children are in the make-believe corner deciding what to wear: "Christopher frowned. 'Jacob, why do you always wear the girls' clothes? Put on knight armor. That's what the boys wear!' 'Christopher, stop telling us what to do!' said Emily." This opening page shows an essentialist ideology emerge from Christopher, as he explains that boys are supposed to wear specific clothing, like knight armor. Not only does Emily defend Jacob's choice at this point, but so does the teacher, Ms. Wilson, "'The dress-up corner is where we come to use our imaginations,' Ms. Wilson said. 'You can be a dinosaur, a princess, a farmer—anything!'" As I read this part of the story, I began to wonder if it was going to be acceptable for Jacob to wear a dress outside of the make-believe area of the classroom. As the story progresses, it is clear that Jacob does not just want to wear a dress and be "anything" only in the make-believe area, he wants to wear a dress everywhere.

When Jacob got home from school, he told his mom about the conflict he had with his classmate, Christopher: “‘Christopher says boys can’t wear dresses,’ said Jacob. ‘Can they?’ ‘Of course they can.’ Mom hugged Jacob. ‘Why don’t you get the dress you wore on Halloween and play with that.’” Here, Jacob’s mother supports Jacob’s desire to wear dresses, but his dress-wearing still only takes place in make-believe spaces: the classroom make-believe corner and Halloween. Jacob asserts that he no longer just wants to play and make-believe with the dress, “‘I want to wear my dress to school!’ Jacob’s mom frowned. ‘I don’t think so,’ she said. ‘That’s for dress-up at home. It would get dirty at school.’” Jacob continues to push, “‘Then can I get a regular dress? A dress I can wear at school?’ Mom was quiet. ‘Let me think about that,’ she said.” Jacob is persistent with his desire to wear a dress outside of make-believe settings. On his own, the next morning Jacob creates a “dress-thing” out of towels that he plans to wear to school. His parents made him put pants on underneath the “dress-thing” and he went off to school wearing it.

The decision to refer to Jacob’s new clothing choice as a “dress thing” as opposed to a full on “dress” is an interesting one. This can be interpreted as Jacob trying to compromise. He could sense that his parents were uneasy about his choice to wear a dress, so maybe they would feel better if he wore a “dress thing.” On the pages that follow, Jacob’s mother acts as an ally for her son and attempts to defend his choice in clothing.

When Jacob arrived at school, Jacob’s mom entered the classroom with him and spoke with Christopher, “‘Good morning, Christopher,’ said Jacob’s mom. ‘Jacob’s wearing something new he invented. Isn’t it nice?’ Christopher didn’t answer. ‘I want a

dress like that!’ cried Emily. In this segment, both Jacob’s mother and Emily are allies to Jacob and defend his desire for wearing dresses. A poststructural ideology emerges at this point in the story, as the identity of boy is expanded and more fluid than the ways in which Christopher conceptualizes what it means to be a boy; in fact, Christopher’s conceptualization of gender expression is an essentialist one—he believes boys do not do certain things, like wear dresses. Even though Jacob had support from his parents, teacher, and Emily, Jacob was bullied by Christopher and other students at recess because of his non-normative gender expression: “Christopher sneaked up, yanked off Jacob’s towel, and ran away whooping. ‘Christopher is *mean*,’ hissed Emily.”

When Jacob got home, he told his mom what had happened and again, pushed his desire to wear dresses. Moving from the make-believe corner and Halloween, to making and wearing a “dress-thing,” Jacob’s desire to wear an actual, real dress becomes more apparent to his mother:

“Mom?” whispered Jacob. “Can you help me make a real dress?” Mom didn’t answer. The longer she didn’t answer, the less Jacob could breathe. “Let’s get the sewing machine,” she said finally. Jacob felt the air refill his body. He grinned.

Mom smiled back. “There are all sorts of ways to be a boy,” she said. “Right?” This excerpt not only showcases the support and acceptance Jacob’s mother exhibits toward him, but it also shows the emergence of a poststructural ideology of gender expression. Jacob’s mother affirms to him that, “There are all sorts of ways to be a boy,” and expands the normative understanding of what it means to be a boy within the world of the story. On the next page, Jacob’s dad reaffirms Jacob’s choice to make and wear a new dress: “‘I can see you worked hard on that dress,’ said Dad. ‘Are you sure you want

to wear it to school?’ Jacob nodded. Dad nodded back and smiled. ‘Well, it’s not what I would wear, but you look great.’ Though Jacob’s father expresses that he would not choose to wear a dress to school, he supports his son’s decision and also expands the notion of what it means to be a boy.

At school the next day, Jacob arrived to school in his new dress and played with his friend Emily. During circle time, Jacob expressed how he and his mom made the new dress, and the teacher asked what the experience of making a dress was like. Then another conflict with Christopher emerges,

“Why does Jacob wear dresses?” interrupted Christopher. Ms. Wilson paused. “I think Jacob wears what he’s comfortable in. Just like you do...” Christopher shook his head. “I asked my dad, and he says boys don’t wear dresses.” Jacob rubbed the hem of his dress, looking at the little stitches he’d sewn himself. He could hear Ms. Wilson and the other kids talking, but their words sounded far away.

Even with the support of Jacob’s teacher and his friend Emily, it is apparent that the disapproval and rejection of Christopher takes a toll on Jacob. On the next page, Christopher suggested to a group of kids that they play tag—boys versus girls—and yelled, “Jacob, you’re on the *girls*’ team!” Though the kids laughed at Jacob:

Jacob felt his dress surrounding him. Like armor. Soft, cottony, *magic* armor.

“Christopher, I made this dress, I’m proud of it, and I’m going to wear it!” ...

Jacob sprinted across the playground, his dress spreading out like wings.

This last moment in the story demonstrates that although Jacob experienced a lack of confidence at many points in the story, this is the first time he asserted himself without the lead of an ally.

Stafford's (2009) analytic question, "Is homo[- and/or trans-] phobia dealt with in a way that shows homo[-and/or trans-] phobia as the problem to be challenged?" is useful here. Christopher—the student who bullied Jacob—was the only character who had a consistent problem with Jacob's non-normative gender expression. Jacob's parents showed initial discomfort with Jacob's desire to wear a dress, but eventually evolved their notion of what it means to be a boy and fully supported their son's decision. Christopher's disapproval of Jacob's gender expression was indeed cast as a problem and in fact, Jacob's teacher, parents, and Emily, all addressed Christopher's mistreatment of Jacob.

The evolution of this book was interesting. At first, Jacob's desire to wear a dress was acceptable, but only within the confines of make-believe spaces—the dress-up corner of the classroom and during Halloween. Jacob's desire to wear a dress in real, non-make-believe contexts really challenged the adults in the story. It is common for most adults to accommodate the desires of children to express themselves in creative ways within "make-believe" spaces, but when children, like Jacob, express the desire to express non-normative outside of these contexts, this forces the adults to think about how they can support (or not support) these desires. This story addresses this tension very well and highlights the ways in which adults can act as allies in such situations.

CONCLUSION

Each of these five books addresses LGBTQ-identity, stereotypes associated with gender, and non-normative gender expression in unique and interesting ways. Due to the dearth of children's books that address issues related to non-normative gender and/or LGBTQ-identity, there can be a tendency for parents and educators to possibly choose these books at first glance because of the simple fact that these topics are addressed within the books, without critically analyzing the ways in which issues/power related to gender and/or sexual identity surface within these books. This kind of literary analysis can be helpful in understanding the ways in which heteronormativity may be reified and/or challenged, the ways in which homo-/trans-phobia is cast, and the ways in which certain hierarchies related to gender and race may be reinforced in order to normalize homosexuality in such themed books.

One of the main tensions within the *No Outsiders* team's work is the idea that queer theory questions if an anti-homophobic (or what I call strategic essentialist) approach troubles heteronormativity, since it can privilege some sexualities over others (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009b). The tension between a strategic essentialist and queer approach to their work remains unresolved. I am interested to see the kind of discourse that is produced from books categorized in these two broader categories, as well as from books with varying ideologies surrounding gender/sexual identity. In the section that follows, I offer an analysis of the literature discussions that ensued during the read aloud of each of the children's books described above. I use this literary analysis as a backdrop as I explore the ways in which the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1999)—the invisible rules that rely on and reify dichotomous understandings of male/female, masculine/feminine,

men/women—are reified, challenged, and disrupted by the children through their talk. Specifically, I analyze the possibilities of gender-/hetero-normativity disruption that children’s books categorized as both *strategic essentialist* and *queer* created. I question whether the mere presence in books of LGBTQ-identified and/or characters with non-normative gender expressions can do much to challenge gender- and/or hetero-normativity and am also interested in examining the discourses that are produced through the discussion of such children’s books.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE DISCUSSIONS

Introduction: Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I analyze the talk that occurred during the literature discussions of the five books analyzed in the previous chapter, as I answer my second research question:

2) What discourse is produced during literature discussions of children's books that contain themes related to non-normative gender and/or non-heterosexual identity?

2a) Based on the characterizations of children's books that emerged from question #1, what are the beneficial/problematic aspects in using books characterized in each way?

To begin to answer these questions, I analyzed the ways in which the heterosexual matrix (1999) was challenged, disrupted, or reified through the children's talk. I turn to Foucault's notion of discourse (1977)—the grids of specification that unconsciously impact our words, actions, thoughts, and being—as I began to locate the power that was embedded within the discourse of the literature discussions. In what follows, I give an overview of the categories used to code the discourse produced in the literature discussions of the five books with themes of non-normative gender expression and/or non-heterosexuality. I then give examples of each type of discourse from the literature discussions, and finally end with a thorough critical discourse analysis of each of the five literature discussions.

Discourse Categories

The two main categories of the discourse of the literature discussions that emerged are *rejections* and *disruptions*. *Rejections* are moments in which gender-/hetero-normativity prevailed and any expressions or identities that fall outside of these normative understandings of gender/sexuality were explicitly rejected. *Disruptions* are moments in the discussions in which discourses of gender- and/or hetero-normativity are challenged, disrupted, or interrogated. As I sorted through the data and reflected on the discourse that was produced in each literature discussion, I realized the need to create several sub-categories within the larger category of *disruptions*.

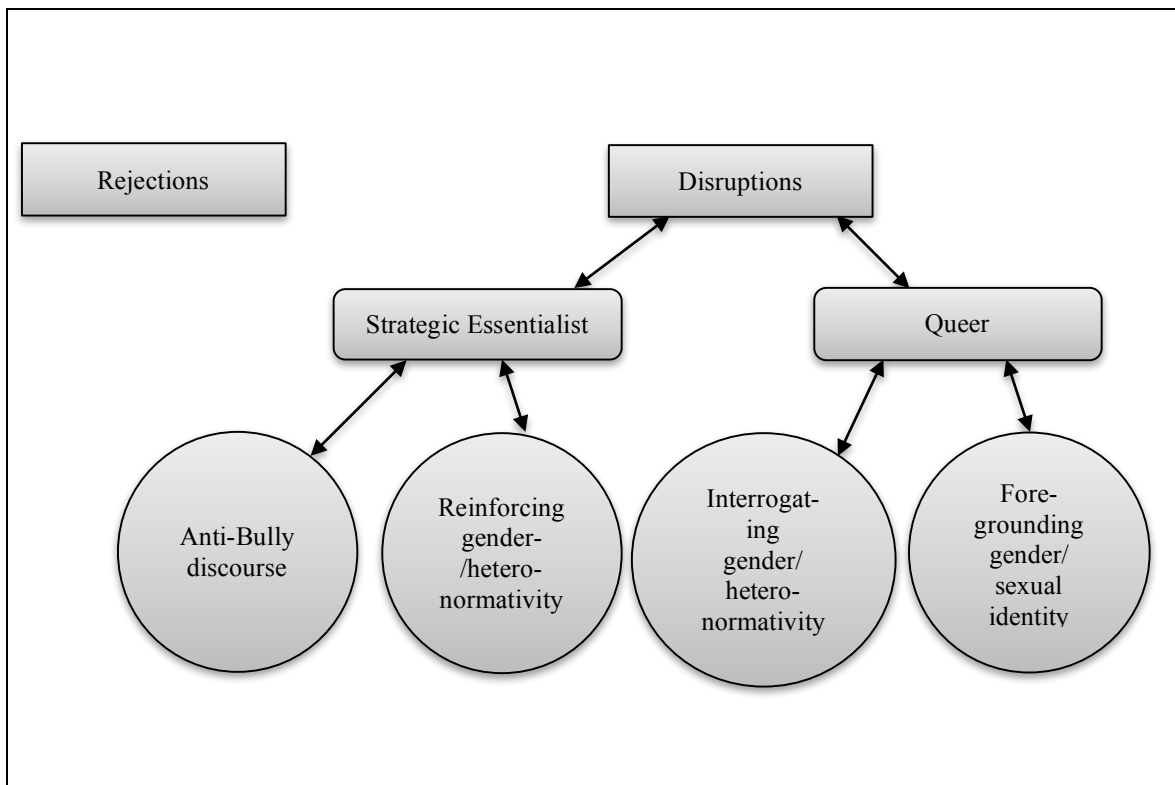
Within the *disruptions* category, I use two subcategories: *strategic essentialist* and *queer*. Discourse that falls inside the *strategic essentialist* subcategory may combat or challenge unfair treatment as it relates to gender and/or sexual identity, but may do so without calling attention to the underlying gender-/hetero-normative discourses that ground the particular mistreatment, and in fact, may inadvertently reinforce gender-/hetero-normativity—leaving such norms unchecked. Disruptions of this nature can be further subcategorized as *anti-bully discourse*. Additionally, some attempts at disrupting heteronormativity that are aligned with the broader category of *strategic essentialist* may attempt to combat mistreatment based on gender and/or sexual identity, but may also intentionally or unintentionally reinforce gender-/hetero-normativity at the same time. Disruptions of this nature can be further categorized as *reinforcement of gender-/hetero-normativity*.

Discourse that falls under the *queer* subcategory can be explained as discourse that explicitly interrogates gender-/hetero-normativity or that disrupts the normative understandings of gender/sexuality of the group of students. Such discourse may be further categorized as *interrogation of gender-/hetero-normativity* if it explicitly interrogates the norms that maintain the heterosexual matrix. Also falling under the *queer* category is discourse that incorporates discussions amongst the students that demonstrate the grappling of issues related to non-normative gender and/or sexual identity. This discourse falls under the *queer* category because it highlights the ways in which the acknowledgement of sexuality in people's everyday lives (Martino, 2009), as well as non-normative gender expressions, may act as a queering discourse due to the very fact that these issues are brought to the forefront in discussion. Because discussions surrounding issues related to non-normative gender and/or sexual identity, particularly amongst young children, are commonly considered taboo, such discussions can act in a queering manner—disrupting the normative regulations of what is/should and what is not/should not be not talked about with and amongst children. I refer to such discourse as *foregrounded in gender/sexual identity*. There are many moments in which discourse within the *rejections* and *foregrounded in gender/sexual identity* subcategories seem to overlap. That is, it could be argued that some discourse coded as *rejections* may act as a queering discourse by the very act of discussing these issues. However, the defining difference between the two is that discourse that falls under *foregrounded in gender/sexual identity* is representative of discourse that discusses issues related to non-normative gender/sexual identity without explicitly rejecting it; whereas a *rejection*

explicitly rejects any form or expression of non-normative expression of gender and/or sexuality.

Any part of the discourse that explicitly rejects gender expressions and or/sexual identities that fall outside of the hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity that regulates the heterosexual matrix are coded as *rejections*. Though some of the discourse coded as *rejections* may overlap with the *foregrounded in gender/sexual identity* category, these are moments in which explicit rejection of non-normative gender and sexual identity is expressed. Refer to Figure 2 for a flow chart representing the coding of the discourse.

Figure 2: Discourse Categories



After the data was coded using these five sub-categories: *rejections*, *anti-bully discourse*, *reinforcing gender-/hetero-normativity*, *interrogation of gender-/hetero-normativity*, and *foregrounded in gender/sexual identity*. Table 4 below records the number of participant responses that are characteristic of each sub-category. In the section that follows, I give examples from the literature discussions of each of the five characterizations of discourse, then follow that with an overview of the discourse that was produced in the literature discussions of each book we read in the study containing themes of non-normative gender and/or sexual identity and expression.

Table 4. Occurrences of Specific Discourse

	REJECTIONS	DISRUPTIONS			
		Strategic Essentialist		Queer	
Focal Text		Anti-bully discourse	Reinforcing gender-/hetero-normativity	Interrogating gender-/hetero-normativity	Foregrounding gender/sexual identity
<i>King and King</i>	19	3	2	4	12
<i>Elena’s Serenade</i>	6	5	1	8	1
<i>The Sissy Duckling</i>	3	11	3	7	4
<i>10,000 Dresses</i>	6	7	2	5	23
<i>Jacob’s New Dress</i>	9	9	2	9	7
Total	43	35	10	33	47
	<i>Rejections: 43</i>	<i>Strategic Essentialist Total: 45</i>		<i>Queer Total: 80</i>	
	<u><i>Rejections Total: 43</i></u>	<u><i>Disruptions Total: 125</i></u>			

Rejections

Rejections are reflective of discourse that rejects non-normative gender expression and/or non-heterosexuality. It is interesting to note that discourse representative of *rejections* outnumbered *disruptions* in the discussion of only one of the books—*King and King*. In this excerpt, from the discussion of *King and King*, the children tried to make sense of the marriage of two princes and also expressed their opinion.

Hartman: “The two princes are now called king and king. The queen finally has some time to herself and everyone lives happily ever after.”

Myra: Really? Oh no. <several students talking and yelling over each other>

Hartman: Okay, remember we want everyone to be heard, so raise your hand. Don’t yell.

Javon: That’s it? This book is short. Aliya: I don’t like this book. Hartman: I get the feeling some people had some problems. If you do, tell why. And try to think about the other books we read too and how people were treated, and all the things we talked about when reading books.

Myra: This book was not even treated unfairly! I don’t like those boys marrying.

Myra expresses her explicit dislike of the idea of the two male characters getting married and in turn, reinforces heteronormativity by shutting down any other option.

In this excerpt of the discussion of the book *Jacob’s New Dress*, Tariq’s comment is characteristic of a *rejection*. At this point in the story, Jacob, the main character has made the decision to wear a dress to school. I asked the children to think about what that experience might be like:

Hartman: What if this happened in real life and you saw a boy student who came to school in a dress? I want you to think about it.

Myra: I can’t imagine that happening.

Tariq: I would get a yardstick and whack his head off.

Students: <Laughing>

It is clear that at this point, Tariq rejects the non-normative gender expression (a boy choosing to wear a dress) by the main character, Jacob—even suggesting that Jacob be physically harmed because of his gender expression.

Though *rejections* may operate in slightly varying ways, the common thread that ties these *rejections* together, is that the norms of heterosexuality and gender that uphold the heterosexual matrix prevail—and identities and expressions that fall outside of these norms are considered wrong, unacceptable, and at times, even worthy of physical harm.

Anti-Bully Discourse

Discourse coded as *anti-bully* can be characterized as talk that proclaims that it is wrong for a character/person to be treated unfairly because of their gender expression and/or sexual identity. However, these proclamations stop short of advocating for more fluidity in understanding gender/sexual identity or of an interrogation of the usual underlying causes of gender- and/or sexual identity-based bullying—heteronormativity. In the following excerpt from the discussion of *The Sissy Duckling*, Myra's responses embody the characteristics of the *anti-bullying discourse* category:

Hartman: Right. What about being a sissy? What do you think about sissies? And that word sissy? I mean...that word is in the title so it's kind of important in the story.

Donald: Well, that word's mean cuz they made fun of him. It was bullying that they did.

Myra: Ya, that is rude!

Hartman: Right, right. But, remember at the end and Elmer said, "I am a big sissy and proud of it!"? Remember? Did he think that word was mean then?

Javon: No! He thought that word was cool... like, he like... He was proud and happy.

Sara: Yes. He liked doing... wearing the girl things. Like hearts and things like that.

Hartman: Ah. Okay. So that word can be used in different ways, hmmm. That's kind of interesting. What about being a sissy? Elmer calls himself a sissy. Is it okay to be a sissy?

Sara: Yes, yes. I think he liked it. He can be like that. Boys can like hearts and things.

Donald: (Yelling) Well that's weird. That's just weird!

Myra: Well, it's not nice to make fun of sissies.

Hartman: Well, what about being a sissy? We know it's not nice to make fun of sissies. What about being a sissy? What do you think about a boy being a sissy?

Myra: No no! That's kinda funny I think. I don't like it.

Sara: I think it's okay. Ya. I think Elmer was nice.

Myra explains that it is rude to call Elmer, the main character, a sissy, and that it is not nice to make fun of sissies, but in her comment that follows, she explains that she thinks it's funny for a boy to be a sissy and that she does not like it. Though Myra expresses displeasure with the mistreatment of Elmer, she does not like that he is a sissy. So, Myra does not think it is okay to bully others, but does not address the underlying cause of the bullying. Myra expresses that name-calling and bullying is wrong, but at the same time, that it is also wrong for a boy to be a sissy.

Reinforcing Gender-/Hetero-Normativity

As I analyzed the data, I noticed that there were several instances in which children thought that the characters who had originally expressed their gender in non-normative ways should change and that their gender expression should reinforce the norms that regulate the heterosexual matrix (hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity). In other words, they policed gender expression in a manner that reinforced heteronormativity. One example of this is during the discussion of *The Sissy Duckling*. When I asked students to predict what would happen at the end of the story, once the members of Elmer's flock realize he survived the winter in the forest and that he saved his father, this is what transpired:

Hartman: “Elmer took a deep breath and spoke to the ducks.” What do you think he’s going to say?

Myra: I have no idea.

Sara: That he’s a sissy?

Myra: I think he’s gonna say that... “Last time you guys all thought that I was a sissy, but now I’m not.” I dunno.

Hartman: This is what he said: “I want to make one think perfectly clear...”

Tariq: <interrupting> Oh I know! He wants a celebration?

Hartman: maybe... “I am the same duck I have always been. I have not changed. I am a big sissy and I’m proud of it.”

<gasps from students>

Donald: Oh dang!

During the winter when Elmer nursed his father back to health in his house, and after Elmer’s father apologized to Elmer for mistreating him because of his gender expression, it became evident that Elmer’s “sissy” qualities were appreciated by his father, and that it was Elmer’s father, not Elmer, who had changed. Even after the students acknowledged and discussed this, Myra’s comment implies that Elmer should still conform to traditional gender norms and hence reinforces gender-/hetero-normativity.

Another example that is characteristic of *reinforcing gender-/hetero-normativity* is during the discussion of *Elena’s Serenade*. I asked the children if they thought it was a good idea for Elena, the main character to disguise herself, so that she could pass as a boy and therefore, learn to be a glassblower. At the beginning of the story, when Elena first proposed the idea, most of the children thought her choice to disguise herself as a boy was a bad one. But, at the end, after the children realized that the only way Elena was going to learn to be a glassblower was if she did indeed disguise herself as a boy, their opinions changed:

Hartman: Ah, ok. But remember at the beginning of the story, you thought it was a bad idea? Everyone except Sara. Why do you think it’s a good idea now?

Myra: Nope, it’s a good idea. A little bad of a idea too. She’s a girl so she shouldn’t wear that clothes like a boy. But she couldn’t do it. Be a glass blower. Like what she wants to do if she didn’t dress like a boy.

Myra acknowledges that Elena had no other choice but to dress as a boy so she could learn to be a glassblower, but at the same time she expresses disapproval with Elena's choice to "wear clothes like a boy."

Interrogating Gender-/Hetero-Normativity

There are moments in the discussions in which students actively sought to interrogate gender-/hetero-normativity. In these instances, participants broadened their understanding of gender/sexual identity and made an effort to expand the boundaries of what it means to be a boy or girl. During the final part of the literature discussion of *Jacob's New Dress*, the students discuss what lesson a reader may take away from reading the story:

Hartman: Now, what lesson can we learn from this story do you think?

Myra: Oh, I don't know.

Javon: Thinking, thinking.

Sara: Don't tell someone how they have to be. You're not the boss of them.

Hartman: Any other lesson or something you learned or thought about in this story?

Sara: There are more than one ways to be a girl or a boy?

Hartman: Ya. I think that's a good lesson. Ya, there's lots of ways to be a boy or a girl.

Javon: There's a million thousand, million thousand ways.

It is clear that both Sara and Javon have a broad understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl, which in turn, disrupts the discourse of heteronormativity. During another similar excerpt from the discussion of *10,000 Dresses*, the students discuss the possible lesson that can be learned from reading the story. They grapple to understand the way in which Bailey, the main character, identifies:

Hartman: Okay, well the parents told Bailey that she is a boy, but she didn't feel like a boy. So how did Bailey overcome this problem? What happened?

Remember, Bailey went to her parents, then her brother...

Sara: That girl, Laurel, helped her make a dress. And it makes her feel good.
Hartman: Why do you think that made Bailey feel good?
Aliya: Cuz he liked dresses.
Sara: Ya, and she wants to be a she so Laurel helped her be a she too.
Donald: What?! Well...
Tariq: But Bailey is a boy.
Sara: But Bailey said she felt like a girl though. So, maybe Bailey is really a girl.
Hartman: Hmmm. Yes, I can see that. Well, what about a lesson? Do you think anyone learned a lesson in this story? Or can anyone reading this story learn a lesson maybe? Did you learn anything from reading this?
Myra: Nope. I didn't.
Tariq: No, nobody really learned a lesson.
Hartman: You think so? Okay, anyone think something else? And think about the lessons, or morals, we learned from reading other stories.
Myra: Oh. Maybe?
Donald: Bailey did?
Hartman: Ok. What lesson did Bailey learn?
Sara: Uhm, I think that, that dresses aren't only made for girls.
Hartman: So, dresses are made for anybody? Ah, ok. What do you all think?
Donald: Disagree. Well, maybe if Bailey said she was a girl, so dresses are for girls. So, it's ok.

In this excerpt, it is evident that Sara advocates for the self-identification of Bailey, while the others insist that others can and should make that choice for Bailey. Sara explains that a lesson from the story is that dresses can be for anybody, which demonstrates a departure from gender-/hetero-normativity. Also, Donald's response seems to unintentionally reinforce gender normativity. Though he seemingly accepts the fact that Bailey does not "feel like a boy," he polices Bailey's gender expression and justifies her desire to wear dresses "if Bailey said she was a girl."

Another instance of the interrogation of heteronormativity, in terms of sexual identity, took place during the discussion of *King and King*:

Hartman: Well, let's read... "The wedding was very special. The queen even shed a tear or two." So, you're right, they did get married.
Tariq: <screaming> AH!
Myra: Ya, but it shows two boys...
Donald: There is a husband marrying a husband?
Teacher: Yes, look. That's what we just read.

Sara: AH! Oh no!

Tariq: Is it allowed to marry a man? Like a man to marry a man?

Myra: That is illegal!

Hartman: You can do that in our state. It is not illegal.

Javon: Ya, because my friend's mom. My friend's mom, like married another woman.

Myra: Uhm, when you marry another man, does it mean that... you are allowed to marry another man, or another woman? Can you marry another man or another woman in our city?

Hartman: Yes, you can.

Aliya: Some men marry cuz my mom just drives downtown sometimes, and because she sees men kissing other men. And that she said... that is disgusting.

<multiple laughs>

Javon: That's actually gay. That's actually called being gay.

<laughing and screaming from students>

In this excerpt, the concept of gay marriage is brought up in discussion because Javon makes it a tangible reality and explains that he knows two women who are married to one another. Javon provides another example from his life in which two women he knows got married, and he names that identity for the rest of the children, "That's actually called being gay," which disrupts heteronormativity.

Foregrounding Gender/Sexual Identity

Discourse that is characteristic of this category are moments in which non-normative gender and non-heterosexual identity and expression is discussed and grappled with. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, the very act of discussing these usually hidden and taboo topics related to non-normative gender and non-heterosexual identity with young children may act as a kind of queer discourse because the very act of discussing these topics challenges the norms of what should and should not be discussed in the classroom. This category is the most prevalent in the data, and it represents moments in which children grapple with, come to consensus/dissensus, and attempt to make sense of non-normative gender and sexual expression and identity. These moments

in the discourse are different than *rejections* in that they create openings for non-normative gender and sexual expression and identity. One example of this is from the discussion of *King and King*:

Javon: So like...what's happening is that they are at the bride place. And then he's sayin' (pointing to what looks like a priest or minister) "Do you take him as your wife? And do you take him as your husband?" And then they say, "Yes," and then I think they gonna kiss.

Students: EWWWWW!

Hartman: Well, let's read... "The wedding was very special. The queen even shed a tear or two." So, you're right, they did get married.

Tariq: AHHHHH!

Myra: Ya, but it shows two boys...

Donald: There is a husband marrying a husband?

Teacher: Yes, look. That's what we just read.

From this excerpt, it is clear that the children boisterously try to make sense of the marriage of the two princes. Javon's background knowledge assists the students in coming to understand what is happening in the story. This is also the first time in which an explicit non-heterosexual identity/theme is brought into the read aloud discussion of the group. The insertion of this topic seems to create a lively interaction between the students as they make sense of the story.

Another example of discourse that is *foregrounded in gender/sexual identity* is from the discussion of *10,000 Dresses*. The children express confusion in the fact that Bailey, the main character, referred to herself as a girl, but that everyone else referred to her as a boy:

Hartman: "'But I don't feel like a boy,' she said. 'Well, you are one, and that's that. Now go away and don't mention dresses again.' Bailey went to her room. Now she would never have a dress made of lilies and roses and honeysuckle sleeves." So what's going on here? Bailey is still shifting because she uses "she" and other people use "he."

Donald: This is just confusing.

Aliya: I think that she is actually a girl. But her parents don't like dresses, so they are saying that she is a boy.

Hartman: Ok. Interesting.

Javon: Well I think she thinks she's a girl though. But not other people. Like her dad thinks she's a boy.

Hartman: Ah. Ok. Ya, it seems like Bailey feels like she's a girl. Let's keep on reading.

In this excerpt, the children are given the opportunity to make sense of the dilemma in which Bailey is confronted. The children's understanding of Bailey's gender identity/expression shifts as they talk with one another, and as the story unfolds. Again, this excerpt can be understood as a queering discourse, as the children are grappling with topics that are usually silenced.

The examples of each subcategory foreground a deeper, more thorough critical discourse analysis of each of the five literature discussions. In the section that follows, I offer an analysis of the discourse that was produced during the discussions of each book—first beginning with the books categorized as *strategic essentialist*, then continuing with the books characterized as *queer*.

ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE DISCUSSIONS

King and King

Throughout the discussion of *King and King*, the children's perceptions of homosexuality seemed to have evolved and at times, appeared to be contradictory. Before reading the story, I asked the students (as I always do) to examine the cover and to think about the title. When asked what they thought the story was going to be about, only one student offered a response: "I think it is about two different kings." None of the other students expressed disagreement with this prediction.

The beginning of the story starts off with a seemingly usual story line in children's books. The problem in the story is immediately stated—that the queen wants to retire from ruling her kingdom and wants her reluctant-to-marry son to take over. At this point in the story, I asked the students how they would describe the queen. Three students responded, and their respective responses were, “Mean!” “Rude,” “I would say old.” For the most part, the students recognized that the queen was placing unfair demands on her son, and the children did not like that. This issue was also brought up at the end of the book discussion.

As the story progressed, and several princesses came to visit the prince, it was apparent that he was not interested in any of them. I asked the students to make a prediction of what will happen next. Responses differed slightly. Most of the responses harkened heteronormativity:

Javon: I think he's gonna like the girl in the next page.

Aliya: Eventually he's gonna get married to one of those princesses.

Sara: I predict that the next princess that comes is gonna be his bride.

Tariq: He will marry nobody cuz none of those princesses look pretty.

Tariq's response differed from the rest, and he presents an alternative possibility to marriage. At the same time that Tariq suggests the option of no marriage, his reasoning relies on the lack of pretty princesses—not necessarily that not marrying, in and of itself, could be a viable option for the king. None of the students' predictions was accurate, and as the last princess arrived, something peculiar happens in the story.

As I read the next page of the story, which shows the final princess being presented to the prince, there was one significant difference—her brother, Prince Lee, accompanies the princess. All of the princesses before arrived alone. I read the words on

the page, “At last the prince felt a stir in his heart. It was love at first sight.” The illustration on this page shows the two princes staring at each other. I asked the students to examine the illustration carefully, and I paused. No student raised his/her hand nor made a comment, though one student let out a gasp. I then asked the students to make a prediction of what would happen next in the story. Their responses were: “I think he’s gonna marry her,” “He’s gonna fall in love with her,” “I think the brother won’t let him fall in love with her.” Again, the students’ predictions were inaccurate and none expressed that the two princes would marry.

I turned the page and read the words to the students: “What a wonderful prince! What a wonderful prince!” The illustration on this page shows the two princes staring at each other, this time, with hearts surrounding them. There is no mistaking that the two princes are falling love with each other. This is what transpired:

Tariq: Huh? What?!

Myra: Uh oh!

Hartman: What’s happening here?

Javon: Oh I know! The prince is falling in love with the other prince!

Hartman: What do you all think?

Myra: <while laughing> Oh, just look at them!

Donald: <pointing to the hearts in the illustration> Well ya, you can see right there.

Tariq: I know something...the prince is actually falling in love with that prince <starts to laugh, and the other children start laughing too>.

Hartman: It looks like it, right?

Aliya: Oh ya, see I can see some hearts going to him only.

This is the first time the issue of non-heterosexuality enters the classroom discussion. I ask the students to describe how the queen and princess look. The illustration shows flat expressions on both of their faces, and it is hard to distinguish what those two characters might be thinking or feeling; therefore, the students seem to project

their own feelings onto the feelings of those two characters. During this point in the discussion I remember feeling a bit uncomfortable. Since I identify as a gay man, I could not help but feel uneasy as I listened to the children's reactions of the romance between the two princes. With that aside, I decided to move on with the hopes of engaging the children in thinking more deeply about what was going on in the story.

Javon: Oh, I don't know. Maybe shocked?

Sara: I think she is laughing.

Hartman: Oh, is she laughing here? Ok, any other thoughts?

Donald: She's thinking!

Tariq: I think she's wondering!

Hartman: What do you think is gonna happen?

Donald: I'm gonna think that the other prince is jealous so he blocked her away.

Myra: I think that when he asked the princess, she will say yes.

Tariq: Oh I know... I think that the prince will marry the other prince! <children laugh>

Myra: <To Tariq's comment> That's just weird!

Aliya: I think the queen is going to be acting all crazy again.

Hartman: Why?

Myra: Because...she's gonna say, "You are not gonna marry a prince... YOU are a prince!"

In this excerpt, even though homosexuality has been presented as a possibility for the prince, some students still try to resist this possibility. Donald and Sara both still believe the prince will marry the princess, though it has been established that there is a love connection between the two princes, and the possibility that the prince will marry the princess appears to have been eliminated. As I turned to the next page, the illustration shows the wedding of the two princes. Before any words are read, Myra shouts out, "They're getting married! EWWWW!" while Tariq responds, "Yes! I got it right!"—his prediction was correct. The excerpt below shows how the students make sense of the gay wedding:

Hartman: Ok, so let's look at the illustration here. What's happening?

Sara: Those princes are getting married!

Javon: So like...what's happening is that they are at the bride place. And then he's sayin', <pointing to what looks like a priest or minister> "Do you take him as your wife? And do you take him as your husband?" And then they say, "Yes," and then I think they gonna kiss.

Students: EWWWWW!

Hartman: Well, let's read... "The wedding was very special. The queen even shed a tear or two." So, you're right, they did get married.

Tariq: AHHHHH!

Myra: Ya, but it shows two boys...

Donald: There is a husband marrying a husband?

Teacher: Yes, look. That's what we just read.

Sara: AH! Oh no!

Tariq: Is it allowed to marry a man? Like a man to marry a man?

Myra: That is illegal!

Hartman: You can do that in our state. It is not illegal.

Javon: Ya, because my friend's mom. My friend's mom, like married another woman.

Myra: Uhm, when you marry another man, does it mean that... you are allowed to marry another man, or another woman? Can you marry another man or another woman in our city?

Teacher: Yes, you can.

Aliya: Some men marry cuz my mom just drives downtown sometimes, and because she sees men kissing other men. And that she said... that is disgusting.
<multiple laughs>

Javon: That's actually gay. That's actually called being gay.

<laughing and screaming from students>

Hartman: Yes it is. Okay...okay. Do you want to read the rest of the story?

Students: <Talking over each other> Yes, yes!

Hartman: Okay, remember, let's be good listeners...Let's read the rest.

It is important to note that gay marriage was legal in our state at the time this conversation took place. Additionally, same-sex marriage became legal nation-wide two months after this discussion. The tenor of this part of the conversation was boisterous, and several of the students began screaming in disapproval. I remember feeling surprised that the students had such a strong reaction, and also feeling a little uncomfortable again. When Javon made his prediction that the princes would kiss, the students expressed disgust. This reminds me of the scenario I wrote about in the introduction, in which the children learned about and were coloring sheets of a heterosexual couple from an opera

kissing each other. This image did not incite the same kinds of reactions in those students—in fact, the presence of heterosexual identity did not seem to faze the students at all. I continued to read the story:

Hartman: “The two princes are now called king and king. The queen finally has some time to herself and everyone lives happily ever after.”

Myra: Really? Oh no. <several students talking and yelling over each other>

Teacher: Okay, remember we want everyone to be heard, so raise your hand. Don’t yell.

Javon: That’s it? This book is short.

Aliya: I don’t like this book.

Hartman: I get the feeling some people had some problems. If you do, tell why. And try to think about the other books we read too and how people were treated, and all the things we talked about when reading books.

Myra: This book was not even treated unfairly! I don’t like those boys marrying.

Tariq: Ya, they weren’t being treated unfairly.

Myra: In the other books, yes, but not this one.

Hartman: Hmm. Does anyone want to respond to Myra?

Javon: I want to say...*King and King*, I think it is kind of unfair, but not really unfair. Because when the husband married the other husband, and maybe one husband has to do all the work. Like if one husband had to cook all the food and stuff...that’s not fair.

Hartman: Oh okay. But that didn’t happen here. You just think that would be unfair if it happened?

Javon: Ya.

Myra: I think I know why.

Javon: Mr. Hartman, you didn’t read the last page!

In this excerpt, Myra makes a good point. Although I asked the students to think of the other books we read, particularly paying attention to the ways in which characters were treated unfairly, I inadvertently created a fair/unfair binary, which was not useful for analyzing this book. The peripheral characters expressed no problem with the gay wedding, and in fact, the only displeasure with the gay wedding that was expressed was that of the students. Also, it is apparent that Tariq is familiar with gay/lesbian identity, and seems to have a firm understanding and seeming acceptance of such identities. There were parts of the discussion that seemed to incite unpleasant feelings in the students—

particularly as they expressed displeasure with the presence of gay characters, and students talked and shouted over each other. The last line of the excerpt shows Javon's interest in reading the last page of the text. He was referring to the page at the end of the book (not the actual last page of the story with words written), which shows the two kings kissing with a heart covering their mouths. After Javon's request, I did turn to the last page and showed the picture to the students. The response to the image was laughter and screaming. Again, this made me feel very uneasy, and at this point, a part of me wanted to come out to the children and to tell them I was gay. This instance made me think of other times in my teaching career in which I had similar feelings. Alas, I did not disclose my sexual identity to the students—for a variety of reasons—but, this discussion made me think about the many layers of addressing non-heterosexuality in the classroom, and the additional risks that LGBT-identified teachers may experience as they did this. What if I had come out to this group of students? Would they have reacted in an unsupportive manner? If so, what would this do to the teacher-student relationship I had developed? Would their parents be upset? At this point, there were just too many unknowable outcomes. At this time, and many others throughout my career, I struggled with this dilemma. On one hand, I felt like a coward for not being "out" to my students and their families, but on the other, I thought about the risks attached with the other option.

I attempted to bring the students together to culminate the discussion of this book. In the excerpt that follows, Myra understands the nuance that I described in the paragraph above.

Myra: If the book was about treated unfairly, the mom would just say, "You cannot marry a boy."

Hartman: Ah, that's interesting. But she didn't say that, did she? Do, do you think she treated the prince fairly?

Myra: In the beginning...kind of when she said you have to be like other princes and marry another princess.

Donald: <interrupting Myra> Unfairly. Unfairly! Because she was choosing the girls. Not letting the prince follow his heart. She was just. She was choosing the girls. Over and over and over.

Hartman: Yes, that's true. <to the whole group> What do you think?

Javon: Ya. Mmhmm.

Myra: The queen only picked queens instead of princes. Cuz if she would've called princes to come, then the prince would have to be a princess... the queen was unfair.

Hartman: Ah, I see.

In this excerpt, Donald points out that the prince did not get to freely choose the person he wanted to marry, and identifies this as unfair. Myra concludes the discussion with an interesting thought and asserts that the only way the queen would have invited men over to meet the prince was if the prince were actually not a prince (man), but was a princess (woman). Myra seems to not see the presentation of other men to the prince as a viable option—reinforcing heteronormativity.

Elena's Serenade

Before reading and discussing this book, I showed a short video of two professional glassblowers (one man and one woman) explaining their craft because I anticipated that the children in the group were unfamiliar with the trade. In the excerpt that follows, the children identify the problem faced by the main character, Elena:

Hartman: It's called *Elena's Serenade*. Do you know what that word means?

Donald: A party?

Hartman: No, a serenade is like a song... Oh, and here there is a Spanish/English glossary. Maybe the kids who know Spanish can help us with the Spanish words... "In Mexico the sun is called El Sol and the moon is called La Luna. My papa is a glassblower. He puffs out his cheeks, blows out of a long pipe and.... One afternoon I find an old pipe of papa's. I ask him if he will teach me... You are too little. And besides, who has ever heard of a girl glassblower?" So, why does he say she can't be a glassblower?

Myra: Because she's little.

Tariq: Because she's a girl. And she's too little.

Myra: But, we just saw a girl who made a glass... that stuff with her husband...

Hartman: What do you think about that?

Aliya: That's not really fair.

The discussion continues, and the children formulate their opinions about the choice

Elena is about to make:

Hartman: "Even though I am as mad as a wet hen, I don't let papa see my tears. When I get home my brother asks, 'Why do you have a sad face Elena?' 'I want to blow glass, but papa says I'm too little. And anyway, who ever heard of a girl glassblower?' 'Monterrey is where the glassblowers are,' Pedro says. 'You should go there.' Oh, so her brother is telling her to go to this other city because that's where all of the glassblowers are. Do you think that's a good idea?

Myra: No. She's too little to go by herself.

Tariq: No... because maybe bad guys are gonna get her.

Hartman: "Should I? I'm scared to leave papa, but maybe I should. The next morning I borrow a pair of Pedro's trousers, hide my hair under his old sombrero and set out. Since girls aren't supposed to be glassblowers, I'll pretend I'm a boy."

Students: <Gasps>

Hartman: Wow. So, what do you think of that idea?

Myra: Bad! She shouldn't dress like that! She's a girl! And because... they might know she's a girl. If her hat blows off or something.

Hartman: What do you think would happen then? If they find out she's a girl?

Myra: They will see and kick her out.

Hartman: What do you think, Javon?

Javon: I was gonna say...when I was little I had long hair. Boys got long hair too.

Hartman: Okay. But, what do you think about her idea about pretending to be a boy?

Javon: Bad. No, no. There's different ways how they will know she is a girl.

Hartman: But someone said it's not fair to allow girls to be glassblowers...

Javon: No. They gonna know and then kick her out!

Hartman: What do you think Donald?

Donald: It's not a good idea to dress like a boy because she might bump into someone and her hat will fall off and people will see she's a girl.

Hartman: Well what do you think is the worst thing that could happen if people see she's a girl? What do you think people would say?

Myra: They will notice that she's a girl because her brother is taller than her... and because she is so short.

Hartman: But remember, her brother is not going with her. She is going alone to Monterrey.

Myra: I know, but it's just still bad.

Hartman: Ok. So far everyone thinks it's a bad idea for Elena to disguise herself as a boy. Does anyone think it's a good idea?

Sara: Me! Because maybe someone might figure it out and keep it a secret. Cuz they might want to help her so she can do glassblowing.

Donald: Maybe they never seen a girl glassblower. And they keep it a secret. That way nobody notices.

Most of the comments in this excerpt focus on very real possibilities and problems Elena may face if she disguises herself as a boy, and therefore, most students do not feel it is a good idea for Elena to disguise herself as a boy. Sara, however, expresses her approval of the idea and recognizes that it may be one of the only choices she can make if she does want to learn to be a glassblower. During the next part of the book, Elena encounters a series of animals who help her, or in which she helps (the burro helps carry Elena to Monterrey, the music Elena plays on her pipe encourages both roadrunner and coyote).

Hartman: What do all of these animals think about Elena?

Myra: That she is nice.

Sara: And she is helpful too and plays nice music.

Hartman: "Next morning...at last we get to Monterrey. Before me is a factory where the furnaces giant mouth is full of ...In front of me, four big men stand stiff as soldiers... as their balloon cheeks shrink.. "What do you want?" their boss yells at me. I say, "Por favor señor, I want to be a glassblower."

Tariq: I think they will notice that she is a young girl.

Hartman: The men laugh. The boss winks and says, okay, muchacho let's see what you can do. I twirl my glass...I close my eyes and gulp and blow.... I sing a song called estrellita...but then.... I remember how my pipe helped burro. I blow strong and steady and when I open my eyes, I see a star. I tap the star off... at the end of my pipe another ...the men try to blow a star too, but only burping noises and crooked bottles come from their pipes. "Welcome little glassblower," the boss says and shakes my hand. He puts my stars in a factory window where they twinkle like real stars. As soon as the children in Monterrey see them, they all want one. The stars sell faster than I can blow them." So, she is pretty successful, right?

Aliya: Ya.

Hartman: How is she different than the men glassblowers?

Donald: She's a girl.

Hartman: Right, right. But what about the way that she blows glass? How is that different?

Sara: She makes nice glass things. Like stars and music.

Hartman: Right. Remember, what happened when the men tried to blow glass like Elena?

Myra: They were burping <laughing>

In this excerpt, the children explain the key difference between Elena's glassblowing abilities with that of the men. I continue reading as Elena decides it is time for her to return home:

Hartman: "One night, when I am working alone, I twirl a huge glass.... It is about a bird gliding over the sea. As I play ... it becomes the size of road runner... I blow and I blow and my bird becomes bigger than burro. Oh I wish papa could see what I could do!" Ah, Ok, so what do you think Elena is going to do?

Myra: She's gonna go home!

Donald: And show his dad!

Myra: Her dad.

Hartman: "After sliding open the factory's big door, I push the big bird out and into the alley. Slowly the bird rises into the air. I'm flying. Down below the lights shine like hundreds of ... I turn south and when I see my town below I play softer and softer. I run home curl up in my own little bed." What do you think will happen when her family sees her again?

Javon: I think she will get grounded because she didn't listen to her dad.

Sara: I think she will take the boy clothes off.

Hartman: "The next morning when Papa goes to work, I get up. I put on Pedro's pants and sombrero again.... I take my pipe and run straight to papa's factory. 'Buenos dias,' I say to my dad. 'I am a glass blower. I came all the way from Monterrey.' 'Oh grandfather—you aren't as tall as your pipe—how can you blow glass?' ...I play a beautiful song... 'Que bonita!' Papa exclaims. 'If only my daughter were here to see this'...

Tariq: I think her beard is gonna come off.

Hartman: "'But she is!' I shout. 'Is that you Elena?' 'At your service, papa'. And I tell him all about the funny and amazing things that happen on my trip to Monterrey. Now, every day, papa and I work side by side. Papa blows bottles and pitchers and drinking glasses. I blow birds, stars, butterflies, and songs. On Saturdays, tourists from all over come to dance to the music and catch a glass butterfly. If you close your eyes and sit absolutely still, you may hear their wings chiming like little glass bells."

Here, both Sara and Tariq rightly predict that Elena will remove her disguise and surprise her father. We then continue to have a culminating discussion of the book:

Hartman: Hmmm. Let's talk about this book, and let's think about the other books we read so far too. How was Elena treated in this story? Think about that before you raise your hand.

Javon: Uhm...Unfair because her dad said only boys could glass blow and not girls.

Hartman: Ah, ok.

Sara: Her dad said that she's too little.

Myra: I agree.

Hartman: So what do you think about Elena's decision? When she decided to disguise herself as a boy?

Sara: She can do that job now. And now she can be a glassblower because she acted like a boy at first. But now she can make like girl glass things. And those men can't do that cuz they aren't a girl like her.

Hartman: Right. So think about that. What did Elena have to do to be a glassblower?

Donald: Go to the city, right?

Sara: And dress like a boy...

Hartman: Ah. Right. That's interesting. What do you think about that? Do you think that was a good idea Elena had?

Myra: YES! It's a good idea. A very very good idea. Cuz now she gets to do it by herself now.

Hartman: Ah, ok. But remember at the beginning of the story, you thought it was a bad idea? Everyone except Sara. Why do you think it's a good idea now?

Myra: Nope, it's a good idea. A little bad of a idea too. She's a girl so she shouldn't wear that clothes like a boy. But she couldn't do it—be a glass blower. Like what she wants to do if she didn't dress like a boy.

Tariq: Ya. She had to do it.

In this final excerpt, the children who initially disapproved of Elena's idea to disguise herself as a boy, express that they now think it was a good idea. When pushed, Myra explains that it was overall a good idea, because now Elena had access to the world of glassblowing, but also admits that it was “a little bad of a idea too” because “she shouldn't wear that clothes like a boy.” Though it appeared that it was the only way Elena could gain access to the glassblowing trade, Myra expresses a contradictory opinion about Elena's actions.

The Sissy Duckling

When *The Sissy Duckling* was first introduced to the group, we took some time to examine the cover and make some predictions about the characters. Upon first glance, the students incorrectly made the assumption that the main character was a girl, and use the pronoun *she* when describing the main character, Elmer, who is pictured on the front

cover of the book. I was not sure if the students were aware of the term *sissy*, and thus, wanted to gauge their understanding:

Hartman: Remember how we learned how to read pictures in a book? Take a look at the front cover and try to figure out what's going on. Who would like to share their prediction... Well, and the book is called *The Sissy Duckling*, so what do you think the word sissy means?

Myra: I think it's about being fancy.

Hartman: Oh, being fancy? Wow cool. Okay. What do you mean by fancy?

Myra: Fancy, like... being mean to the other kids and being cool. And being... and other kids are not wearing cool stuff, they're just wearing their uniform...and she's wearing a hearts glasses and cool backpack...and I think sissy means, like sister.

Hartman: Oh, okay. What do you think?

Donald: I think sissy means silly.

Hartman: And what do you think the story is gonna be about?

Donald: A duck that's trying to act cool.

Sara: Uhm, I think that it means like sassy.

Hartman: Oh, ok. And what does sassy mean?

Sara: Mmmm, I don't know. But I think that she might be being mean.

Hartman: I see this duck is looking pretty cool and the other ducks looking like, wow, who is that?

Tariq: Ya, the other ducks look mad.

Myra: Why? What did she do to them? Maybe they think it's unfair that she gets to wear heart glasses?

Hartman: Hmmm. Interesting. Let's read and find out.

Their responses revealed that clothing and accessories play an important role in expressing one's gender. Perhaps because we had read books about characters being treated unfairly, they immediately thought that the main character on the cover must be treating the other characters in the book unfairly. As we read the first pages of the story, the students grapple with the actual gender of the main character, Elmer, and try to make sense of his non-normative gender expression.

Hartman: "...Yes, Elmer was one happy duckling doing all the things he loved to do."

Aliya: Is it a she or a he?

Hartman: Well, what does it say?

Aliya: He?

Hartman: Yep.
Myra: Huh? But why does he have a heart glasses, like a girl?
Hartman: Well, why do you think?
Myra: I think he's a girl.
Hartman: But it says he though.
Donald: Ya, he!
Myra: Oh, maybe he likes pink?
Sara: I think the other ducks are gonna make fun of him. Cuz he's wearing those glasses, and like hearts.
Myra: Ya girl things. I think they're gonna be making fun of him because he has girl stuff <laughing>.
Hartman: Hmmm. Well what do you all think about that?
Myra: I don't know.

Even after we confirmed that the pronoun *he* was used to refer to Elmer, Myra still insists that Elmer must be a girl because of the way he expresses his gender. At this point, a “girlish boy” identity is not a valid possibility for her. And though Elmer is usually a name associated with boys, I do not think many of the students were familiar with that name.

The next part of the story explains the activities in which Elmer likes to engage and explains a problem he encounters—that there was not another boy duck who enjoyed doing the same things that Elmer did. Now that the students get some more information about Elmer and that he likes to partake in activities stereotypically associated with girls, the students inferred, based on the non-normative gender expression of Elmer, how the other ducks might use the word *sissy* in a hurtful manner.

Hartman: So what do you think about Elmer?
Myra: I think he does girly stuff, and that's why they're gonna make fun of him.
Hartman: But, do you think that's a good thing?
Myra and another student together: No.
Myra: And now I think I know what *sissy* means. I think they might use that word to make him feel bad.
Hartman: Well what do you think that word might mean if you use it in a mean way?
Myra: I think it might mean...
Donald: <finishing Myra's sentence> ...Like, girly?

In the next section of the book, Elmer's father pressures him to play baseball and immediately, Elmer's lack of enthusiasm is apparent. The next page describes Elmer's father's disappointment in him, and Elmer listens to his father complaining about him to Elmer's mother in the adjacent room of their home. Elmer's father uses the word *sissy* to describe Elmer, and interestingly, as the students in the group are learning how this word is being used, so is Elmer. In fact, in the next sequence, Elmer's mom explains to him that the word *sissy* is sometimes used to hurt others who may be "different." As the story progresses, Elmer is confronted with bullying at school because of his non-normative gender expression, and the ducks at school also begin to use the word *sissy* to describe Elmer. The ducks' teacher observes the tail end of the bullying episode, but makes all of them stay after school for a punishment, because she misunderstands what has actually happened. In the following excerpt, the students agreed that Elmer should not have been made fun of, nor punished. After experiencing bullying at school, and being chased home by Drake, the main bully, Elmer sadly reflects on his existence in the safety of his bedroom.

Hartman: Do you think Elmer should have gotten a detention?

Sara: No.

Hartman: Who do you think should have?

Myra: That boy! <pointing at the main bully, Drake>

Hartman: Why?

Myra: Because he is teasing him!

...

Hartman: "Even then, alone in the dark, there was no peace for Elmer." So how do you think he's thinking about all of this?

Myra: Like bullied and sad.... <raising her voice> And his dad is the third person who is bullying him.

Sara: It's mean for a dad to bully their daughter or son.

Hartman: Ya. Right. Ya, so his dad called him a sissy. Wow, that's hard. What, what do you think Elmer should do? What do you think he can do?

Sara: I would go to his dad and tell him not to call him names.
Myra: I would go away from home.
Donald: I would stay in my room.
Javon: I would run away.

The students agree that the boy who was bullying Elmer should get in trouble by the teacher. Four of the students in the group each offer possibilities for Elmer to respond to his harassment. Sara's response, again, calls for an immediate confrontation of the individual inflicting the pain—whereas the others suggested fleeing from the problem.

Elmer does decide to run away and not fly south for the winter. He makes a home in a hollow tree and then, when the rest of the flock takes off to fly south for the winter, Elmer sadly looks on from his new home. As he secretly watches the ducks take off for flight, he suddenly hears the sound of hunters' guns shooting at the flock. Elmer sees his father fall from the sky after getting hit by a bullet and picks up his dad and carries him off to safety.

Hartman: Okay, wow. So Elmer is carrying his dad after he got shot. What do you think is going to happen?
Myra: Is he gonna kill his dad?
Hartman: You think so? Wow! What makes you think that?
Myra: <laughing> No, no, no.
Sara: No, no. Maybe his dad is gonna apologize?
Myra: No. I think that uhm. When uhm. He carries his dad... His dad is going to think that the boy is strong...and...oh, now I know...I think he's gonna bring his dad to his house.

Myra's immediate response was that Elmer was going to kill his dad—presumably because of the mistreatment he inflicted on his son. But her response immediately changed. It is interesting to note that Myra thought Elmer's dad was going to think he was physically strong, and it can be inferred that this is a quality his dad will appreciate—this demonstrates Myra's seeming disapproval of Elmer's gender expression. Sara's response immediately jumps to an apology from Elmer's father—again,

suggesting that his father is the one with the problem, not Elmer. Myra and Sara represent two differing views—Myra feels Elmer will be accepted because of his emerging qualities that align with stereotypical boy behaviors (*i.e.*, being strong); whereas Sara seems to feel Elmer should not change and that his dad should accept who he is—including his gender expression.

Elmer takes his dad to his house, and he is impressed that Elmer was the only duck who was able to survive a winter in the forest. The two ducks realize they are stuck in Elmer's house for the rest of the winter, and Elmer continues to impress his dad with his stereotypical feminine qualities (cooking, doing art, cleaning). Elmer's father regretfully expresses to Elmer: "Oh son, what have I done!" When early spring comes, the rest of the flock arrives in the forest, thinking that Elmer and his father were both dead. During a kind of memorial service for the ducks who were killed by the hunters, facilitated by Drake (the main bully to Elmer), Elmer is brought to the flock's attention:

Hartman: "'And let's not forget the ones who were shot by the hunters last fall.' 'And Elmer!' Mama called out. Don't forget we lost my Elmer too.' 'Now, who could forget Elmer?' Drake laughed. 'That little sissy!'"

Students: Oh no.

Hartman: "The other ducks joined in laughing until a voice boomed forth. 'If Elmer is a sissy, then I wish I were a sissy too!'"

<I continue reading the book and the students are listening attentively>

...

Hartman: "Elmer took a deep breath and spoke to the ducks." What do you think he's going to say?

Myra: I have no idea.

Sara: That he's a sissy?

Myra: I think he's gonna say that... "Last time you guys all thought that I was a sissy, but now I'm not." I dunno.

Hartman: This is what he said: "I want to make one thing perfectly clear..."

Tariq: Oh I know! He wants a celebration?

Hartman: Maybe... "I am the same duck I have always been. I have not changed. I am a big sissy and I'm proud of it."

<gasps from students>

Donald: Oh dang!

Myra states she has no idea what Elmer is going to do. The fact that she vocalized this may indicate her lack of acceptance for Elmer's gender expression—especially if her previous responses are taken into consideration. She does go on though, to explain that she thinks Elmer is going to assert that he is no longer a *sissy*, although nothing in the story and our discussion gave any indication of this. This example may demonstrate again that Myra believes that Elmer, and his gender expression, is a problem and should change. On the other hand, Myra has not yet seen the ways in which the term *sissy* might be used by someone in an affirming manner. Perhaps she does not yet have the background knowledge to understand how one might reclaim such an identifying category. Sara's prediction on the other hand, is accurate, and coincides with her feelings of Elmer throughout the book—that he should embrace his *sissy* identity and refuse to change.

Hartman: Drake took a step forward. "You haven't changed, but maybe I have."
How do you think Drake changed?

Myra: I think he changed by, when he saw that he built his own house, saved his dad...I think that he thinks that he was being mean and rude and bossy. And bully.

Hartman: But how did Drake change though?

Myra: Well now he's being nice and happy.

At this point, Myra recognizes the change Drake made and admits that he was a bully and was mean and rude to Elmer. She explains that Drake is being nice and happy now, but does not go into detail regarding his opinion about Elmer (specifically Elmer's gender expression) that has changed. At this point, I finished reading the last two pages of the story as the students listened.

Hartman: Okay. Well, let's talk about Elmer a little bit. How was Elmer treated unfairly and how did he overcome? Like, what did he do to stay strong?

Tariq: They don't like him cuz he was a sissy. Ya. And he did stuff like build a house and paint.

Sara: Ya, those ducks bullied him. Oh ya. Oh, his dad did bully too.

Hartman: Right, right. Well, do you think Elmer changed?

Myra: Oh no. He did all that stuff he liked.

All three children correctly answered this explicit question about the story, but at this time, I was looking to further understand their opinions about sissies (non-normative gender expression), in a more general sense. We culminated this book discussion with a conversation about non-normative gender expression, more broadly.

Hartman: Right. What about being a sissy? What do you think about sissies? And that word sissy? I mean...that word is in the title so it's kind of important in the story.

Donald: Well, that word's mean cuz they made fun of him. It was bullying that they did.

Myra: Ya, that is rude!

Hartman: Right, right. But, remember at the end and Elmer said, "I am a big sissy and proud of it!"? Remember? Did he think that word was mean then?

Javon: No! He thought that word was cool... like, he like... He was proud and happy.

Sara: Yes. He liked doing... wearing the girl things. Like hearts and things like that.

Hartman: Ah. Okay. So that word can be used in different ways, hmmm. That's kind of interesting. What about being a sissy? Elmer calls himself a sissy. Is it okay to be a sissy?

Sara: Yes, yes. I think he liked it. He can be like that. Boys can like hearts and things.

Donald: <Yelling> Well that's weird. That's just weird!

Myra: Well, it's not nice to make fun of sissies.

Hartman: Well, what about being a sissy? We know it's not nice to make fun of sissies. What about being a sissy? What do you think about a boy being a sissy?

Myra: No no! That's kinda funny I think. I don't like it.

Sara: I think it's okay. Ya. I think Elmer was nice.

In this excerpt, it is clear that Myra and Donald agree that it is mean and rude to bully someone because of his/her gender expression. However, the underlying cause of the bullying is not addressed by these two students, and in fact, they believe that being a sissy is "weird," "kinda funny," and Myra expresses, "I don't like it." Sara, on the other hand,

creates an opening for non-normative expressions of gender: “He can be like that. Like hearts and things like that,” and “I think it’s okay. Ya. I think Elmer was nice.”

Jacob’s New Dress

While reading the beginning of this book, I explained the setting of the story in the hopes of conjuring up a familiarity students may have based on their own past experiences. Myra also asserted a prediction about the storyline, which was met with boisterous responses.

Hartman: Any ideas about what the story is about?

Myra: Maybe in the middle of the story Jacob’s gonna wear a dress.

Students: <talking over each other> Yes. What?! No!

Hartman: Ok. Well let’s read it and we can talk about what is happening in the story. “Jacob ran to join Emily in the dress up corner.” Oh, okay so this is like in school. You know, like how in kindergarten class you can do make believe and play... ok. “Emily slid into a shiny yellow dress while Jacob wiggled into a sparkling pink dress. They both wanted to wear the crown, but Jacob got there first. ‘I’ll be the princess,’ he said. Christopher frowned.” Why do you think Christopher frowned?

Aliya: Because he doesn’t like princesses. It’s like when I played with my bear and I was the prince.

Hartman: Ah, ok. “‘Jacob, why do you always wear girl clothes? Put on the knight armor! That’s what the boy wears!’ ‘Christopher, stop telling us what to do,’ said Emily.” So Emily is kind of standing up for him, right?

Students: Mmhmm.

Hartman: “Ms. Wilson heard the argument. ‘What’s going on, kids?’ ‘Jacob is wearing girl’s clothes,’ complained Christopher. ‘The dress up corner is where we come to use our imaginations. You could be a dinosaur, a farmer, a princess.

Anything! Christopher, what do you want to be?’ ‘A boy!’ Christopher scowled.

Ms. Wilson smiled. ‘Jacob, you try it. What new thing could you imagine being? A firefighter? A policeman?’ ‘Ms. Wilson,’ Jacob said proudly. ‘I’m the princess.’

Students: Ewww! <making sounds of disgust>

At this point in the read aloud, I decide to stop and have a discussion of what is happening in the story and to connect it to the lives and opinions of the children. When students responded with disapproval of Jacob’s desire to wear a dress, I wanted to find

out about the children's reasoning. The children were very animated at this point of the discussion and collectively made sounds of disapproval, including "Ewww!"

Hartman: Oh. I am hearing a lot of sounds. But, instead of making sounds, let's talk about what you are thinking. Okay, Tariq?

Tariq: I agree with Aliya. But, it is kind of... strange. Cuz when Jacob wears that it kind of gets a little weird on the subject. And everyone argues. And it's all mixed up.

Javon: This is almost like the duck. Like Elmer. Cuz when he was wearing a girl book bag, this is like that. And now Jacob is kind of being bullied too.

Myra: I think the teacher is going to tell him what to wear too.

Javon: I think they just bullying him cuz he wants to be a sissy.

Donald: I think that Jacob is doing his imagination because he can do his imagination...ya, but the other boy, he thinks that he shouldn't wear girl things. And he really isn't using his imagination.

At this point, Javon connects the main character with another character with whom the children are familiar—Elmer. In fact, Javon decides to use the descriptor *sissy* to describe Jacob. At once, I am impressed with Javon—that he picked up a new vocabulary word and attempting to utilize it in a similar manner that Elmer from *The Sissy Duckling* used it. At the same time though, I think about how Javon's use of his newly discovered word might be misconstrued if he were to use it in the future. This of course, depends on the context in which Javon uses it—do the others in that context have an experience of understanding how the term *sissy* might be used in an affirming manner? Donald connects Jacob's non-normative gender expression to a robust imagination and claims that Christopher's rejection of Jacob's desire to wear a dress is rooted in a lack of imagination. The discussion continues:

Tariq: Ya, well I disagree. Cuz I think it's nasty. When a boy wants to act like a girl or a boy acts like a girl I think it's nasty.

Hartman: Does someone want to respond to what Tariq said? Agree? Disagree?

Aliya: I agree because boys do not wear dresses.

Sara: In Hawaii boys wear a dress.

Javon: We not in Hawaii.

Sara: I disagree with Tariq and Aliya because anyone can be anything they want to be. Like nobody can tell them how to be. Like your teacher can't tell you to be a boy and your mom says something else. Just... just be yourself.

Sara seems to be reaching for ways to defend Jacob's choice to wear a dress and explains that in some places, it is acceptable for boys to wear dresses. Javon rightly points out that we are not in that particular context. Tariq's and Aliya's responses express represent? disapproval of Jacob's non-normative choice to wear a dress, while Sara goes on to defend Jacob's choice and calls for a more nuanced understanding of gender.

Myra: I agree with Tariq because in our country if you act like a girl you will get killed.

Hartman: In what country?

Myra: In my country. In Somalia.

Hartman: Ah. Wow. I did not know that. What about where we live, here? Do people get killed for that?

Myra: Hmm. No.

Hartman: Do you think if someone is a boy and acts like a girl should they get hurt?

Students: <In unison> No!

Myra: Ya. Well, maybe it's ok to kinda act like a girl. But if they wear like girl stuff, they actually are weird. And they can do this like a girl <she holds her hand up to demonstrate an effeminate hand gesture> but nobody could wear girl stuff.

Hartman: But what does everyone think about that? What's your opinion about that?

Sara: I disagree with everyone who said I agree because uhm, if you want to act like a girl, you can act like a girl. If you want to act like a boy, you could act like a boy. It's up to you. You could act like a girl or a boy. Nobody can tell you.

Hartman: Ah ok, good idea. Let's keep reading.

Myra explains that people in Somalia get killed for expressing non-normative gender, and when I ask if this happens in the United States, the children yell in unison, "No!" Of course, this is unfortunately not true, but I wanted to continue with the discussion. Myra expresses that it's "kinda" okay for a boy to act like a girl, but that they must stop at a certain point before it is unacceptable. Again, Sara disagrees with this sentiment and further articulates a more nuanced understanding of gender expression.

Hartman: <continuing to read> “‘How was school today,’ Jacob’s mom asked, studying Jacob’s face. ‘Fun?’ ‘Christopher says boys can’t wear dresses.’ said Jacob. ‘Can they?’ ‘Of course they can!’ Mom hugged Jacob. Why don’t you get the dress you wore on Halloween and play with that?

Hartman: So, how does the mom feel about it?

Aliya: She thinks it’s okay.

Hartman: “Jacob pulled on his witch’s dress and twirled. He loved the way the black lace swirled around it. ‘I want to wear this dress to school.’ Jacob’s mom frowned.” So what do you think his mom feels about that?

Javon: Nope! She doesn’t like that.

Myra: I don’t think so.

Hartman: “‘I don’t think so,’ she said. ‘That’s for dress up at home. It could get dirty at school.’ ‘Then can I get a regular dress? A dress I can wear at school?’ Mom was quiet. ‘Hmmm. Let me think about that,’ she said.” What do you think she’s going to say?

Students: <in unison> Yes! No!

Hartman: “Jacob wondered what to play next. Pirate, princess, bird? Heaping three towels on the floor, Jacob made a nest. Snug and warm, he imagined what a school dress would look like. The next morning Jacob stood at the top of the stair wrapped in a giant bath towel. ‘What are you wearing?’ asked mom. ‘It’s like a dress. But I can get it dirty,’ Jacob said, pointing to the towel. ‘I made it.’ Dad frowned. ‘You can’t go to school like that!’ ‘Put on some shorts and a shirt and let’s go to school!’ Oh, but he is wearing it over his clothes. So he is still wearing the dress thing over his clothes. What do you think?

<no response from students after teacher pauses for five seconds>

“‘What’s that?’ demanded Christopher? ‘Good morning Christopher,’ said Jacob’s mother. ‘Jacob’s wearing something new that he’s invented. Isn’t it nice?’ Christopher didn’t answer. ‘I want a dress like that,’ said Emily. ‘It’s not a dress!’ said Jacob. ‘It’s a dress thing.’ Jacob saw Emily smile and grinned back. ‘I can make you one!’ The playground was full of laughter as the children played tag. Christopher sneaked up, yanked off Jacob’s towel, and ran away with it.”

Aliya: Oh.

Donald: That’s so mean!

Hartman: Ya, you think so? “‘Christopher is mean,’ hissed Emily. Jacob saw Christopher wave the towel like a captured flag and started to cry.” What do you think? Ya, it seems like Christopher is bullying Jacob because he wants to wear a dress.

Myra: Now that is what I call mean.

Aliya: That is mean cuz you can’t pull someone’s clothes off like that. They probably want to play with that and stuff.

At this point, the children believe that it is mean to treat Jacob like that. Their responses indicate that it is wrong to bully someone, but not all students interrogate the underlying causes of this bullying.

Hartman: Ok. Let's continue. "'How was school today?' Mom asked. 'Christopher stole my dress thing,' said Jacob. The tears flooded back. Mom hugged Jacob. 'I'm sorry. Christopher's not always a good friend. 'Mom,' whispered Jacob. 'Could you help me make a real dress?'

Student: Whoa!

Hartman: "Mom did not answer. The longer mom didn't answer the less Jacob could breathe." What do you think that means?

Aliya: He is so scared she will say no.

Here, Aliya's response indicates that she is tuned in to the struggles and desires in which Jacob is faced. As the discussion continues, the children express varying ideas about Jacob's gender expression, and about non-normative gender expression in a more general sense.

Hartman: 'Let's get the sewing machine,' she said finally. Jacob felt the air refill his body. He grinned. Mom smiled back. 'There are all sorts of ways to be a boy, right?' What does that mean? That sentence, 'There are all sorts of ways to be a boy'?

Donald: She means that a boy can be anything. He could be like a pirate or a princess whatever or like a girl.

Javon: I was tryin' to say that boys could wear dresses if they want.

Hartman: What if this happened in real life and you saw a boy student who came to school in a dress? I want you to think about it.

Myra: I can't imagine that happening.

Tariq: I would get a yardstick and whack his head off.

Students: <Laughing>

Hartman: Whoa. Really? Who can respond to that?

Javon: Uhm. I disagree with Tariq cuz that would be kinda like a bully. What I would do is kinda say, 'hmmmm. Don't listen to anyone else who bullies you—just be yourself. That's all I'd say.'

Donald: Uhm. The person who bullies you tell the teacher.

Hartman: Ya, but what else could you do to help that person being bullied?

Donald: Just tell that person that's a bully, to just tell them to be kind.

Aliya: If they were bullying him, I would say what if you wore that clothes like that. Would you like that if they all laugh at you?

Sara: I would say don't be their friends and come play with me. I will be kind to him.

Tariq: I don't like that. I would still not like him.

Donald explains what the sentence in the book means, and seems to agree with the statement because he goes on to explain that people should stand up to bullies and should

insist that they should change. Tariq expresses disapproval with non-normative gender expression. Though I sense a feeling of lightheartedness with his suggestion of physical harm (I get the sense he said this to get a reaction from the group), his comment is taken seriously by others. At the end of this excerpt, Tariq expresses that his attitude has not changed, and that he would not like a boy who expressed his gender like Jacob does.

Aliya also expresses her disapproval of bullying, and Sara expresses that she would support a child like Jacob and be his friend. We continue to read the ending of the book:

Hartman: <continuing to read> “Dad looked up from his book. ‘Mom and I made a dress,’ said Jacob quietly. Dad studied the dress. Jacob started to get that can’t breathe feeling again. ‘I can see you worked hard on the dress,’ said dad. ‘Are you sure you want to wear it to school?’ Jacob nodded and smiled. ‘Well, it’s not what I would wear, but you will look great. Go ahead.’ Jacob skipped up the front walk to school. He found Emily inside and showed her his new dress. They found matching colors in their clothes and laughed. Together they ran out to the playground. ‘My mom and I made this dress,’ Jacob said proudly at circle time. ‘We used her sewing machine.’ ‘That’s wonderful,’ said Ms. Wilson. ‘Why does Jacob wear dresses?’ interrupted Christopher. Ms. Wilson paused. ‘I think Jacob wears dresses because he is comfortable in them. Just like you do. Not very long ago little girls weren’t allowed to wear pants. Did you know that? Can you imagine that?’ Christopher shook his head. ‘I asked my dad, and he said boys don’t wear dresses.’ Jacob rubbed the hem of his dress looking at the little stitches he had sewn. He could hear Ms. Wilson and the other kids talking, but their words sounded far away. On the playground Christopher yelled, ‘Let’s play tag—boys vs. girls. Jacob, you’re on the GIRLS team.’ A bunch of kids started laughing. Jacob felt his dress surrounding him, like armor. Soft, cottony, magic armor. ‘Christopher, I made this dress and I am proud of it and I’m going to wear it. And you know what else?’ Jacob tugged at Christopher. ‘You’re it!’ Jacob sprinted across the playground. His dress spreading out like wings.” The end.
Students: <clapping> Yay!

Hartman: Now, what lesson can we learn from this story do you think?

Myra: Oh, I don’t know.

Javon: Thinking, thinking.

Sara: Don’t tell someone how they have to be. You’re not the boss of them.

Hartman: Any other lesson or something you learned or thought about in this story?

Sara: There are more than one ways to be a girl or a boy?

Hartman: Ya. I think that’s a good lesson. Ya, there’s lots of ways to be a boy or a girl.

Javon: There’s a million thousand, million thousand ways.

During the culmination of this discussion, the students discussed the possible lessons that were learned from reading this story. At the conclusion of the last page, all of the students clapped, which seems to demonstrate their likeness for the story. Sara continues to call for a nuanced understanding of gender, and Javon echoes these sentiments—hence continuing to disrupt heteronormativity.

10,000 Dresses

Before I began reading this book, I asked the children to make predictions about what the book is about. On the front cover is an illustration of Bailey, the main character, wearing a dress. Bailey has short, spikey hair and has an ambiguous gender expression. We read this book after *Jacob's New Dress*, which takes up the issue of a boy who desires to wear dresses. This book, while similar, is slightly different in the sense that the main character, Bailey—who is seemingly assigned a male identity by her parents—does not just want to wear dresses, but also *feels like a girl* and wants to be identified as such.

Hartman: This one is called *10,000 Dresses*. What do you think it's about?

Javon: One girl wearing a thousand dresses?

Sara: A boy wears a dress to school I think?

Tariq: Is that a boy or a girl?

Myra: It's a girl.

Hartman: Any predictions what you think might happen in this story?

Aliya: Maybe she wears so many dresses to school.

Donald: Maybe it's a contest to see how many dresses someone can wear?

Tariq: Well, it might be a boy and he might wear a dress. And maybe that's causing problems.

Hartman: Ah okay, let's start. "Every night, Bailey dreamed about dresses."

Sara's prediction may have come from the fact that we read *Jacob's New Dress* before this text. Tariq's prediction is correct, which is interesting because he has expressed

dissatisfaction with non-normative gender expression in past discussions. I also question whether or not he would have made this prediction had we not read and discussed the previous books that take up issues/themes of non-normative gender expression and/or sexual identity.

Myra: Is that a girl?

Sara: Oh, okay it's a boy.

Hartman: What do you think?

Myra: A girl?

Javon: Looks like a boy to me.

Hartman: Okay, let's keep going. "A long staircase led to a red valentine castle. 10,000 dresses in all and each one was different. The first dress was made of crystals....and when sunlight hit the dress just right, rainbows jumped out." With all her heart, Bailey loved the dress with crystals.

Myra: <interrupting> Told you!

Hartman: What? Oh, now they're using the word *her* to describe her. "When Bailey woke up, she went to find mother." So is the character a boy or a girl?

Donald: Boy.

Hartman: But the word *she* is used.

Students: Ohhhh.

In this excerpt, it is clear that the students are attempting to make sense of Bailey's gender identity. The omniscient narrator uses the feminine *she* and *her* to refer to Bailey, which is noticed by the children in the group.

Hartman: "Mother was in the kitchen cutting out coupons. 'Mom, I dreamt about a dress,' said Bailey. 'Uh huh,' said her mother.' 'A dress made of crystals that flashed rainbows into the sun.' 'Uh huh...' 'And I was wondering if you would buy me a dress like that.' 'Bailey, what are you talking about? You're a boy! Boys don't wear dresses!'"

Students: Huh?! What??

Donald: But first they said *she* and now they say *he*.

Hartman: Right. "'But I don't feel like a boy,' Bailey said. 'But you are one, Bailey. And that's that. Now go away and don't mention dresses again.'"

Myra: Hahaha. That is a boy.

Hartman: What do you think is happening?

Myra: Well, that she likes dresses? And I think this is the same as Elmer because they both like girls' stuff.

Hartman: I can see that. Elmer was a boy, right?

Donald: Ya. They are like mixing him up. Sometimes they say *she* or *he*.

Hartman: Look what it says here: “Bailey went to her room. Now she would never have a dress made of crystals that flashed rainbows in the sun”

Aliya: It is a little bit. It’s going back and forth.

Javon: This is like a little confusing.

Again, the children notice there is a shift in feminine and masculine language to identify Bailey—depending on which character, or the narrator, is speaking in the story. At this point in the discussion, the students recognize there is some conflict in the ways in which Bailey’s gender is identified in the story. Now that this is confirmed and discussed, the children think more deeply about the ways in which Bailey feels and is perceived by others.

Hartman: Yes, yes. Let’s keep reading. “That night, Bailey walked right past the crystal dress and went to the second stair. There was a dress made of lilies and roses. When she slipped it on, she saw that the sleeves were made of honeysuckles. Bailey picked a few of the blossoms to taste little drops of the honey. With all her heart, Bailey loved that dress with lilies and roses with honeysuckle sleeves. Bailey woke up and went to find father. He was in the backyard pulling up weeds.”

Any predictions what you think will happen?

Aliya: The same?

Hartman: What do you mean?

Aliya: Same as what mom said.

Javon: Mmmm. I agree.

Hartman: “‘Dad, I dreamt about a dress,’ Bailey said. ‘Uh huh,’ said her father. ‘A dress made of lilies and roses with honeysuckle sleeves.’ ‘Uh huh.’ ‘And I was wondering if you could grow me a dress like that.’ ‘Bailey, what are you talking about? You’re a boy! Boys don’t wear dresses!’

Students: <laughing>

Hartman: “‘But I don’t feel like a boy,’ she said. ‘Well, you are one, and that’s that. Now go away and don’t mention dresses again.’ Bailey went to her room. Now she would never have a dress made of lilies and roses and honeysuckle sleeves.” So what’s going on here? Bailey is still shifting because she uses *she* and other people use *he*.

Donald: This is just confusing.

Aliya: I think that she is actually a girl. But her parents don’t like dresses, so they are saying that she is a boy.

Hartman: Ok. Interesting.

Javon: Well I think she thinks she’s a girl though. But not other people. Like here dad thinks she’s a boy.

Hartman: Ah. Ok. Ya, it seems like Bailey feels like she's a girl. Let's keep on reading...

Aliya asserts that Bailey will probably receive the same response from her father as she received from her mother. Javon uses *she* to refer to Bailey and expresses that Bailey feels like a girl, while Donald expresses confusion and seems to still be making sense of Bailey's gender.

Hartman: ...“That night Bailey walked right past the crystal dress and the dress made of lilies and roses, and went to the third stair.”

Donald: Oh, maybe he's gonna ask his grandpa, or stepfather for help.

Sara: Or sister. Ya, sister.

Hartman: Let's see. “There was a dress made of windows. One window showed the Great Wall of China. And another, the pyramids. With all her heart, Bailey loved the dress made of windows, which showed the Great Wall of China and the pyramids. Bailey dreams again. The next morning Bailey woke up to find her brother. He was playing soccer with some kids.” Any predictions?

Students: <in unison> Same!

Hartman: “‘I dreamt about a dress,’ she told him. ‘A dress made of windows which showed the Great Wall of China and the pyramids.’ ‘You dream about dresses, Bailey?! That's gross—you're a boy!’

Students: <laughter>

Hartman: “‘But,’ said Bailey. ‘But nothing. Now get out of here before I kick you!’

Students: <laughing>

Hartman: Wow. Ok. So, What do you think about that?

Sara: That's mean.

Myra: It's kind of funny <laughing in the background>

Hartman: Why funny?

Myra: Cuz he's a boy and he shouldn't wear that.

Hartman: Ok. Any predictions what will happen next?

Javon: She will have another dream?

When Bailey finds her brother, the students demonstrate they understand the format of the story—that Bailey will reach out to another family member, but will be rejected.

Though the threat of being kicked by her brother is met with disapproval by Sara, Myra expresses that it is “kinda funny” that Bailey wears dresses and insists that “he's a boy and he shouldn't wear that.” I continued reading:

Hartman: <After turning to the next page> Who do you think this is? <pointing to picture of the neighbor, Laurel>

Sara: Her sister!

Myra: *His* sister!

Tariq: Ya, *HIS*.

Hartman: “Bailey ran and ran. She ran all the way to the end of the block. Until she came to a house with a big, blue porch. An older girl was sitting there. An older girl with needles and thread and old sheets. ‘What are you doing?’ Bailey asked. ‘Making dresses,’ said the big girl. ‘But it’s really hard. Mine all come out all the same.’ ‘Maybe I can help,’ said Bailey. Bailey told Laurel, the big girl, about the dresses made out of windows, which showed the Great Wall of China and the pyramids. ‘That’s awesome,’ said Laurel. ‘But how do we make a dress out of windows?’ ‘We’ll use old mirrors instead,’ said Bailey. Together, the two girls made two new dresses which were covered with mirrors of all shapes and sizes.”

Donald: The girls?

Hartman: Ya. No it says “the girls.” What do you think is going on?

Donald: They are confusing him as she.

Hartman: Well what do you think Bailey thinks. Do you think she thinks she’s a boy or a girl?

Students: <in unison> Girl.

Hartman: But what do Bailey’s parents and brother think?

Students: <in unison> Boy.

Hartman: So, what do you think?

Javon: He’s a boy because his mom. Her mom. His...Her mom knows the baby longer than her knows her.

Sara: Well, he says that he’s a boy but he doesn’t feel like one.

Hartman: Right. Remember, Bailey said she didn’t feel like a boy.

At the beginning of this excerpt, the children dispute whether *his* or *her* should be used, even though it has been discussed that Bailey feels like a girl. Even after reading the next page of the book, Tariq expresses disapproval of the narrator’s use of “the girls” to describe Bailey and Laurel. In fact, after that page, I ask the students to clarify how Bailey feels in terms of her gender, as compared to how others feel about her gender. The students all acknowledge that Bailey feels like a girl, but still reject the fact that the narrator refers to Bailey as a girl. Also, Javon expresses the idea that Bailey is truly a boy because her mom always knew Bailey and saw her when she was born. I interpret this comment to mean that Bailey’s mother saw that Bailey was born as a boy, and

therefore, because of this, Bailey's gender is fixed and cannot or should not sway from a boy. I continue reading the end of the story:

Hartman: "'These dresses don't show us the Great Wall of China or the pyramids,' said Laurel. 'No,' said Bailey. 'But they do show us ourselves.' 'You're the coolest girl I've ever met, Bailey,' said Laurel. 'Hey, do you think you can dream up of any more dresses?' Bailey grinned. I think I can dream up of 10,000!" That's the end.

Students: <laughter> Aww.

Hartman: So what can we say here for Bailey. How was she treated in the story? Can someone tell us?

Javon: She wants to be a girl, but she's not a girl.

Myra: She? You should say *he*.

Hartman: Well, she felt like a girl. Bailey said she was a girl. So who said Bailey is not a girl?

Tariq: Okay, ya. But her mom and dad know what she really is. She really is a boy.

Hartman: Okay, well the parents told Bailey that she is a boy, but she didn't feel like a boy. So how did Bailey overcome this problem? What happened?

Remember, Bailey went to her parents, then her brother...

Sara: That girl, Laurel, helped her make a dress. And it makes her feel good.

Hartman: Why do you think that made Bailey feel good?

Aliya: Cuz he liked dresses.

Sara: Ya, and she wants to be a she so Laurel helped her be a she too.

Donald: What?! Well...

Tariq: But Bailey is a boy.

Sara: But Bailey said she felt like a girl though. So, maybe Bailey is really a girl.

Hartman: Hmmm. Yes, I can see that. Well, what about a lesson? Do you think anyone learned a lesson in this story? Or can anyone reading this story learn a lesson maybe? Did you learn anything from reading this?

Myra: Nope. I didn't.

Tariq: No, nobody really learned a lesson.

Hartman: You think so? Okay, anyone think something else? And think about the lessons, or morals, we learned from reading other stories.

Myra: Oh. Maybe?

Donald: Bailey did?

Hartman: Ok. What lesson did Bailey learn?

Sara: Uhm, I think that, that dresses aren't only made for girls.

Hartman: So, dresses are made for anybody? Ah, ok. What do you all think?

Donald: Disagree. Well, maybe if Bailey said she was a girl, so dresses are for girls. So, it's ok.

Hartman: Oh, you mean since Bailey thinks she's a girl. It's ok for her to wear dresses.

Donald: Ya. I think that.

Sara: Well, even like Elmer wore girl things and that. And that was an ok idea.

Hartman: Ah, right. Ok. So Elmer was a boy. He didn't wear dresses though. He just liked some things that girls liked.

Sara: Ya, it's ok for someone to like whatever they want.

Myra: Disagree!

Hartman: What do you disagree with?

Myra: Well, Bailey is a boy.

In this excerpt of the discussion, there is a lot going on. Myra maintains the idea that Bailey is and should remain a boy, even though she acknowledges that Bailey feels like a girl. When Sara suggests that it's okay for boys to like whatever they want, Myra explicitly disagrees with that notion, which reinforces normative gender expressions. Donald also expressed disapproval of boys wearing dresses and states that the only way it would be okay for Bailey to wear a dress is if she said she was a girl, which she does state. Javon expresses that even though Bailey feels like and wants to be a girl, she cannot do this because she is *really* a boy. Javon acknowledges Bailey's desire to be a girl, but insists that it is simply an impossibility. Sara expresses that Laurel helps Bailey "be a she." Sara continually expresses approval of Bailey's desire to identify as a girl and supports that stance. Her statement at the end sums up her stance, "Ya, it's ok for someone to like whatever they want."

CONCLUSION

The ways in which children talked about LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression varied greatly. In exploring the answer to the second research question of this chapter: *Based on the characterizations of children's books that emerged from question #1, what are the beneficial/problematic aspects in using books characterized in each way?*, I began to think about whether or not the way a book is categorized has an impact on the kinds of discourse that is produced during literature discussions.

In reference to table 4, which is a record of the number and type of discourse produced during each literature discussion, it is clear that the number of *rejections* was greatest within the discussion of *King and King*, which happened to be categorized as *strategic essentialist*. Perhaps this is because none of the characters within that story experienced some kind of struggle associated with their gender/sexual identity. At the same time though, the number of times the discussion addressed sexual identity—without a necessarily negative or rejecting outcome—was great within the discussion of *King and King*. Creating a space for children to discuss a usually marginalized sexual identity within a classroom setting disrupts the norms of what is usually discussed within primary classrooms.

Another perspective as to why there were the most *rejections* during the discussion of the text *King and King* can suggest that the reason for this high number of *rejections* is because this is the only book that explicitly addresses homosexual identity. The participants seemed to be able to discuss issues of non-normative gender expression with less rejection, but when explicit gay identity surfaced in the books, the children boisterously rejected this.

It is also clear that the number of discourse coded as *queer* was greatest with books that were also categorized as *queer*. Perhaps these books create more spaces for children to think about and discuss gender/sexual identity in a more nuanced manner—in a way that disrupts or interrogates gender-/hetero-normativity. At the root of this research question was to understand if a particular kind of book produced more liberatory or oppressive discourse. Though the process of analyzing the discourse produced in the literature discussions allowed me to code it as either *strategic essentialist* or *queer*, both

types of discourse offer interesting and unique ways of challenging and combating sexism, heterosexism, gender-/hetero-normativity, and/or homo-/trans-phobia.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Connections

Pedagogical Implications

As I describe in chapter II, Kevin Kumashiro (2000) argues for the need to move beyond teaching *about* and *for the other* and that we should move towards ways of embracing reading practices that are critical of *privileging* and *othering*. There were moments in which the discussions of the books seemed to have focused on teaching *about* and *for the other*. For instance, during our discussion of *King and King*, when Javon names the act of two men marrying as “gay,” the children have a strong reaction:

Aliya: Some men marry cuz my mom just drives downtown sometimes, and because she sees men kissing other men. And that she said... that is disgusting.
<multiple laughs>

Javon: That’s actually gay. That’s actually called being gay.
<laughing and screaming from students>

Hartman: Yes it is. Okay...okay. Do you want to read the rest of the story?

Students: <Talking over each other> Yes, yes!

Though a powerful moment in which this identity/expression is given a name by Javon is highlighted in this excerpt, this seems like it could just be an entry point into a more critical and nuanced understanding of the story. I wonder what kind of discussion would have ensued had I tried to engage the students to think about the ways in which other power hierarchies were recreated—in this case, the ways in which the prince seemed to objectify the princesses who came to visit him and persuade the prince to marry them—in order to normalize his homosexual marriage/identity.

Then there were times in which the children seemed to move toward a stance that was critical of *privileging* and *othering*. During the discussion of *Jacob’s New Dress*, I asked the children to think about the possible lesson of the story:

Hartman: Now, what lesson can we learn from this story do you think?

Myra: Oh, I don't know.

Javon: Thinking, thinking.

Sara: Don't tell someone how they have to be. You're not the boss of them.

It is evident here, that Sara is critical of the othering that Jacob experienced by some of his classmates because of his choice to wear a dress. Her response, "You're not the boss of them," highlights a stance that opposes the privileging of certain expressions of gender over others.

I have reflected much on the ways I responded, or could have responded to different moments within the literature discussions. In the excerpt that follows, during the discussion of *Jacob's New Dress*, I reflect on the ways in which the discussion could have went:

Hartman: "Let's get the sewing machine," she said finally. Jacob felt the air refill his body. He grinned. Mom smiled back. "There are all sorts of ways to be a boy, right?" What does that mean? That sentence, "There are all sorts of ways to be a boy?"

Donald: She means that a boy can be anything. He could be like a pirate or a princess, whatever or like a girl.

Javon: I was tryin' to say that boys could wear dresses if they want.

Hartman: What if this happened in real life and you saw a boy student who came to school in a dress? I want you to think about it.

Myra: I can't imagine that happening.

Tariq: I would get a yardstick and whack his head off.

Students: <Laughing>

Hartman: Whoa. Really? Who can respond to that?

Javon: Uhm. I disagree with Tariq cuz that would be kinda like a bully. What I would do is kinda say, 'hmmmm. Don't listen to anyone else who bullies you—just be yourself. That's all I'd say.'

Donald: Uhm. The person who bullies you tell the teacher.

Hartman: Ya, but what else could you do to help that person being bullied?

Donald: Just tell that person that's a bully, to just tell them to be kind.

Aliya: If they were bullying him, I would say what if you wore that clothes like that. Would you like that if they all laugh at you?

Sara: I would say don't be their friends and come play with me. I will be kind to him.

Tariq: I don't like that. I would still not like him.

I could have relied on the popular anti-bully discourse in which Javon and Donald both highlight. However, I attempted to leverage the comment made by Donald, “The person who bullies you tell the teacher,” by encouraging the students to think about how they can move from the “bully is wrong” notion to more of a notion that exposes the underlying cause of the bullying behavior—in this case, heteronormativity seems to be the cause of Jacob’s mistreatment (getting bullied).

The Possibilities of Children’s Books

The five books used in this study are nowhere close to an exhaustive list of children’s books containing themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression. However, the ways in which the books were analyzed can encourage a similar kind of analysis of such-themed children’s books as teachers and parents choose books to read with their children. The analysis of these books, and categorizing them as either *strategic essentialist* or *queer* begs the question, “what does this mean?”

When I reflected on the two books in this study that were categorized *strategic essentialist*—*King and King* and *Elena’s Serenade*, I searched for similarities amongst the books. Though the content/themes of the books were quite different—*King and King* dealt specifically with gay identity, and *Elena’s Serenade* dealt with a young girl trying to gain access to a male dominated profession, they overlapped in the sense that a poststructural gender ideology did not emerge in neither story. In *Elena’s Serenade*, though gender stereotypes were challenged throughout the story, essentialist understanding of what it means to be a girl/boy were reinforced. Though Elena eventually learned how to blow glass, her creations were stereotypically feminine in quality and distinctly different from the creations in which the male glass blowers made.

And, though Elena never expresses a desire to express her gender “as a boy,” her choice to wear stereotypical boys’ clothing was only used for her to gain access to male sphere. Though the story creates space for a discussion of gender stereotypes and the harm they may cause, a traditional and normative understanding of gender is reified throughout the story.

Within *King and King* power hierarchies related to gender, race, and class were all recreated within the world of the story in order to normalize the gay marriage of the two princes. A poststructuralist ideology was absent in this story as well—as the norms associated with heterosexual marriage were reified. This is not to say that books categorized as *strategic essentialist* should be abandoned. These books offer crucial—usually marginalized—identities to be brought to light. Though I did not attempt this within the discussions of these books with the children in this project, I wonder what a discussion that goes deeper—one that examines the ways in which hierarchies of power are replicated—would look like, and whether or not these types of discussions elicit more, or less, liberatory discourses.

The books categorized as *queer* shared a common theme—not only did multiple and conflicting ideologies of gender and sexual identity surface in these books, but the conceptions of what it meant to be a boy or a girl were disrupted and nuanced by the actions of the characters in those books. Elmer in *The Sissy Duckling*, Bailey in *10,000 Dresses*, and Jacob in *Jacob’s New Dress* all struggled with their gender expression throughout the course of the stories and each character’s struggles and perseverance sends a likely message to readers is an important one—that the problem is with the underlying gender-/hetero-normative forces within society, not with the characters’ non-

normative gender expressions. Additionally, none of these books seemed to recreate power hierarchies from the dominant culture such as gender expression, race, and class in order to normalize homosexuality and/or non-normative gender expression.

Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth (2013) remind us that it would be inappropriate to insist that for a book to be categorized as queer, it must first be categorized as LGBT-inclusive or inclusive of non-normative gender expression, as queer theory seems to value a suspension and nuancing rather than imposition of classification. Previous research shows that the category of *queer*, as it pertains to children's literature, can extend beyond gender and sexual identity and include books that are "already on the shelf" (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013)—books that do not explicitly address non-normative gender expression and/or LGBTQ-identity. Additionally, a queer analysis can extend beyond the realm of gender/sexual identity to include a nuanced understanding of notions associated with families, homes, and time (Blackburn *et al.*, 2015).

Unfortunately, none of the books in this project address the notion of the *tomboy*—*i.e.*, a girl whose gender expression is stereotypically masculine. It would be helpful to examine the ways in which characters who identify or are labeled as such deal with this struggle, and to make the connections of these struggles to other forms of oppressions. At the time I was choosing books for this project, I was not aware of any books that directly addressed the *tomboy* identity, and am interested to investigate if there are such representations in children's books. *The Sissy Duckling* did a good job of portraying a character reclaiming and embracing the *sissy* identity. I am interested to find children's books that portray *tomboys*—flexible children who are able to "expand their repertoire to include both gender-traditional and nontraditional activities" (Plumb &

Cowan, 1984)—and to explore the ways in which children’s notions of gender can be impacted by this exposure.

The Narrowing of the Primary Literacy Curriculum

Throughout my time as a primary grades teacher in a large urban school district, I have seen the ways in which the neoliberal turn in our culture—specifically the ways in which the values associated with neoliberalism have seeped into the public education—has a negative impact on my classroom. Dyson (2015) has documented the devastating ways in which the primary literacy curriculum acts as an ideological filter—how children’s lives/identities are erased in schools, and the language associated with white, middle-class, norms (and tests) prevail.

Currently, there seems to be an obsession with labelling primary school children according to their reading levels from the moment they enter school, casting children into one of several categories—*blue* (far above proficient), *green* (proficient), *yellow* (below proficient), or *red* (far below proficient). In my school district, these categories are assigned based on a battery of reading assessments that measure children’s (in)ability to decode and comprehend texts at specific text complexity levels. It is no surprise that young children whose first language is not English, or who are from non-dominant backgrounds (*i.e.*, Standard English is not spoken in their homes), do not fare well on these assessments. This creates scenarios in which many non-White and non-English speaking children are labeled as “failing,” or “red,” or “far below proficient” the moment they walk into the Kindergarten classroom.

The knee-jerk reaction from administrators to this dilemma in my school district, and most others around the country, is for the teachers to assess more. An often hidden

reality that is created in primary classrooms in such contexts is that teachers are mandated to test their students more during class time, and hence, sacrifice classroom instruction.

For example, at the beginning of this school year, fifteen (of thirty-three) of my second-grade students were labeled “far below proficient” or “red.” Because of this, I was required to administer a one-on-one reading assessment each week to each of these fifteen students. On average, this test takes between ten to twelve minutes to administer, per child, equaling between 150-180 minutes of testing time each week, or about 30-40 minutes each day (out of a 140 minute daily literacy block). Teachers in such situations have to decide which instruction should be sacrificed within the primary balanced literacy block (phonics instruction, interactive read aloud, phonemic awareness, writing, word study, etc.). And, this does not even take into account the once-every-four-weeks testing the students coded as “yellow” are mandated to endure.

Clearly, this formula is inequitable. Literacy curricula in classrooms with children who are mostly considered “proficient” and “above proficient” are not sacrificed and are afforded the opportunity to remain intact. Usually teachers in these classrooms have more flexibility to engage their students in things like project-based learning, and collaborative and critical discussions of children’s literature. I fear that in classrooms with children from non-dominant backgrounds, engaging activities, like the classroom read aloud, are sacrificed. This project highlights the importance for the maintenance of the primary read aloud, and encourages primary teachers to create the read aloud as a space of critical engagement, meaning-making, and dissensus—activities in which all children in all primary classrooms should have access.

Children and Agency

This project highlights the fact that children already have ideas about LGBTQ-identity and non-normative gender expression. Primary teachers should acknowledge that their young students are already grappling with complicated issues related to identity and power. Hetero-/gender-normativity is a naturalized aspect of the school day and the literacy curriculum, and often casts queer/non-normative expressions of gender/sexual identity as taboo, strange, and wrong. It is crucial for primary teachers to expand the discursive practices of their students—that is, teachers should engage their students in discussions about a wide range of gender and sexual identities. We should also recognize children as social actors, as I do in this project, and pay careful attention to the ways in which they may propose solutions for dealing with social problems associated with gender and sexualities equity.

In examining the talk of each of the participants, some interesting findings emerge. Sara seemed to remain consistent in her advocacy for individuals to express their identities in any way they desire. Her comments were refreshing and provided a nice contrast to some of the homophobic comments made by other students. On the other hand, Myra also remained fairly consistent in her opinions about non-heterosexuality and non-normative gender expression. Even though Myra's opinions seemed contradictory at times, she remained consistent in her disapproval such expressions of gender/sexual identity.

Javon's comments were interesting and exposed an important contradiction. Though at times Javon names gay identity and seemingly expresses approval with that identity, he also expresses his disapproval of non-normative gender expression. At one

point, he even suggested physical violence toward someone who expresses their gender in a non-normative manner. Donald and Sara both seemed to be somewhat of quiet observers throughout the discussions. They both seemed at many times to echo the thoughts/comments of other students, though at time they did offer their own ideas.

Policy Implications

In addition to the pedagogical implications of this work, the implications on educational policy are plentiful. Critical issues in education are a major aspect of most teacher preparation programs; however, issues related to gender and sexualities equity in the elementary classroom are often either rendered invisible, not as important as other identity-related issues, or inappropriate to address within elementary classrooms. This research though, complicates these common notions of doing gender and sexualities equity work in elementary classrooms. Pre-service teachers should engage in activities that encourage them to understand identity from a poststructural and queer perspective, which can lead to learning new ways of opening up the elementary classroom and curriculum to more inclusive practices. Within teacher preparation literacy methods courses, students should be given the opportunity to critically analyze children's literature and should be exposed to literature that addresses LGBT-related issues and issues related to non-normative gender expression. Given the difficult and contentious context of attempting to do such work in elementary classrooms, pre-service teachers should be given the space to discuss the difficulties of doing such work, and should also be given the opportunities to explore how such work can be actualized and possibly observe this kind of work already being done in elementary classrooms.

In addition to teacher preparation programs, practicing teachers should be given the opportunity to explore the ways in which heteronormativity operates within their own classrooms. I am sure that many teachers are engaging their students in activities that encourage them to think about heterosexism and homophobia. Within the current era of corporate reform of public education in the United States, there is a heavy emphasis on test scores and the teaching of discrete skills in literacy education. Rarely, if ever, are practicing teachers given professional development opportunities that focus on cultural issues within the literacy curriculum. Practicing teachers need opportunities to stay up to date on new multicultural children's literature and to use literature in ways that can engage children in critical and thoughtful discussions of oppression, equity, fairness, and activism.

Possible Limitations: The Limits of Queer Theory

In keeping in conversation with educational research informed by queer theory, I explore a limitation offered through a critique of the work of the *No Outsiders* participatory action research team. In a collected volume of writings on the work of the *No Outsiders* team (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009), one of the contributors, Susan Talburt, offers an insightful critique to their work. In her critique, Talburt uses Edelman's (2004) concepts of the "Child" and queer futurism to make an eloquent argument for the inclusion of pleasure/desire (or, the discourses that surround gender/sexuality) in primary education classrooms. Talburt (2009) states,

The elision of sexuality, pleasure, bodies and desire in schooling is said to protect the child's innocence and to protect it from the spectre of the child molester, a figure conflated with the male homosexual, recruitment and contagion. Yet this

idea of protecting childhood innocence denies children engagement with crucial knowledges, silencing children (and adults) and erasing their sexual agency.

(p.88)

Relating back to the tension of the No Outsiders group between *strategic essentialist* approaches and *queer* approaches to pedagogy, Talburt argues that truly queer conceptions of pleasure/desire have no teleology—*i.e.*, the outcome of desire/pleasure are unknowable and outside the realm of the political. So, if the “discourse of desire” is brought into the classroom, in order for it to be “queer” it must have no teleology. She argues that when the “discourse of desire” is brought in the classroom through the means of strategic essentialism, a desired future is already articulated for that desire, which will privilege/normalize particular forms of pleasure/desire over others. It is at this point that Talburt complicates the the possibility that the entrance of *queerness* into the classroom and might bring and engages with Edelman’s concepts of *reproductive futurism* and *queer futurism*.

Edelman argues that mainstream politics uses the Child (with a capital C to represent the *figure* of the Child – not *actual* children) as its regulating force. Edelman states, “we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child” (p. 11). It is this regulation that Edelman coins *reproductive futurism*—which contrasts the future with the image of the non-reproducing queer. For Edelman, reproductive futurism “preserves in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (p. 2). What is needed to combat

reproductive futurism, is a rethinking and a use of queerness that requires us to “withdraw our allegiance, however compulsory from a reality based on the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism” (p. 4). Edelman encourages us to accept the negativity that the (non-reproducing) queer represents:

We do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future. We choose, instead, not to choose the Child, as disciplinary image of the Imaginary past or as site of projective identification with an always impossible future. (p. 31).

The way in which Edelman traces the concept of the Child as the regulating force to mainstream politics and reproductive futurism is helpful in articulating the ways in which the “discourse of desire” has been absent in primary classrooms, and at the same time rationalizing why it is important to resist reproductive futurism, and to conceive of pleasure/desire as having no teleology. But, Talburt, in the end of her essay, exposes an important paradox that is present in the queer work of the *No Outsiders Team*. Talburt writes:

If queerness is to speak of pleasure, desires and bodies in schools, how can it do so without submitting itself to the Symbolic’s realm of signification in the name of reproductive futurism? How can it avoid substantializing identities through the ontological literalism of the political order, a substantialization supported, if not made possible, by the figure of the Child and our collective future? My answer is that it cannot, for attaching political change and subject formation to pleasure works against pleasure’s very transformative potential. (p. 93).

In other words, Talburt argues that a queer approach cannot have a teleology, or a unified and defined result. Talburt goes on to say that, “schools cannot announce themselves as radically TBA...pleasure and queer must refuse the false hope of unity, the realization of the social subject and the regulatory effects of the politics of signification” (p. 94). As I think about the results of this project and the implications for future work, I think about the importance of this sentiment and reflect on the ways in which a truly queer approach cannot attempt to create a prescribed set of actions. Indeed, the results of this project are not intended to do as such, but instead are meant to encourage researchers and primary teachers to think about the ways a queer approach can open up unknowable possibilities in their work and in their classrooms.

Further Research

Queer theory still seems to be misunderstood and underutilized within educational research and classroom pedagogy. In reflecting on Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth’s (2008) inquiry into the inclusion of children’s books containing families headed by LGBTQ parents, they express the ways in which the term *queer* may put off early childhood educators because of the connotations the term may carry. I would again turn to the easily accessible definition put forth by Blaise & Taylor (2012), the idea that queer theory “is definitely not a theory about gay and lesbian identity. Queer theory is queer because it questions the assumption that there is any ‘normal’ expression of gender” (p. 88). I am interested to see the ways in which a queer analysis can inform research on topics in the primary classroom that fall outside the realm of gender/sexual identity. As this project highlights, queer theory creates new ways of understanding identity and the discourse produced within literature discussions.

This project only offers an analysis of five children's book that contain themes related to LGBTQ-identity and/or non-normative gender expression. I am interested in finding other children's books with such themes and creating a living, evolving document containing an analysis of the books. As LGBTQ-identity and issues related to non-normative gender expression become more approachable within educational research, specifically in primary schools, I argue that it is crucial to pay careful attention to the ways in which norms associated with gender, sexuality, race, socioeconomics, ability, etc. are reified, challenged, and disrupted within children's books. Before deciding to read a book with a child that takes up issues related non-normative gender expression and/or LGBTQ identity, it is important to analyze these critical aspects of the books and to think about the ways in which these issues can be discussed with young children.

The sharp focus of this project was on the ways in which issues related to LGBTQ identity and/or non-normative gender expression surfaced in children's books and in the discussions of such themed children's books. I am interested in exploring how discourses of gender/sexuality may intersect with discourses related to other facets of identity—race, socioeconomics, ability, etc. An intersectional approach in addressing social problems, though complex, can offer important insights which would otherwise be obscured.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this project and throughout my time teaching young children, I have thought deeply about the ways in which gender-/hetero-normativity regulate the classroom sphere. The large gap in research on gender and sexuality in primary schools needs to continue to be addressed by exploring the ways in which

children construct and make sense of their own and others' identities, and how they think about and grapple with the process of privileging and othering.

This research project highlights the ways in which young children not only actively construct meaning surrounding gender/sexual identity, but it also highlights the fact that we should listen more to the words of children. As Dyson (2015) calls upon primary educators to challenge the notion of “deficit” discourses—I heed that call, and wish to further it. I encourage teachers to challenge discourses that encompass race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, etc. that are cast as deficit, wrong, and inappropriate within our schools. I am encouraged at what a queer and more nuanced understanding of identity and the world can offer.

Afterword

On June 12, 2016, the United States experienced the largest mass shooting in its history at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. This horrific event not only brought to light issues of gun violence, but also issues of homophobia. The shooter, and his position as a presumably closeted gay man, brings up the importance of the necessity to discuss and identify the underlying roots of homophobia. As scholars like Michelle Fine (1996 & 2006) have noted, the “discourse of desire” is absent in elementary schools, even though explicit homophobia and heterosexism is rampant in the classroom—as this research project exposes. Though I agree with the idea that context does indeed matter, and that trusting relationships must be created in order to work against oppressions—specifically homo-/trans-phobia and heterosexism in the elementary classroom—there needs to be a stronger effort in addressing these issues. This project highlights young children's opinions about LGBT-identity, and more work must be done so that all

children can engage in critical and thoughtful discussions about fairness and equity in regards to sexual and gender identity.

We must be critical of the abundance of “quick fixes” neoliberal reform efforts may attempt to offer when addressing complex issues like homophobia. Instead of merely casting homophobia as a problem that must be addressed within schools, we must also look at the underlying causes of homophobia and give careful examination to the ways in which heteronormativity operates within schools to create such homophobia and often times aggression and marginalization of LGBT individuals and individuals with non-normative gender expressions.

During the moments of this project when the participants rejected non-heterosexuality and/or non-normative gender expression, I could not help but think of the ways this type of thinking and acting impacts children in classrooms that may identify, or who may one day identify as LGBT. I was also encouraged by the ways some of the children steadfastly rejected and disrupted heteronormativity.

The findings of this project serve as a call for the disruption of heteronormativity in elementary schools so that all of our students can develop in safe and affirming classroom contexts. In keeping in tune with the tenets of queer pedagogy, this kind of teaching/learning cannot be done in a prescriptive manner. Indeed, this work is never complete, and I encourage teachers to continually be aware of the margins that are created in their classrooms. Just as my student Javon suggests that “there’s a million thousand, million thousand ways” to be a boy or girl, this project is just one of a million thousand ways to begin to strive for gender and sexualities equity in the primary literacy classroom.

APPENDIX A

After-School Literacy Club Student Survey

Your name: _____

What is your favorite subjects in school?

Why do you like that subject the most?

What is your least favorite subject in school?

Why don't you like that subject?

What kinds of books do you mostly like to read?

What is your favorite thing to do with your family?

What is your favorite thing about school? Use the back of the paper to draw a picture of your favorite thing to do in school.

APENDIX B

After-School Literacy Club Parent Survey

Your child's name: _____

Who does your child live with? _____

What are the ages and names of your child's brothers and sisters?

What languages are spoken in your home? _____

What are your child's favorite things to do at home? _____

What is your child's favorite thing about school?

What is your child's least favorite thing about school?

Thank you!

APPENDIX C

Description of Non-Focal Texts

Only Passing Through, by Anne Rockwell:

This biographical text tells the story of Sojourner Truth with a particular focus on her slavery abolition activism. The story recounts her experiences as a slave and having been sold three times by the time she was thirteen years old, of her experience witnessing the death of her parents, and of her experience of being beaten by her owners for not understanding their orders.

Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon, by Patty Lovell:

This fictional story captures the experiences of the main character, Molly Lou Melon. Molly is a girl who is short for her age, has buck teeth, and a high-pitched voice. Though Molly experiences bullying from her peers because of her appearance, she perseveres as she remembers the advice of her grandmother: that she should walk proudly, smile, and sing loudly.

Each Kindness, by Jacqueline Woodson

This fictional story focuses on a character named Chloe, her group of friends, and a new girl at school, Maya. Chloe and her friends are reluctant to warm up to Maya because of the way she looks and dresses. It is clear that Maya's clothes are old, and it could be easily intuited that her family does not have much money. One day, Maya stops coming to school, and Chloe's teacher teaches the class a lesson about kindness. This lesson forces Chloe to reflect on her lost opportunity to be kind and to form a friendship with Maya.

Chato Goes Cruisin', by Gary Soto

In this fictional story, Chato and Novio Boy, the main cat-characters, plan to take a cruise, but mistakenly end up on a ship filled with dogs. Throughout their trip, they try to make amends with the dogs on the ship, and learn an important lesson about being accepting.

Frederick, by Leo Lionni

In this fictional story, the main character, Frederick and the other mice he lives with are all preparing for the winter. As the other mice gather and store grains and other food that will tide them over until the spring, Frederick does not appear to be offering much help. The mice get mad at Frederick because of this, and think he is just being lazy and is mooching off the other hard-working mice. However, when winter comes and the mice are bored, Frederick amazes them all. He entertains them by reciting poems and songs, and turn their boredom into fun, which helps the winter pass quickly. The other mice learn that Frederick was indeed working when they thought he was being lazy. He was gathering thoughts so that he could provide the other mice with entertainment throughout the long winter.

REFERENCES

- Arendt H. (1958). *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Arendt, H. (1977). What is freedom? In H. Arendt (Ed.), *Between past and future: Eight exercises in political thought*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Atkinson, E. & DePalma, R. (2010). *Undoing homophobia in primary schools: The no outsiders project team*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Banks, J. & Banks, C. (2009). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons.
- Biesta, G. (2006). *Beyond learning: Democratic education for a human future*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Biesta, G. (2010). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Blackburn, M. (2006). Combating heterosexism and homophobia. *Language Arts* 84(2), 172-173.
- Blackburn, M. (2012). *Interrupting hate: Homophobia in schools and what literacy can do about it*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Blackburn, M.V. & Clark, C.T. (2007). Making local and global connections in literacy research for political action. In M.V. Blackburn & C.T. Clark (Eds.), *Literacy research for political action and social change*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Blackburn, M.V. & Clark, C.T. (2011). Analyzing talk in a long-term literature discussion group: LGBT-inclusive and queer discourses. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 46(3), 222-248.

- Blackburn, M.V., Clark, C.T., Nemeth, E.A. (2015). Examining queer elements and ideologies in LGBT-themed literature: What queer literature can offer young adult readers. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 47(1), 11-48.
- Blaise, M. (2005). *Playing it straight: Uncovering gender discourses in the early childhood classroom*. New York: Routledge.
- Blaise, M. (2009). "What a girl wants, what a girl needs": Responding to sex, gender, and sexuality in the early childhood classroom. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 23(4), 450-460.
- Blaise, M. & Taylor, A. (2012). Using queer theory to rethink gender equity in early childhood education. *Young Children*, January, 88-97.
- Blount, J. (2000). Spinsters, bachelors, and other gender transgressors in school employment, 1850-1990. *Review of Educational Research*, (70)1, 83-101.
- Blount, J. (2006). *Fit to teach: Same-sex desire, gender, and school work in the twentieth century*. State University of New York Press: Albany.
- Brandenburg, R. (2008). *Powerful pedagogy: Self-study of a teacher educator's practice*. Springer: New York.
- Britzman, D.P. (1998). *Lost subjects, contested objects: Toward a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Britzman, D. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. *Educational Theory*, 45(2), 151-165.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminisms and the subversion of identity*. Routledge: New York.
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.

- Caref, C., Hains, S., Hilgendorf, K., Jankov, P., & Russell, K. (2012, November 30). *The black and white of education in Chicago's public schools: Class, charters, and chaos* [Scholarly project]. Retrieved March 01, 2016, from <http://www.ctunet.com/root/text/CTU-black-and-white-of-chicago-education.pdf>
- Connell, R.W. (1987). *Gender and Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R.W. (1983). *Which way is up? Essays on class, sex and culture*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Connell, R.W., Ashenden, D., Kessler, S., & Dowsett, G. (1982). *Making the difference: Schools, families, and social division*. Boston: Allen and Unwin.
- Connell, R.W., Connell, B., Radican, N., & Martin, P. (1987). *The changing faces of masculinity*. Sydney: Macquarie University.
- Davies, B. (2003). *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender*. Cresskill: Hampton Press.
- Davies, B. (2004). Introduction: Poststructuralist lines of flight in Australia. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 17(1), 3-9.
- de Haan, L., & Nijland, S. (2003). *King and king*. Berkeley: Bicycle Press.
- DePalma, R., & Atkinson, E. (Eds.) (2008). *Invisible boundaries: Addressing sexualities equity in children's worlds*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- DePalma, R., & Atkinson, E. (Eds.) (2009a). *Interrogating heteronormativity in primary schools: The no outsiders project*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- DePalma, R., & Atkinson, E. (2009b). 'No outsiders': Moving beyond a discourse of tolerance to challenge heteronormativity in primary schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(6), 837-855.

- DePalma, R., & Atkinson, E. (Eds.) (2010). *Undoing homophobia in primary schools: By the no outsiders project team*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Dyson, A.H. (2007). Literacy “basics” in childhood spaces: A critical perspective on the “basics”. In Y. Goodman & P. Martens (Eds.) *Critical issues in early literacy: Research and pedagogy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.
- Dyson, A.H. (2013). *Rewriting the basics: Literacy learning in children’s cultures*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dyson, A.H. (2015). The search for inclusion: Deficit discourse and the erasure of childhoods. *Language Arts* 92(3) 199-207.
- Edelman, L. (2004). *No future: Queer theory and the death drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ellsworth, E. (1997). Why doesn’t this feel empowering?: Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogies* (pp. 90-119). New York: Routledge.
- Epstein, D. & Johnson, R. (1998). *Schooling sexualities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ewert, M. (2008). *10,000 dresses*. Seven Stories Press: New York.
- Fierstein, H. (2005). *The sissy duckling*. Simon and Schuster Books: New York.
- Fine, Michelle (1998). Sexuality, schooling, and adolescent females: The missing discourse of desire. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(1), 58-71.
- Fine, Michelle (2006). Sexuality education and desire: Still missing after all these years. *Harvard Educational Review* 76(3), 297-313.

- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (A.M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1973). *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Truth and power. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (pp. 111-133). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Gavey, N. (1997). Feminist poststructuralism and discourse analysis. In M.M. Gergen and S.N. Davis (Eds.), *Toward a new psychology of gender: A reader* (pp. 49-64). New York: Routledge.
- Gee, J.P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: ideology in discourses*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Geeslin, C. (2004). *Elena's serenade*. New York: Athaneum Books.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Giroux, H.A. (1981). *Ideology, culture, and the process of schooling*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains: Longman.
- Grieshaber, S., & Cannella, G. S. (Eds.) (2001). *Embracing identities in early childhood education: Diversity and possibilities*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Halberstam, J. (2004). Oh bondage up yours! Female masculinity and the tomboy. In S. Bruhm & N. Hurley (Eds.), *Curiouser: On the queerness of children* (pp. 191-214). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haraway, D. (1998). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.
- Harvey, L. (1990). *Critical social research*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Harre, R. (1979). *Social being*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hermann-Wilmarth, J.M. & Sauto-Manning, M. (2007). Queering early childhood practices: Opening up possibilities with common children's literature. *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood* 5(2), 5-16.
- Hermann-Wilmarth, J.M. & Ryan, C.L. (2014) Queering chapter books with LGBT characters for young readers: Recognizing and complicating representations of homonormativity. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, DOI: 10.2080/01596306.2014.940234
- Hoffman, S. (2014). *Jacob's new dress*. New York: Whitman and Company.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (2013). *Teaching community*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jordan, E. (1990). Gender theory and the construction of masculinity in the infants school. *Department of Sociology, University of Newcastle, Australia*.

- Kessler, S., & Swadener, B. (1992). *Reconceptualizing the early childhood curriculum: Beginning the dialogue*. New York: Routledge.
- Kumashiro, K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 25-53.
- Kumashiro, K. (2002). *Troubling education: Queer activism and antioppressive pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Lather, P. (1995). Feminist perspectives on empowering research methodologies. In J. Holland & M. Blair (Eds.), *Debates and issues in feminist research and pedagogy* (pp. 292-307). Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lester, J.Z. (2014). Homonormativity in children's literature: An intersectional analysis of queer-themed picture books. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 11(3), 244-275.
- Letts, W.J. & Sears, J.T. (Eds.) (1999). *Queering elementary education: Advancing the dialogue about sexualities and schooling*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lionni, L. (1967). *Frederick*. New York: Dragonfly Books.
- Lovell, P. (2001). *Stand tall, Molly Lou Melon*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Luhmann, S. (1998). Queering/querying pedagogy? Or, pedagogy is a pretty queer thing. In W.F. Pinar (Ed.), *Queer theory in education* (pp. 141-155). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Luke, A. (1995). Text and discourse in education: An introduction to critical discourse analysis. *Review of Research in Education*, 21, 3-48.
- Mallory, B.L., & New, R.S. (1994). *Diversity and developmentally appropriate practices: Challenges for early childhood education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- MacNaughton, G. (1998). Improving our gender equity “tools”: A case for discourse analysis. In N. Yelland (Ed.), *Gender in early childhood* (pp. 149-174). New York: Routledge.
- Martino, W. (2009). Literacy issues and GLBTQ youth: Queer interventions in English education. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent research*. (pp. 386-399). New York: Guilford Press.
- Mayo, C. (2014). *LGBTQ youth and education: Policies and practices*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- M. W. (2015, October 23). Newest "Captain Underpants" banned from local book fair. Retrieved April 17, 2016, from <http://www.wxyz.com/news/region/monroecounty/newest-captain-underpants-banned-from-local-book-fair>.
- Olssen, M. (1996). In defense of the welfare state and of publicly provided education. *Journal of Education Policy* 11, 338-351.
- O'Shaughnessy, M., Russell, S., Heck, K., Calhoun, C., & Laub, C. (2004). *Safe place to learn: Consequences of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity and steps for making schools safer*. San Francisco: California Safe Schools Coalition Press.

- Patai, D. (1991). U.S. academics and third world women: Is ethical research possible? In S. Gluck & D. Patai (Eds.), *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history*. New York: Routledge.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Pilkey, D. (2015). *Captain underpants and the sensational saga of sir stinks-a-lot*. Scholastic: New York.
- Plumb, P. & Cowan, G. (1984). A developmental study of destereotyping and androgynous activity preferences of tomboys, nontomboys, and males. *Sex Roles*, 10(9-10), 419-429.
- Poteat, V.P. & Espelage, D.L. (2007). Predicting psychosocial consequences of homophobic victimization in middle school students. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 27(2), 175-191.
- Ramsin, C. Caucus of rank-and-file educators (CORE) takes over Chicago teachers union. *Gapers Block*, June 12, 2010, gapersblock.com.
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5, 631-660.
- Rockwell, A. (2002). *Only passing through: The story of Sojourner Truth*. Alfred A. Knops Books: New York.
- Rosenblatt, L. (2004). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1978).

- Rymes, B. (2009). *Classroom discourse analysis: A tool for critical reflection*. Creskill: Hampton Press.
- Ryan, C.L., & Hermann-Wilmarth, J.M. (2013). Already on the shelf: Queer readings of award-winning children's literature. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 45, 142-172.
- Sears, J., (Ed.) (2005). *Gay, lesbian, and transgender issues in education: Programs, policies, and practices*. New York: Routledge.
- Sedgwick, E.K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Segal, L. (1990). *Slow motion: Changing masculinities, changing men*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Sipe, L. (2008). *Storytime: Young children's literary understanding in the classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Somekh, B. (2005). Transforming professional knowledge through a global action research community. Paper presented at *First Congress for Qualitative Inquiry*. University of Illinois, May 5-7.
- Stafford, A. (2009). Beyond normalization: An analysis of heteronormativity in children's picture books. In R. Epstein (Ed.), *"Who's your daddy?" and other writings on queer parenting*. (pp. 169-178). Toronto: Sumach Press.
- Soto, G., & Guevara, S. (2007). *Chato goes cruisin'*. London: Puffin Books.
- Souto-Manning, M., & Hermann-Wilmarth, J. (2008). Teacher inquiries into gay and Lesbian families in early childhood classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*. (6)3, 263-280.

- Talburt, S. (2009). Toys, pleasures, and the future. In R. DePalma & E. Atkinson (Eds.) *Interrogating heteronormativity in primary schools: The no outsiders project*. (pp. 85-94). Stoke on Trent: Bentham Books.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: Morrow Press.
- Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Uetrict, M. (2014). *Strike for America: Chicago teachers against austerity*. New York: Verso Books.
- Walkerdine, V. (1986). Poststructuralism theory and everyday social practices: The family and the school. In S. Wilkinson (Ed.), *Feminist social psychology: Developing theory and practice* (pp. 57-76). Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Walkerdine, V. (1990). *Schoolgirl fictions*. London: Verso Books.
- Warner, M. (Ed.) (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Woodson, J. (2012). *Each kindness*. Nancy Paulsen Books: New York.

VITA

NAME: Paul Hartman

EDUCATION: B.A., Urban Elementary Education, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 2005

M.Ed., Instructional Leadership, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 2008

Ph.D., Curriculum & Instruction: Curriculum Studies; Graduate Concentration: Gender & Women's Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 2016

ELEMENTARY TEACHING: Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois

James Shields Elementary School:
First through Third Grade reading resource teacher, 2005-2006
Fourth Grade classroom teacher, 2006-2007
Fifth Grade classroom teacher, 2007-2008
Eighth Grade writing teacher, 2008-2010
Second Grade classroom teacher, 2010-2012

George B. Armstrong School of International Studies:
Second Grade ESL, language arts and social studies teacher, 2012-2016

UNIVERSITY TEACHING: University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois:

CI 505: Integrated Reading and Writing Instruction, 2011
ED 257: Foundations of Literacy Learning and Teaching, 2012
ED 394: Survey of Children's Literature, 2013
ED 341: Teaching Language and Literacy in the Urban Elementary Classroom II, 2013

Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois:
EDU 533: Reading and Writing Instruction and Improvement, 2015
EDU 657: Foundations of Language Minority Education, 2016

RESEARCH INTERESTS: Critical literacy, queer theory, feminist theories, primary literacy, critical pedagogy, Foucault, children's literature, LGBTQ-related issues in elementary schools, gender studies, critical childhood studies.

SELECTED
COURSEWORK:

Undergraduate Coursework:

Urban Educational Policy Studies
Elementary Teaching Methods
Queer Theory

Masters Level Coursework:

Testing and English as a Second Language Instruction
Curriculum Theory
Advanced Educational Psychology
Literacy Improvement in Schools and Districts
Diagnosing Reading Problems
Feminist Theories
History of Same-Sex Desire in the United States
Language and Gender

Doctoral Level Coursework:

Proseminar in Literacy, Language and Culture
Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry in Education
Feminist Knowledge Production
Language Ideologies
Foucault
Critical Race Theory in Education
The Art of Academic Writing

Qualifying Exams:	Passed August, 2014
Oral Preliminary Exam:	Passed November, 2014
Dissertation Defense:	Passed May, 2016

PEER-REVIEWED
PRESENTATIONS:

- Hartman, P.** (2009, December). *Queer thinking in the classroom: From conception to (un)reality*. Paper presented at the 6th International Conference on Teacher Education and Social Justice, Chicago, Illinois.
- Hartman, P.** (2012, November). *Queering conceptions of primary literacy and youth identity*. Paper presented at the Literacy Research Association's 62nd Annual Conference, San Diego, California.
- Katsarou, E., Podsiadlick, E., **Hartman, P.** (2015, February). *Re-imagining urban teacher preparation: Investing in university-school collaborations*. Interactive Dialogue at The National Council on Teacher Education's Annual Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Hartman, P.** (February, 2016). *Using literacy as a tool to challenge gender-/hetero-normativity with second-graders*. Paper presented at the National Council for Teachers of English Assembly of Research, Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Hartman, P. (April, 2016). *Exploring the use of literacy as a tool to challenge gender-/hetero-normativity with second-graders*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association's 100th Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

SERVICE: Mentor Teacher, Chicago Public Schools and University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007-2016.

Chicago Teachers Union, School Voting Delegate, 2008-2016

James Shields Elementary School, Chicago Public Schools, Local School Council Teacher-Representative, 2010-2012

George B. Armstrong School of International Studies, Local School Council, Teacher-Representative, 2014-2016

Chicago Teachers Union, Executive Board Member, 2014-2016

Illinois Federation of Teachers, Voting Delegate, 2014-2016

American Federation of Teachers, Voting Delegate, 2014-2016

Reviewer, Literacy Research Association 2015 Annual Conference.

Reviewer, American Educational Research Association 2016 Annual Conference.

AWARDS: UIC College of Education, Office of Research Travel Grant, 2015 & 2016 (\$500, consecutively)

UIC Graduate College Student Travel Presenter's Award, 2016 (\$250)

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND AFFILIATIONS: American Educational Research Association
Literacy Research Association
International Literacy Association
National Council for Teachers of English
Chicago Teachers Union
Illinois Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers

CERTIFICATIONS: Illinois Type 03, Elementary Teaching (Grades K-9)
English as a Second Language Endorsement (Grades K-9)

Language Arts Middle School Endorsement (Grades 5-8)
German Language Endorsement (Grades K-9)
Social Science Middle School Endorsement (Grades 5-8)

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Early and
Middle Childhood: Literacy, Reading, and Language Arts