

Queering as a Critical Imagination: Educators Envisioning
Queering Schools Praxis Through Critical Participatory Action Research

by

Lindsay Cavanaugh (she/her)
BA, Queen's University, 2014
BEd, University of Victoria, 2015

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

It is well documented that hetero/cisnormativity is prevalent in schools. Queerness predominantly enters schools through anti-Queerphobia work, efforts to protect and include “at risk” gender and sexually creative youth from overt violence and discrimination. ‘Normative’ conceptions about gender and sexuality, however, are not just present in overt gender policing; they lurk in how Queer (LGBTQIA2S+) people are constructed as (in)visible, ‘humourous’, and brave/excessive in and around schools. Hetero/cisnormativity – a hegemonic discourse that interlocks with colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism – is at the heart of why gender and sexually expansive people are not thriving in schools. Mainstream efforts to protect and include Queer people (particularly youth) do not combat hetero/cisnormativity. By focusing solely on the ways that Queer youth are suffering in schools, these strategies absolve schools of looking deeply at how they (re)produce norms and hierarchical, non-reciprocal relationships through space, curriculum, and pedagogy that negatively impact everyone. Through a five-month critical participatory action research (CPAR) project, informed by queer and feminist frameworks, nine activist educators who formed the *Queering Schools Collective*, explore ways that Queerness/queerness does and can exist in schools beyond protective and assimilationist mainstream efforts. Educators Bridget, Kat, Gabby, Lauren, Max, Gayle, Reagan, Ronnie and Sarah co-researched ways to queer schools through examining the following concepts: inclusion, queerness/queering, and queering schools (space, pedagogy, and curriculum). Analyzing individual interviews, focus group meetings, and select journal entries, this thesis proposes that *queering* is an orientation towards desire, hope, and thriving; it rejects Queer deficiency narratives and positions queerness as non-dominant ways of being, acting, knowing, and valuing. This thesis likewise conceptualizes *queering schools praxis* as a flexible, situational process that engages multiple strategies concerned with disruption, reciprocity, and care. Finally, through interpreting collective members’ observations about the process, this thesis positions radical community spaces, where people can dream and strategize, as crucial for enabling *queering school praxis*.

Key Terms

This thesis understands and utilizes these terms in the following ways.

LGBTQIA2S+: This is an acronym that stands for ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer, intersex, asexual and two-spirit’. There is a plus at the end of the acronym to demonstrate that not all the identities are represented. People write, say, and reference the acronym differently.

gender and sexual minorities; or gender and sexually creative/expansive people: As a synonym for LGBTQIA2S+ or Queer, I often write one of the following: gender and sexual minorities; gender or sexually creative people; or gender and sexually expansive people. I borrow the term ‘gender creative’ from Diane Ehrensaft (2011), whose research team coined the term as a way to communicate gender fluidity in an affirming way. See Pyne (2014) for more information regarding paradigm shifts towards gender nonconforming children and youth.

cisgender: This term refers to people who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth.

trans: This is an umbrella term for people who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. This could include people who feel they are another binary gender (e.g. trans man, trans woman, male-to-female, female-to-male etc.) or that they are a combination of binary genders or neither (non-binary, bi-gender, a-gender, gender-Queer, gender-conforming etc.). Ultimately, trans identities relate to gender identity (how an individual perceives their gender), not gender expression (how a person dresses or acts), or sexual orientation (to whom a person is attracted).

two-spirit: This is a cultural term for Indigenous peoples that can relate to sexuality and/or gender depending on the context. Not all Indigenous peoples embrace this term; but when individuals do, it can also denote specific cultural roles.

Queer: When I capitalize this word, I am using it as an umbrella term to represent non-dominant sexual orientations (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer, questioning etc.), gender identities (e.g. trans, non-binary, gender-queer, gender-fluid, gender-nonconforming, gender-creative, two-spirit etc.), and sexes (intersex). In other words, I am using it as a synonym for any of the following: LGBTQIA2S+ people; gender or sexual minorities; gender or sexually creative people. I use it as an adjective (e.g. ‘Queer students, and’ ‘Queer educators’ etc.). Some collective members use the term as a noun occasionally (e.g. ‘it’s great being in a group of Queers’). Based on what

I've observed in the literature, capitalizing this term is not typical. I do it to help readers distinguish between the word's other meanings.

queer(ness)(ing): When I do not capitalize queer, I am using it to connect to queer theories. As a noun and adjective, 'queerness' and 'queer' represents a non-dominant way of being, acting, knowing, and valuing that is rooted in disrupting oppressive norms and systems. As a verb, 'to queer' or 'queering,' means to enact those values in spaces.

Queerphobia: I am using this an umbrella term for homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. I discuss throughout this thesis that Queerphobia is symptomatic of hetero/cisnormativity. For consistency, I capitalize Queerphobia because it signifies social punishments that are generally directed towards Queer people (although cisgender and heterosexual people can also experience Queerphobia if they are perceived as Queer). While Queerphobia is likely also a rejection of queerness – non-dominant ways of being, acting, knowing, and valuing – people generally associate it with gender and sexuality. It is therefore capitalized to correspond with my capitalization of Queer to represent non-dominant gender and sexual identities.

hetero/cisnormativity: This term refers to the widespread belief in many cultures that heterosexuality is the only natural desired sexual orientation, and that gender is a binary based on biology.

Turtle Island: Occasionally, I make reference to Turtle Island. This is the name that some Indigenous peoples use to describe the continent of North America (Robinson, 2018). The term relates to the creation stories of some First Peoples (Robinson, 2018). Over the past few years, Indigenous activists have made efforts to reclaim traditional names (Robinson, 2018). I write the term Turtle Island/Canada because I have seen other activists and scholars make that disruptive linguistic choice and wish to follow their lead.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Key Terms.....	iv
Table of Figures	x
Acknowledgments.....	xi
Prologue: Queering Is	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	2
My Positionality As Researcher.....	9
Who am I?.....	9
Where do I come from?	10
Why I am here on this land doing this research?	10
A “Conflicted” Theoretical Standpoint.....	13
What are the strengths and weaknesses of postmodern theories?.....	14
What is conflicted practice?.....	19
What are Native feminist theories?.....	20
What are the strengths and weaknesses of critical and queer pedagogy?.....	22
A Note on Language & Unknowability	24
What terms do I use?.....	24
How do I use the term Queer/queer?	25
Why do I write queer as a verb sometimes?	26
How do I use the word praxis?	27

What are the limitations of our words?.....	28
The Value of Intimate & Accessible Academic Writing.....	30
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	32
Why Do Research on <i>Queering Schools</i> ?.....	32
Why Are (Queer) People Not Thriving in Schools?.....	34
What is a (hegemonic) discourse?	35
What is hetero/cisnormativity?	36
How is hetero/cisnormativity enacted in and around schools?.....	42
Why is hetero/cisnormativity prevalent in schools?.....	50
What are the effects of hetero/cisnormativity?.....	54
How Can (Queer) People Thrive in Schools?.....	59
Why should we move away from Queer deficiency narratives?	60
What can we learn from Kumashiro’s types of anti-oppression education?	64
What stances do schools take towards gender and sexual diversity work?	72
What is queer thrival?.....	80
Chapter 3: Methodology	82
Understanding Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR).....	83
What is CPAR?.....	83
What are the stages of CPAR?.....	84
How is CPAR different from participatory research and action research?.....	85
What paradigms inform CPAR?.....	87
Why is CPAR suitable for this study?	88
Enacting Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR).....	90

	viii
How did I ensure this study was ethical throughout?	90
How did I recruit and select educators?	92
Why did I focus on educators?.....	93
Who were the collective members?	94
What data did I collect?	96
How did I code and analyze data?	97
How did I measure validity in this study?	97
Chapter 4: Findings.....	101
Cluster 1: How Collective Members Defined Queer(ness)(ing).....	101
How did collective members define queer(ness)(ing) in general?.....	102
How did collective members understand the project of queering schools?.....	116
Cluster 2: How Collective Members Responded to Inclusion.....	126
How did collective members respond to the idea of inclusion?	126
Cluster 3: How Collective Members Perceived Their Role as Educators	137
How did collective members see themselves as educators?	137
Cluster 4: How This CPAR Project Impacted Collective Members.....	140
How did educators experience CPAR?.....	141
Summary of Findings.....	146
What is queer(ness)(ing) according to these educators?.....	146
How can we queer schools according to these activist educators?.....	147
What are the limits and merits of inclusion according to the collective?	147
How do these activist educators see themselves?	148
What was the value of forming a collective according to these educators?	148

Chapter 5: Discussion	149
Understanding Queering Schools as De/Reconstructive Work	149
Queering schools as deconstructive (disruptive) work.	151
Queering schools as reconstructive (irruptive) work.	152
Bringing together ‘Inclusion’ & ‘Queering’ in Praxis	154
Inclusion as care, but not necessarily reciprocity or disruption.	155
Queering schools praxis as changing stances	157
Conflicted Practice: As Long as There is Disruption, Reciprocity & Care	160
The Role Educators & Communities Can & Do Play in <i>Queering Schools Praxis</i> ...	161
Fostering community enabled praxis for the collective.	161
Summary of Discussion	165
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	166
Scope of Research.....	169
Significance of Research.....	170
Further Considerations for Research	173
Bibliography	175
Appendix.....	194
Appendix A: Consent Form	194
Appendix B: Journal Explanation.....	198
Appendix C: Initial Interview Questions	200
Appendix D: Exit Interview Questions.....	201

Table of Figures

<i>Figure 1. Summary of synthesized gender and sexual diversity framework</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Figure 2. Collective members' bios</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Figure 3. Visual summary of broad and sub-categories for queer(ness)(ing)</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>Figure 4. Collective members associations with the word inclusion</i>	<i>120</i>
<i>Figure 5. Queering schools praxis as conflicted</i>	<i>153</i>

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Prologue: Queering Is

queering is remembering something very old

queering is living unapologetically

queering is building community

queering is building defiance

queering is transparency

queering is consent

queering is reciprocity

queering is holding space

queering is refusing judgment

queering is embodiment

queering is resistance

queering is constantly in motion

queering is expansive

queering is softness

queering is hope

queering is resilience

queering is thriving

queering is love

queering is magic

queering is

I start this thesis with a found poem constructed out of quotations from nine activist educators because their words illustrate that queer/Queer is not static. Queering can be disruption, reciprocity, and care. I maintain throughout this thesis that queer(ness)(ing) is a radical imagination, a desire-based framework for disrupting and reconfiguring Western schooling systems (Tuck, 2009, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Queering is hope, resilience, thriving, love, and magic.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Can gay ... lesbian theories [queer theories, trans theories, two spirit theories] become relevant not just for those who identify as [LGBTQIA2S+] but for those who do not? What sort of difference would it make for everyone in a classroom if [LGBTQIAS2+] writing was set loose from confirmations of [Queerphobia], the afterthoughts of inclusion, or the special event? (Britzman, 1995, p. 151)

Nearly twenty years ago, Deborah Britzman (1995) asked that question, which remains relevant today. About four years ago, I was facilitating a lesson with a group of Grade 10 students on my final teaching practicum relating to gender and sexual diversity. Post-class, I was wobbling down the hall, various objects in hand: paint, bits of left-over-canvas, a few signs. One of the teachers saw me struggling to carry the materials. *Can I help?* she asked approaching with a smile. I nodded in relief. *This looks fun*, she replied enthusiastically. I explained I had just completed a lesson where we talked about different Queer identities, the notion of coming out, and created an art mural. *Interesting*, she stated. I then proceeded to tell her how great it was to be able to talk about such things in the context of a classroom and how meaningful it was for me as a Queer teacher. At that point, she fidgeted and gripped what she was carrying: *Are we not supportive enough though? I guess I'm just surprised you feel stuff like that is so necessary. I feel like we've come such a long way. We're such a progressive district, province, and country, no?*

I did not take this conversation as an opportunity to educate my colleague about the nuanced and complex experiences of Queer people in schools. At that moment in

time, I did not know how well documented Queerphobia is in schools, both in Canada (Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor & Peter, 2015) and internationally (Baum et al., 2014; Callender, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2013; Greytak, Kosciw & Boesen, 2013; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer, 2012). I was a young, soon-to-be teacher trying to make sense of lesson planning, British Columbia's new curriculum, and how to differentiate instruction. I had certainly experienced discomfort, frustration, shame, and exclusion in school spaces as a result of being Queer, but I did not know how common my experiences were. That, for example, according to Canada's first national survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, 64% of all LGBTQIA2S+ students and 78% of gender minority students felt unsafe in schools (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Or, in a later national survey, up to 55% of trans youth reported being bullied at least once as a result of their gender identity or expression (Veale et al., 2015). I did not know at that time that only about half of school districts across Canada have gender and sexuality support groups, commonly referred to as Gender & Sexuality Alliances (Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor et al, 2016). Nor was I aware that there was and remains very little quantitative and qualitative research specifically highlighting the experiences of racialized Queer youth, educators, and families navigating schools (Brockenbrough, 2015; Goldstein et al., 2019; de Vries, 2014).

While I had never felt particularly affirmed in schools as a Queer woman – who is both centred as a result of my whiteness, middle/upper class background, cisgender identity and decentred by my sexual orientation – it was both cathartic and saddening to find research that echoed my experiences of feeling out of place (e.g. Benson, Smith & Flanagan, 2014; Connell, 2015). I found it deeply troubling to discover that more than

one quarter (27%) of Queer educators received advice to conceal their identity or avoid talking about anything LGBTQIA2S+ while teaching (Taylor et al., 2015). During my program and as I entered the field, I had certainly experienced what Connell (2015) describes as the difficult choice to split one's Queer sexual or gender identity from their professional role, to knit those roles together in a haphazard way, or to quit the profession altogether because LGBTQIA2S+ identities are often positioned in conflict with professionalism (Deverall, 2001; Ferfolja and Hopkins, 2013; Lugg and Tooms, 2010; Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Nonetheless, I did not turn this conversation into a 'teachable moment.' I did not state that only 26% of Canadian teacher candidates received any formal instruction, any mention, about gender or sexual diversity during their teacher education program (Taylor et al. 2015). Instead, I pursed my lips and asked her what she meant by supportive. She answered: *Well kids aren't getting beat up and we have a GSA here. We care so much about inclusion at this school.* She smiled and gestured towards a few rainbow posters on the walls.

After walking away and thinking about that hallway interaction, a few insights occurred to me. First that my teacher colleague seemed to think we have arrived at a place of thriving for LGBTQIA2S+ people. Second that she conceived of gender and sexual diversity in schools as protection, safety, and belonging measures for Queer youth. And third that Queerness/queerness did not currently have a much room in the time and space of schooling outside the realm of protecting and including vulnerable youth. I start my thesis recalling this interaction because it is these problematic assumptions that foreground my inquiry: that we have arrived at a place of thriving for LGBTQIA2S+ people in schools; that positive change for Queer people is inevitable and passive; that

gender and sexual diversity in schools should *only* be about safety and belonging; and that Queerness/queerness does not have a place in other aspects of schooling like curricula, assessment, pedagogy, policy, and organizational structure.

I will concede that according to colonial perspectives, my teacher colleague was not inaccurate in saying we have come a long way when it comes to gender and sexual minorities. Turtle Island/Canada is often considered an international leader regarding LGBTQIA2S+ rights (Rau, 2015; Rayside, 2008, 2014). But Canada, like other nations around the globe, both criminalized and pathologized Queer people. Compared to other places, Turtle Island/Canada does offer many legal protections for LGBTQIA2S+ people (Rau, 2015), but many of these rights, like the right to serve in the military, to marry, or to adopt children, focus largely on sexual minorities and are about offering the same opportunities that are afforded to the dominant heterosexual and cisgender population. These rights do not translate into transforming society's widespread and colonial belief that gender is a binary and that heterosexuality is the one and only natural and desirable sexual orientation (also known as hetero/cisnormativity) (Mulé, 2006; Ruti, 2017). Nor do they automatically dispel Queerphobia (homophobia, biphobia and transphobia). For some queer and critical theorists, acquiring rights, like marriage and adoption, are assimilationist and domesticating; according to them, rights are about absorbing certain Queer people (largely those who are white, educated, and middle class) into the dominant heteropatriarchal and colonial culture (e.g. Ahmed, 2012; Arvin, Tuck, Morrill, 2013; Ruti, 2017; Warner, 1993). It is important therefore to challenge the thinking that because Canada has more rights relative to other nations that we have arrived at a utopia wherein Queer people are thriving. Much work remains to be done.

There is also a danger in thinking that we are *only* moving forward when it comes LGBTQIA2S+ people for two reasons. Firstly, that statement neglects that “most (but not all) Indigenous nations on Turtle Island had diverse gender systems that exceeded the binary of men and women prior to colonization” (Laing, 2018, p. 3). Accepting and valuing gender and sexually creative people is not a new phenomenon, a moving *forward* per se, but a worldview that many First Peoples maintained prior to colonization, and so is a sort of moving *backwards* (a remembering). Or as one of the participants/co-researchers for this project explained while reading this thesis: change is a cyclical process. From a Eurocentric perspective, forward is often seen as the desirable motion and backwards as a regressive motion. She encouraged me to imagine progress as a circle – as movement that is connected to the past, present, and future. The second danger of seeing movement in a linear way is that it might suggest positive advancements are inevitable and thus do not require ongoing action. Relevant examples showcasing that advancements are not inevitable can be found in Ontario and Alberta. This is apparent when it comes to both gender and sexual diversity and also Indigenous education. For example, in 2015, Ontario updated its original 1998 sexual education curriculum to address gender and sexual identities in affirming ways along with other previously absent topics. With a change of provincial government, however, this curriculum was rolled back in 2018 and is now being fought by many advocates and activists through human rights complaints. A similar regression can be seen in Alberta, where a change of government is bringing a return to an old Education Act: one that gives power to educators to decide whether or not to tell parents about a student’s involvement in a GSA and loosens requirements for private schools to support LGBTQIA2S+ students. This

change essentially gives teachers the ability to ‘out’ children and youth to parents, which could result in harm for those young people. These examples show that it is possible for advancements to be lost or stalled. The steps we take forward are therefore not assured but the result of continuous action. Instead of saying statements like *we are moving forward*, or *we have come so far for LGBTQIA2S+ people*, I find it more helpful to articulate that our path forward requires recalling and (re)learning multiple non-dominant ways of knowing and being.

So how can we recall and (re)learn non-dominant ways of knowing and being? And what might those knowledges and worldviews be exactly? This thesis puts forward *queering* as non-dominant ways of being, acting, knowing and valuing that functions as a “counter-discourse” (Foucault, 1980), “a critical imagination” (Giroux, 1993), and a disruptive-irruptive process (Young, 2016). I argue that *queering* is a conceptual and practical tool for reparative/reconstructive work – for queer praxis (the coming together of queer and anti-oppressive theories and educational practice) – that moves away from LGBTQIA2S+ pain and deficiency narratives towards desire/hope (Tuck, 2009, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2014) and queer thriving (Greteman, 2018). I draw on the literature to make a case for more radical gender and sexual diversity efforts in schools. I begin by outlining the ways that if Queerness/queerness is present in schools at all, it largely manifests as anti-Queerphobia work (e.g. Airton, 2013; MacIntosh, 2007; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010). “[H]ow ‘helping young queers’” becomes what Lee Airton (2013) calls “the singularity of ‘fighting school homophobia’ over and over again” (p. 535). Drawing on scholars that discuss queer theories and pedagogies, and through the voices

of my participants, a group of nine activist educators, I discuss ways that queerness can manifest in schooling beyond anti-Queerphobia work.

I address the following questions: *What is queering schools praxis according to a collective of local activist educators? How can schools' mainstream gender and sexual diversity efforts shift from an inclusion/protection model to a queering model (according to the Queering Schools Collective)? Is that shift desirable? Is it possible? If so, how do we proceed? What can we learn from the Queering Schools Collective about the role that educators can and do play in queering schools praxis?* Stated otherwise, I am interested if it is possible and worthwhile for schools to move away from simply trying to protect and include LGBTQIA2S+ youth to a *queering* approach that both deconstructs discourses embedded in our schooling system and reconstructs the system through a queer lens. Moreover, I wish to contemplate the role that educators can and do play in facilitating anti-oppressive movements in our “schooling-as-education” (Airton, 2013) system.

It is therefore through a survey of the literature, and an analysis of findings from a five-month critical participatory action study, where a group of nine local activist educators formed a collective, that I conceptualize *queering schools praxis*. In the pages that follow, I outline relevant scholarship and the data I acquired from initial/exit interviews, three focus group meetings, select participant journal entries, and my own personal reflections. Through relating the literature to my findings, I argue that we can *queer* our “schooling-as-education” (Airton, 2013) system. I posit that *queering schools praxis* is already happening at both the individual and collective level, in ways that are ongoing, messy, and conflicted. By “conflicted,” I mean that this process requires an

engagement with multiple positions towards gender and sexual diversity work. It is ultimately through my interpretation of my participants' voices, and my readings of queer educational research, that my understanding of *queering schools praxis* as “conflicted” comes to life.

My Positionality As Researcher

At our *Queering Schools Collective* meetings, we now often go around counter-clockwise in a circle (as I have since learned is protocol on Lkwungen & WSÁNEĆ territories). Our introductions first started off as fairly simple: our names, our pronouns, and where we are from. That introduction has since evolved into something more detailed and deeper. One of our collective members, a two-spirit Anishinaabe youth educator named Lauren gifted us with one of their cultural teachings: to start meetings by saying who we are, where we come from, why we are here on the land we are today, and what brought us to this work. They explained that naming where we come from is a way to provide an accountability structure. Lauren also noted that naming one's ancestry and reason for being on the land can also set us up in a way where people are more receptive to listening because it requires that people reflect on their complicity within systems of oppression. With that in mind, I will answer those questions.

Who am I?

I am Lindsay, a (non-practicing, certified) teacher, student/novice researcher, daughter, sister, and friend. I am a cisgender, white, Queer femme (feminine-presenting) woman. I grew up in an upper/middle class context. I consider myself able-bodied, although I live with a chronic illness whose symptoms ebb and flow.

Where do I come from?

My British, French, and Irish ancestors settled in what is now considered eastern Canada. Most of my extended family members, as well as my parents and sister, live in South-western Ontario. I come from London, Ontario, and spent the first eighteen years of my life divided between the quiet country town of St. Thomas and suburb of Westmount. As a child and youth, I was unaware I grew up on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendt, Attawandaron and Lenape peoples. I did not know that my childhood home bordered the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. Nor was I aware that those territories are covered by the Upper Canada Treaties six and two. When I was eighteen, I moved to Kingston, also Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory, where I completed my undergraduate degree in English Literature and French. It is on those territories that I first explored my passion for education and realized that I was Queer.

Why I am here on this land doing this research?

I originally found myself in on Lkwungen & WSÁNEĆ territories (Victoria BC) because I wanted to follow my heart, to set forward in a new direction I had not imagined. I left Ontario in 2014 to follow my first love. I felt stifled in Kingston, eager to feel that Queerness was not controversial, worthy of eliciting debates over positive space stickers in the Faculty of Education, or stares by strangers as I walked hand-in-hand with my partner. It is that year that I started a teacher education program in BC. I left Victoria about six months after I finished my teaching degree. I had left my first love and was craving my very own class and a fresh start. I was passionate to build a community and

connect with youth in meaningful ways – to work towards the ideal of education I had dreamed up.

It is with that vision and zeal that I set off to teach high school in a remote, fly-in Anishinaabe Oji-Cree community called North Spirit Lake First Nation. It is in that community of about three hundred people, a reserve not named on most maps, that I learned what intergenerational trauma looks like in reality. I learned how incredibly strong people are and how deeply flawed our education system continues to be. I also remembered what it felt like to feel very exposed as a Queer woman. I was thrown back to the hypervigilant state of my earlier days. I remember at a training session in Thunder Bay Ontario, as part of the three-week intensive job training for that position, listening to a guest speaker, a two-spirit elder who recounted the homophobia she experienced in her home community. She stated: *I wouldn't go back. I'd fear for my life.* Her words stayed with me. While I did not fear my physical safety in the community I lived, homophobia was just as much part of the landscape as was the snow. It was one other trait of colonization that manifested in the ways people talked, joked, and the graffiti that one could find scrawled inside abandoned houses.

But more than being reminded of what it feels like to be vulnerable and exposed as a result of my Queerness, I felt on a very visceral level the ways that I, as one of seven white teachers in that community, was a tool for colonization. We were coming into a community we did not grow up in, into a cultural context where our ancestors brought about cultural genocide, bringing our own concepts about knowledge and education. We were open-minded and kind-hearted, but we were still reproducing schooling as a colonial system. My brilliant students, who ranged from fourteen to fifty-four years old,

were largely not being served by this system. I learned that my students were receiving less funding than in provincial schools because First Nations schools follow an entirely different federal funding model, as they are required to per the Indian Act. In 2016, the funding gap between First Nations schools and public schools in Canada was estimated between 336-665 million dollars, and projected to be between 366-723 million in 2019 (see the Federal Spending on Primary and Secondary Education on First Nations Reserves). I also learned that as a result of the complexities of my students' lives (the ways poverty, racism, and trauma compounded) many of them were often perceived as incapable of 'succeeding' according to Eurocentric belief systems around schooling. I experienced a different kind of heartbreak that year, one that shook my understanding of my role as a teacher within a system I came to fundamentally disagree with.

While I maintain a love for teaching, an unrelenting conviction in the resilience and beauty of people, I lost faith in our education system. I did not want to work in schools anymore. I had grown attached to my wonderful students, but I was emotionally exhausted. I did not know how to 'make things better.' I felt complicit in perpetuating stories of white people coming into spaces to make things better. Teaching curriculum – any subject – seemed insufficient. How could I prioritize that over my students dealing with addictions, with mental health crises, with assault? I was burnt-out, but I could not go back to a regular classroom in a city and try to forget what I had seen. It is with that disenchantment that I turned to theory.

I came to theory "because I was hurting ... I wanted to make the hurt go away [and] I saw in theory ... a location for healing" (hooks, 1994, pp. 59). Paradoxically, I was drawn back to schooling, further education for myself, because while our schooling

system (re)produces dominant knowledges and power structures, it can also enable processes of deep learning. I still believe that learning can be liberating; it can open up new spaces and furnish us with hope for moving forward. I wanted to study and better understand what Kevin Kumashiro (2002) describes as the “paradoxical nature of schools that strive[s] to give students equal opportunity but function[s] to maintain various social hierarchies” (p. 1). I wanted to learn what scholars have said about how we can challenge the ways that schools (re)produce power. I also wanted to foster a community that could benefit and support activist educators as they engage in this difficult self-reflective and transformative work. I chose to centre Queerness/queerness in my research because it is my personal entry point into anti-oppressive work. I likewise wanted to draw on Queerness/queerness as a point of inspiration and possibility. It is with that desire that I arrived at the conclusion to do critical participatory action research: to create a *Queering Schools Collective* with a group of passionate, committed, and inspiring activist educators. What enabled me to work with a diverse group of educators – some of whom had years of experience and others who were newer to educational work – was my willingness to learn and create a communal space that reflected the desires and needs of that particular group. The goal was not to guide educators to a conclusion or specific actions, but merely to create a space where we could dream together about the sort of transformation we wanted to see happening in schools.

A “Conflicted” Theoretical Standpoint

While designing this research project, I drew on a number of theoretical frameworks to balance my desire for rigorous critique and optimistic transformation. This research is informed by poststructural feminism, queer theories, ‘Native feminism

theories' (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013), queer pedagogy, and critical pedagogy. All of these theories and pedagogies developed and continue to grow alongside activist movements. In this section, I take some time to loosely sketch out these theories/pedagogies, noting how they each enter anti-oppressive and/or educational work from different places. While they are wrought with tensions, I maintain that each offers valuable insights. Ultimately, I "reparatively read" (Sedgwick, 2003) these theories/pedagogies by compassionately acknowledging the shortcomings of each framework and emphasizing their strengths. In doing so, I take a "conflicted" (Armstrong, 2008) theoretical standpoint where I hold space for multiple perspectives, recognizing tensions without needing to dispel them.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of postmodern theories?

As I understand it, postmodern feminism evolved with the rise of postmodern and poststructural thinking that challenged the idea of 'woman' as real and stable (Mann, 2012). By that, Mann (2012) means that postmodernism ushered in a type of thinking that encouraged challenging taken-for-granted knowledge, which when applied to feminism expanded to notions of 'man' and 'woman.' Other feminisms perceive(d) being a woman as a purely biological reality that should not be questioned (Mann, 2012). Postmodernism/poststructuralism "contends that identity" – any identity from gender to sexuality to race – "is an essentialist category constraining rather than opening up possibilities for ... analysis" (Kirsch, 2006, p. 22). Like postmodern feminism, queer theories are also concerned with destabilizing identity categories; they advocate for fluidity, disruption, and anti-normativity. Adopting a postmodern lens to research and activism is powerful because it refuses dominant knowledge, which arguably carves out

space for new possibilities. Both postmodern feminism and queer theories “assert that inclusiveness requires relativity, and that it is with this perspective that we can free our analyses from fixed, if hidden, meanings and structures of power” (Kirsch, 2006, p. 20). Queer theories take a stance of “critiqu[ing] all things oppressively normal” (Mann, 2012, pp. 235), using sexuality, and now gender more broadly, as a springboard to think about identity.

Although I generally find it useful to analyze gender and sexuality in ways that stretch our existing understanding, I found adopting a purely postmodern feminist or queer lens for my study problematic for two reasons. Firstly, both postmodern feminism and queer theories are linked predominantly to Western white scholars (Mann, 2012) who miss the diverse perspectives of scholars of colour, including but not limited to Black/African and Indigenous scholars (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013; hooks, 1994). For example, bell hooks (1994) found that when “‘women’ were talked about [in feminist scholarship and activism], the experience of white women was universalized to stand for all female experience” (p. 120). Comparing gender education theory from Western Europe and Europe with Africa and South Asia, Fennell and Arnot (2009) found a similar problem. Non-Western feminist scholars were noting that “Western feminisms have used Western female-based structures of language, concepts, theories and models of reality and world views as a criteria against which experiences of all non-Western women as well as non-Western men can be known and written about” (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010, p. 618).

This is troubling because the “feminist concerns of white women, women of color, and Indigenous women ... often differ and conflict with one another” (Arvin,

Tuck, & Morrill, 2013, p. 10). Various African feminisms, for example, “emphasise the centrality of motherhood in African households and family organisation and the agency and power of mothers as the source of solidarity” (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010, p. 618). This focus on relational worlds – motherhood, sisterhood, and friendship – contrasts with some (liberal) Western feminist foci, including helping women enter the workforce and achieve independent and individualized goals. Moreover, various Native feminist theories “are often about not about achieving formal equality or civil rights within a nation-state” as is often the case in other feminist movements, “but instead [about] achieving substantial independence from a Western nation-state – independence decided on their own terms” (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013, p. 10). Postmodern feminism is therefore useful for destabilizing gender as taken-for-granted identities; however, it does not necessarily engage with the intersectional liberation concerns of Black/African, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) as well as other marginalized groups.

Another reason why I did not draw on postmodern feminism and queer theories exclusively as the framework for my study is because they are highly theoretical and have been critiqued as elitist. They both favour deconstruction. While deconstruction is often understood as synonymous with critical analysis, Jones (2011) explains that

deconstruction can be thought of more generally as a contestation of any form of containment. It involves a boiling up or a ‘dissemination’ that interrogates the limits that are put on things ... deconstruction is a strategy of critical reading but is not limited to that. It is a thinking of and at the limit, that patiently and persistently asks why any such limit stands in front of us (p. 96).

Alternatively said, deconstruction is a process of examining taken-for-granted knowledge and asking why it is maintained in the first place.

While thinking about concepts in non-stable categories is a theoretically “useful endeavor,” Young (2016) argues it is practically “unethical and demoralizing” because “[s]table categories exist not simply because of our structured minds, they are stable because they mediate tangible experiences of oppression” (p. 58). This builds off Foley’s (2003) concern with postmodernism, where he describes that while “[p]ost modernism attempts to criticize the dominant order . . . it is difficult to maintain values [because] it proposes that there are no intrinsic human values” (p. 44). It is helpful therefore to consider the ways that identities are constructed socially; however, if we *only* perceive them as social creations (we deconstruct them entirely), we might not have the tools to address the “tangible experiences of oppressions,” (Young, 2016, p. 58). Kath Browne & Catherine Nash (2010) share similar concerns to Young (2016) and Foley (2003).

Browne & Nash (2010) observe that

[n]ot everyone is enamoured with queer theories [and postmodernism’s] deconstructive tendencies and critiques have emerged from numerous quarters. Those involved in forms of identity politics such as second wave women’s or gay and lesbian and trans movements argue that denying the stability of the subject (women or lesbian) undercuts the ground on which political activism is built by denying the existence of a viable political subject (e.g. Hartsock, 19980; Richardson et al., 2006) (pp. 5-6).

Scholars like Wayne Martino & Wendy Cumming-Potvin (2018) agree with Browne and Nash’s concerns. They invite people to consider the “antinormative limits of

queer theory” (p. 689), one of which they name as an inability “to attend to the complexities of embodied understandings and experiences of gender” (p. 689). According to them, since queer theories first emerged out of gay and lesbian movements, queer theories’ emphasis on anti-normativity and deconstruction does not always speak to what different trans activists and scholars want to emphasize: the experiences people have living in their bodies (embodiment). Martino & Cumming-Potvin (2018) elaborate that the lived experiences of trans-gender people – what they know about ‘becoming legibly gendered subjects’ (265) – needs to be centred in generating trans informed knowledge and understandings, and in this regard, analysis must not just concern itself with ‘cultural inscription’ in terms of the norms governing the surgical demands involving bodily transformation, but attend to the ‘productive, creative work of the subject struggling to articulate itself within received categories” (p, 689).

In other words, because queer theories stress deconstruction, some scholars and activists assert that they neglect considering the ways that people experience identities in and through their bodies. For example, one can argue that gender is simply a construct; however, whether constructed or not people still move through the world as gendered beings, as humans who experience the world differently on the basis of how they understand their body, and how others perceive their body. If queer theories do not attend to embodiment, they are missing an important aspect of being Queer (Kaufmann, 2010; Kirsch; 2006; Teo, 2010; Rubin, 1998).

Martino & Cumming-Potvin’s (2018) concerns relate to the critiques Lovas, Elia, & Yep (2006) have identified in the literature. Lovas, Elia, & Yep (2006) note that there

is “much heated discussion about the political utility of queer theory: ‘some critics have portrayed queer theory as an esoteric and politically bankrupt approach that contributes little to social change’” (p. 7). Another scholar, Kirsch (2006) goes so far to say that queer theories take a privileged stance that “has consequences for those who are [not] able to weather or ignore the acts of physical and emotional abuse that many in de-valued positions experience” (p. 35). By “consequences” Kirsch (2006) seems to mean that when people emphasize deconstruction, they may be deflecting attention away from safety concerns and the ways that coming together on the basis of identity can mobilize community organizing and social change. Although I would not agree that queer theorizing uniquely causes harm, or that we cannot deconstruct *and* organize community, I take Kirsch’s point to heart: that we need to consider Queerness in lived terms. I maintain throughout this thesis that we should draw on constructed and embodied understandings of Queer/queer identities, and identity in general. In doing so I listen to scholars like Lovaas, Elia, & Yep (2006) and Armstrong (2008) who call applying a strengths-based lens to both LGBT studies (that value and consider identity in more embodied ways) and queer theories (that deconstruct identity). Pairing these two perspectives together can hopefully ensure that this study’s engagements with queer theories are operationalized (action-oriented), not just theoretical exercises.

What is conflicted practice?

Mary Armstrong (2008) calls holding this paradoxical understanding of identity as real/unreal – embodied/constructed – in one’s consciousness as a “conflicted practice.” This term comes up through her envisioning of “queer pedagogy as conflicted practice.” While she talks about conflict in terms of pedagogy (how one teaches and understands

teaching), we can relate the concept of “conflicted practice” more broadly to taking a compound approach towards research. Armstrong (2008) explains that:

the last twenty or so years have seen a burgeoning tension between identity-based politics in ‘lesbian and gay studies’ and ‘queer’ poststructuralism revision of subjectivity that works to overturn the hegemonic absolutism embedded in all fixed identity models. As a result, ‘queer pedagogy’ and ‘queer issues’ get caught between versions of sexual [and gender] subjectivity that are often positioned as necessarily opposed. I argue here that teaching queer issues is best done through a pedagogy of conflicted practice, that is, through the simultaneous recognition of gender and sexual identities as both (at least experientially) coherent/stable and as provisional/historicized (p. 86)

I listen to Armstrong (2008) and frame my research around theoretical frameworks that, in conjunction with each other, address the “coherent/stable” (real) and “provisional/historicized” (unreal) aspects of identity. Specifically, this thesis engages with theories/pedagogies that function to critique (deconstruct) and function to transform (reconstruct).

What are Native feminist theories?

I see ‘Native feminist theories’, a term coined by Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill (2013) as another cluster of theories linked to critique. Unlike postmodern feminism and queer theories, Native feminist theories “focus on compound issues of gender, sexuality, race, indigeneity, and nation” (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013, p. 11). Arguably, those drawing on Native feminist theories are more closely aligned with various non-Western feminist theories as opposed to Western feminisms because many Native/Indigenous, African & South Asian feminisms advocate that scholars engage fully with local communities,

worldviews, cultural practices and oral literatures (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Fennell & Arnot, 2009). This emphasis on local cultures is a strength-based lens that rejects deficiency narratives about non-Western cultures (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Fennell & Arnot, 2009). For example, many African feminism[s] “[t]akes care to delineate those concerns that are particular to the African situation. It also questions features of traditional African cultures without denigrating them, understanding that these might be viewed differently by the different classes of women” (Mekgwe, 2003, p. 7). Native feminist theories similarly attend to local contexts. Drawing on different scholars (Aluui & Meyer, 2001, 1998; Rigney, 1999; West, 1998), these theories strive to decentre whiteness and centre Indigeneity as it relates to specific nations. They focus on “the erasure of Indigenous women ... in ways that are not simply token inclusion of seemingly secondary (or beyond) issues, but rather shift the entire basis of how disciplines see and understand their proper subjects” (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013, p. 14).

While I am not Indigenous, Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill (2013) “do not view Native feminist theories as limited to the participation of those who are Indigenous, feminist, and/or women identified” (p. 11). This differs from Indigenous standpoint theory, which calls for researchers and practitioners involved in Indigenous research to be Indigenous (Foley, 2003). While some participants in this study are Indigenous, I am not an Indigenous researcher, nor is this research done from an Indigenous standpoint. I engage with Native feminist theories as an attempt to interrogate and decentre whiteness as I investigate queering/queerness.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of critical and queer pedagogy?

Up until this point, I have described theories that are predominately about critique. I now wish to briefly describe two pedagogies that I see as more related to reconstruction (transformation). The first pedagogy I wish to discuss is critical pedagogy, which is broadly associated with Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization, "knowing reality in order to better transform it" (Lather, 1986, p. 67). This way of understanding teaching/learning (pedagogy) arises from Freire's (1970) writing that describes the context of engaging with rural farmers in Brazil. He theorized that teaching people who are impoverished about systems of oppression could facilitate their own liberation and that of others. Critical pedagogy therefore concerns itself with how learning about one's social reality and acting on that knowledge can facilitate liberation. Because this project has been about creating a community for support and change, it embodies Freire's understanding of conscientization. The *Queering Schools Collective* (QSC) started as a critical participatory action research (CPAR) group where activist educators come together: (1) to better understand their positionality (as educators, as queer people or allies, and as humans with various intersecting identities); and (2) to strategize ways to change our social reality. Since the research phase ended, the group has decided to morph into a community network and to continue organizing in their local Victoria BC community. In this way, this research is not just about critique but also about fostering transformation/change in the context of the participants' lives.

Queer pedagogy is the second pedagogy that informed the research design. Like critical pedagogy, it too is concerned with helping people learn about their social reality to alter it. Neto (2018) explains that

[q]ueer pedagogy, based in these ideas of a queer theory against normalization, seeks to contribute to practices of education, analyzing the fluidity and the mobility of society and affirming that educational institutions should not attach themselves to one set model, since these ideals end up alienating, even excluding, certain individuals. For Britzman (1995), queer theory transgresses seemingly stable representations and, in this sense, queer pedagogy works to question situations of apparent normality in the classroom and concerns itself with the social production of what is learned (p. 256).

The goal of queer pedagogy is therefore to unsettle normalization, dominant knowledges and modes of teaching/learning (Britzman, 1995, 2012; Bryson & Castell, 1993; Hoad, 1994; Luhmann, 1998; Neto, 2018; Niccolini, 2016; Parker, 1994; Rands, 2016).

Examples of dominant knowledges that queer pedagogy could disrupt include: the ways that hetero/cisnormativity, patriarchy, neoliberalism, and colonialism manifest in curriculum; the ways educators organize the space of their classroom; and the ways educators facilitate learning. Queer pedagogy helps “question and challenge dominant models in schools ... by problematizing the very school structure, the normalization of teaching per se and of the fixed and exclusionary content that is presented” (Neto, 2018, p. 297). In sum, both critical and queer pedagogy are about applying understandings of oppression through a theoretical lens as a way to alter social realities. In this way, they are both avenues for theory-informed transformative action (praxis).

Pairing critical and queer pedagogies together, along with the other theories previously mentioned, is useful in conceptualizing *queering schools praxis*. When these theories and pedagogies come together, they address some of each other’s weaknesses.

Native feminist theories demand an intersectional and ongoing attentiveness to interlocking forms of oppression, which postmodern feminism and queer theories lack. Postmodern feminism and queer theories allow for a very expansive approach to conceptualizing identity, opening spaces that other frameworks do not allow for. And critical pedagogy emphasizes transformation and action, which calls for reconstruction, not just deconstruction. Bringing together multiple frameworks that realize the constructed and lived realities of Queerness/queerness, combats forgetting the embodied realities of LGBTQIA2S+ people by not seeing identity as simply constructed (Kirsch, 2006). Ultimately, these frameworks informed my research design. I engage with them throughout this thesis as a way to illustrate the need for a “conflicted” (Armstrong, 2008), compound theoretical standpoint that balances deconstruction (troubling/pulling apart/refusing limits) and reconstruction (re-imagining/re-enacting/rewriting).

A Note on Language & Unknowability

Before diving into my literature review, I wish to take a moment to both define terms I use throughout this thesis for reader clarity, and to emphasize the constraints of definitions. Listening to poststructural thinkers like Jacques Derrida (1967) and Roland Barthes (1977), I maintain that language is not fixed, but always evolving and socially constructed. Words are mirrors, reflecting our (often unquestioned) relationships with, positions in, and assumptions about our society.

What terms do I use?

For a quick definition of recurring terms, I offer a key terms section at the beginning of this thesis. When describing LGBTQIA2S+ people I generally use the following phrases: (1) Queer, (2) LGBTQIA2S+, (3) gender and sexual minorities, and

(4) gender and sexually creative/expansive people. All of those terms are broad ways to encapsulate all non-dominant *sexual orientations*, *gender identities*, and *sexes*. *Sexual orientation* refers to who a person is sexually and/or romantically attracted. Queer sexual orientations include, but are not limited to the following: lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual and asexual. *Gender identities* refer to how people perceive their own gender. Queer gender identities include, but are not limited to the following: trans, non-binary, gender-queer, gender-fluid, gender-nonconforming, and two-spirit (2S). *Sex* refers to a person's biology. Queer sexes include intersex people, who have a combination of chromosomes and/or genitalia, which are considered 'male' or 'female'.

I purposely use different words and phrases to represent Queer identities throughout this thesis to signal how I do not privilege one way of denoting these identities. I also recognize that some of these phrases may leave out certain identities depending on who is reading them and how they utilize these terms. There are times when I talk specifically about trans people, and may use terms like non-binary and two-spirit. When I am talking specifically about gender creative people, I am intentionally drawing attention to the fact that gender minorities have different experiences from sexual minorities, and to signal to readers to not collapse gender with sexuality (Airton, 2009; Meyer, Tilland-Stafford, & Airton, 2016).

How do I use the term Queer/queer?

Another term worth clarifying in this thesis is 'queer', which I write two ways: Queer (capitalized) or queer (not capitalized). As Kornack (2015) notes "[u]p until the end of the 1980s the word 'queer' in English-speaking countries had commonly been used as a derogative term to address mostly homosexual men" but within the past "two

decades, the word ‘queer’ has achieved an immense popularity ... across different languages ... [as] a site of identification” for many LGTBQIA2S+ folks” (p. 1). When I capitalize Queer, I am using it as a broad term to represent an ambiguous non-dominant sexual or gender identity – a catch-all for the whole community. ‘I am Queer’ has become synonymous for some as saying ‘I’m part of the LGTBQIA2S+ community.’ While not everyone uses the word Queer as a catch-all for LGTBQIA2S+ (nor do most people capitalize it), I utilize the term for conciseness and to signal a plethora of sexual and gender identities that are non-dominant.

The second way I use the term ‘queer’ is to represent an anti-normative stance, which readers can observe when I do *not* capitalize the word. Kornak (2015) notes that queer can function to “pose a challenge to previous political discourses that were used to describe sexual minorities” (p. 3). A core principle of queer theories is to disrupt the idea that there is a normative sexuality or gender and that one should strive for normalcy. As Green (2010) notes, “queer theory was never intended to produce a new identity or a ‘fixed referent’ (Eng et al., 2005), but “the term ‘queer’ nevertheless denotes a subject position outside of normalization and the traditional configurations of gender and sexuality)” (p. 325). Ultimately, there are times in this thesis when I will use the term ‘Queer’ as an identity label and times when I use ‘queer’ to represent an anti-normative stance.

Why do I sometimes write queer as a verb?

To *queer*, *queering*, and *queering schools* are also words I use frequently and relate to a goal of unsettling dominant norms and power structures as it relates to schooling. The term *queer* signals multiplicity and incoherence (Butler, 1990/2006;

Foucault, 1976/1998; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt, 2007; Sedgwick, 1990). When I write *queer* as a transitive verb, I use it to indicate enacting a political worldview, process, and/or action that values anti-normativity, non-conformity, ambiguity, and uncertainty. As part of my findings, I discuss in great detail how participants conceptualize queer(ness)(ing) and this initial sketching of the word connects to their discussions. My definition of *queer* here also connects to what scholars have been writing about queer pedagogy (e.g. Britzman, 1995, 2012; Bryson & Castell, 1993; Hoad, 1994; Luhmann, 1998; Nelson, 1999; Neto, 2018; Niccolini, 2016; Parker, 1994; Rands, 2016). *Queering* (not capitalized, and as a verb) is therefore largely about destabilizing and disrupting norms and dominant knowledges.

How do I use the word praxis?

Besides writing *queer* as a verb, I also commonly write the phrase *queering schools praxis*. To understand that phrase fully, it is worth outlining how I understand praxis. Patti Lather (1986) describes praxis as “a two-way street produced in the interaction between theory and practice” (p. 76). Paulo Freire (1970) calls it: “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 50). According to Aristotle, *praxis* is concerned with “the knowledge produced through action” (Given, 2008, p. 676). This notion of knowledge arising from action connects to what Marx and Gramsci wrote about the term. Through Marx’s discussions of capitalism, he critiqued certain philosophers for not imagining theory in terms of concrete action (Given, 2008). He divided *praxis* into two types: one that upholds the status quo and one that disrupts it (Given, 2008). Gramsci’s conception of *praxis* connected to Marx’s second version of *praxis* that defined it as “the struggle that people undertake to obtain a critical perspective” (Given,

2008, p. 676). Moreover, both Gramsci and Freire located marginalized groups at the centre of praxis. Freire (1970) theorized that people break the cycle of oppression first by “critically recogniz[ing] its causes” (p. 47). Based on these definitions, I see *praxis* as the moments when people act in theory-informed ways to emancipate themselves and others. When I use the phrase *queering schools praxis* I am indicating a process (moments) when people apply queer theories and other anti-oppressive frameworks in and around schools as emancipatory work. This thesis is concerned with understanding what that process can and does look like. This study is also concerned with considering what role educators can and do play in *queering schools*.

What are the limitations of our words?

Now that I have defined words, it is worth communicating that those definitions are partial and contextual. Defining identities, in particular, is a limited exercise. Words are constantly evolving. Queer communities are constantly changing, as are the words Queer people use to self-identify. These terms are likely changing over time as new groups of LGBTQIA2S+ people enter their local communities and as political movements evolve. Beyond constantly shifting, words that describe identities are highly subjective.

The term ‘two-spirit’ offers an example of a term that carries different meanings for Indigenous peoples. Cree community member and scholar Myra Laramée first coined the term in 1990 (Two-Spirited People of Manitoba, 2016) “to replace the colonial term ‘berdache’ that was frequently used by anthropologists and non-Indigenous appropriators of Indigenous spiritualities throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Driskill, Finley, Gilley & Morgensen, 2010; McKiver, 2017; Morgensen, 2011)” (Laing, 2018, p. 3). The

English phrase two-spirit does not translate directly into Indigenous languages. “Some Indigenous people use direct translations of the word two-spirit into their Indigenous languages to identify themselves (McKiver, 2017; Wesley, 2014), while others caution against this practice as one which misrepresents both the term two-spirit and the various meanings associated [with] spirit in Indigenous languages (Medicine, 1997)” (Laing, 2018, p. 4). For those who do identify with the term, it can be used in different ways. For some “it is a way to identify both their [Q]ueerness and their Indigeneity ... and others use it to denote the responsibilities they carry in their communities” (Laing, 2018, p. 3). For example, one participant in this project, Lauren, described “one of [their] responsibilities as a two-spirit Indigenous youth [as] question[ing] authority”.

I wish to end this section with a note about unknowability. It is easy to put boundaries around sexual and gender minorities, to contain gender and sexuality to specific identities, and to be comfortable with definitions and the act of defining. It can be frustrating to not know, to be unsure whether or not a term is going to change, and to feel uncertain or afraid of one’s lack of expertise. Such efforts to know the answers – to feel confident about what Queer/queer *means* or to wish people would just stop adding letters to the LGBTQIA2S+ acronym – might not be the best way to proceed. Language evolves. Queer people arguably use language as a tool for agency – a way to rewrite their gender or sexuality in ways they want it to be seen. A person might not identify with a term I have listed in this section yet still be a sexual and gender minority. I therefore include this disclaimer about terms to emphasize the paradox of identity language: that there is value in simultaneously holding space for labels (of knowing and respecting the ways people self-identify), and value in letting go of them (of understanding they are not

fixed per se and do not reflect how others might be using the exact same term). Holding these tensions is an example of conflicted practice (Armstrong, 2008); it is recognizing the value of embodied and constructed experiences simultaneously.

The Value of Intimate & Accessible Academic Writing

I conclude my introduction with a note about the format of this thesis. I will admit that I wrestled with how to represent my findings. Being interested in challenging dominant knowledges and power structures, I wondered how writing a thesis, what feels like a normative academic task, could be disruptive and disrupted. I have sometimes read academic articles about anti-oppressive work and struggled to make sense of what is being said because it is full of jargon. I have often found this painfully ironic – that people seek to critique power yet write in ways that are likely inaccessible to those that are most oppressed. I try to assuage my fears of not aligning with my anti-oppressive values by subverting assumptions about academic writing. I seek to subvert a normative structure (this thesis) and disrupt it (through defying some expectations and conventions).

In sum, my writing style strives to disrupt the following: that knowledge can or should be objective; that the researcher can or should be detached from the research; that research about Queerness/queerness can or should be separate from lived experiences; and that gender and sexual diversity work is only about inclusion and protection. Following the lead of some qualitative, post-structural feminist and queer researchers (e.g. hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2002; Lather, 1991), I employ an openly confessional tone at various points throughout this text to challenge the thinking that knowledge can be or must be impartial to be valid, which is a colonial, modernist mindset (Foley, 2003; Smith, 1999). This goal aligns with feminist critiques of researcher objectivity (Fine, 1994;

Gluck & Patai, 1991; Lather, 1991; Richardson, 1997). I likewise use a more personal tone to connect with some scholars' call for more critical intimacy in research and pedagogy: "stories, intimate sharing, and risky dialogue" (Preston, 2016, p. 70). I also tell stories related to my Queerness and that of the participants to remind readers that gender and sexuality is not just a topic of inquiry for this research; it relates to ongoing lived experiences (Krisch, 2006). Finally, I strive to write as accessibly as possible, balancing research with narratives. It is with that note that I lead you to my literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Why Do Research on *Queering Schools*?

When I first started my program and curious or polite people would ask me the topic of my studies, I would typically say ‘gender and sexual diversity in schools.’ Many replied with comments like: *Wow what important work! You are on the cutting edge! It’s important to support students who are ‘different.’* Or *It’s such a shame that schools are such unsafe spaces.* Others responded by telling me stories of how they do not know how to support trans students, telling me proudly they have gay teachers in their school, or admitting sheepishly they *just don’t get gender-neutral pronouns.* A few said: *But don’t you think we’re going a little far with trying to make everything so ‘inclusive’? We can’t include everyone? Can we?* What these interactions reveal is that many people can concede that supports are necessary for LGBTQIA2S+ people in schools (they may even applaud or appreciate research or school efforts) but they do not see gender and sexuality as relevant to people who are cisgender and straight. At best, it appears that research and work around ‘gender and sexuality’ in schools are important measures to support a marginalized population and at worst they are a special cause that is taking space away from other important topics.

Regardless of people’s stances towards ‘gender and sexual diversity work in schools, some of my teacher friends have asked: *Will your research help teachers know what to do (how to support students who are trans or gay, lesbian, bi etc.)?* The short answer to such a question is hopefully, but not in the way that people might expect. My research will likely not provide clear answers about how educators can support trans, non-binary, two-spirit and Queer students in their day-to-day teaching practice. My

research is not explicitly focused on supporting students or teaching in classrooms. My research is about investigating alternative ways to support all Queer (and non-Queer people) – students, educators, administrators, staff and families – in schools that relate to a paradigm shift: what Airton (2013) describes as a centring of queerness, not Queer youth. Airton (2013) suggests “moving beyond the flourishing of individual, particular [Q]ueers and toward the flourishing of queerness in schools” (p. 534). Centring queerness involves moving from the problem of youth – how Queer youth are not thriving in schools – to the problem of schooling – why schools contribute to a lack of safety and affirmation for Queer people. Centring queerness in schools is therefore about unsettling dominant attitudes towards gender, sexuality, identity, difference, and schooling; injecting non-dominant ways of being, acting, thinking, and valuing in and around schooling; and investigating the role of disruption, not inclusion, in ‘gender and sexual diversity’ work.

Now when people ask me the topic of my research, I often say: *I am examining the concept of queering schools*. I explain to them that I want to unearth how and if we can queer schools. I want to know if we can challenge (disrupt/deconstruct) and re-imagine (irrupt/reconstruct): what we teach (curricula); how we teach (pedagogies); and the general time and space of schooling (the structure and space of schools). As I mentioned in my introduction, I utilize the verb *queering* throughout my thesis as an engagement with queer theories. As my supervisor once mentioned, *the word queering is confronting whereas terms like inclusion and diversity are less so*. It is with that desire to confront that I use the word. This thesis strives to be compassionately confrontational for two reasons: many people are not currently thriving in schools as a result of

hetero/cisnormativity so there is a need for renewed interventions; and seeing this work from a critical vantage point could allow for new possibilities in and around schools that move past deficiency narratives about LGBTQIA2S+ youth.

Why Are (Queer) People Not Thriving in Schools?

This thesis maintains that hetero/cisnormativity contributes to (Queer) suffering in schools. One would think that many people are aware that gender policing, in the form of Queerphobia, is common in schools because it is well documented (e.g. Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2011). That being said, there is a disconnection between widespread findings that demonstrate many Queer people do not feel safe and educators' perceptions of that lack of safety (Taylor et. al, 2015; Taylor & Peter, 2011). In Canada, both non-Queer teachers (Taylor et al. 2015) and non-Queer students (Taylor & Peter, 2011; Veale et al., 2015) report having some awareness of gender-based harassment in schools. In fact, some non-Queer people report experiencing homophobia or sexist remarks themselves (Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor et. al, 2015). That being said, over 60% of LGBTQIA2S+ students reported feeling unsafe in schools (Taylor & Peter, 2011), and about 75% of educators reported that they perceived schools being "safe" or "somewhat safe" for LGBTQIA2S+ students (Taylor et. al, 2015). This means that the majority of educators are over-estimating the safety of their schools. Statistically the same phenomenon is happening with trans youth. Over 75% of trans students reported feeling unsafe in schools (Taylor & Peter, 2011), and over half of all Canadian educators perceived schools as "safe" or "somewhat safe for them" (Taylor et. al, 2015). Whether or not people have awareness of the pervasive

Queerphobia in schools, they may not ask themselves: *What contributes to schools being an environment where Queerphobic language and violence is so common?*

This section claims that Queerphobia is symptomatic of hetero/cisnormativity, a hegemonic discourse that interlocks with colonialism, heteropatriarchy and neoliberalism, and is taken up by various people in and around schools. Drawing on Foucault's notion of biopower (1976/1998), I posit that people (educators, learners, parents, and administrators) unconsciously police themselves and others. Outlining Meyer's (2003) understanding of minority stress, I delineate the potential consequences of hetero/cisnormativity on Queer people. I also discuss Maslow's (1943, 1954/1970) hierarchy of needs, noting that when hetero/cisnormativity is largely unidentified and unchallenged by people in and around schools, it can impact the safety, belonging, esteem needs of Queer people, limiting possibilities for self-actualization. In sum, this section claims that (Queer) people are not thriving in schools because our schooling system mirrors widespread societal hetero/cisnormativity.

What is a (hegemonic) discourse?

Before explaining hetero/cisnormativity and how it relates to colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism, it is important to explain how I am using the words 'discourse' and 'hegemonic.' I understand discourse as written or spoken texts and social and cultural behaviours as they are linked to institutions (Foucault, 1976/1998). When I write 'hegemonic' in front of discourse, I mean dominant and possibly overtly enforced viewpoints. Hegemony, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, refers to the "social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group." Consequently, a hegemonic discourse is the viewpoint that is most commonly

(re)produced; it is usually taken up by the dominant group to preserve their privileges, but can be very pervasive, and subsequently internalized by minorities. In the case of hetero/cisnormativity, which I argue is a hegemonic discourse, the dominant groups are heterosexual and cisgender people. I use the words hegemonic or dominant in front of discourse: (1) to emphasize that this is a prevailing discourse; (2) and to indirectly suggest that discourse in itself can be used to disempower oneself/others (as is the case in many dominant discourses) or liberate oneself/others (as is the case of many counter-discourses).

What is hetero/cisnormativity?

Building from the understanding of discourse described above, I suggest that hetero/cisnormativity is a hegemonic discourse: a constellation of written, spoken, and social texts and behaviours that, in conjunction with each other, uphold certain normative values about sexuality and gender. Heteronormativity is the belief system that straight people are normal, natural, and expected; it is the ways sexual minorities are rendered visible and/or invisible in spaces (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Warner (1993) explains that heteronormativity is the way that heterosexual “culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relation, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist” (p. 11) Cisnormativity, on the other hand, is the common thinking that gender is purely a binary, people grow up to express and relate to their gender according to the biological sex they were assigned at birth, and consequently people who are gender minorities are deemed abnormal and/or unnatural (Pyne, 2011).

Cisnormativity is connected to heteronormativity because tied in with binary genders is the idea that heterosexual coupling is natural. Butler (1990/2006) calls this inextricable link between gender and sexuality the ‘heterosexual matrix’. This term builds on Monique Wittig’s (1989/1992) notion of the ‘heterosexual contract’ and Adrienne Rich’s (1980) notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, which both

characterise a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990/2006).

For example, Western cultural understandings of masculinity often revolve around ‘men’ not being ‘feminine’. While people are not necessarily told that being LGBTQIA2S+ is wrong, or that women are weaker, (although they might be), these understandings emerge from the ways that people talk about, think about, and act in relation to gender and sexual non-conformity. This happens on both an individual and cultural level. Wittig (1989/1992) calls theses societal expectations of gender, sexuality, and partnering a contract:

a social link ... that each and everyone one of us stands with[in] – the social contract being then the fact of having come together, of being together, of living as social beings ... Indeed, the conventions and the language [of our lives] show on a dotted line the bulk of the social contract – which consists in living in heterosexuality. For to live in society is to live in heterosexuality” (p. 40).

Paechter (2017) argues that to “stand outside of [being heterosexual or cisgender], is, on such a formulation, to repudiate or exclude oneself from the social contract; equally, by stepping outside of the social contract one is at the same enable to remove oneself from the heterosexual matrix” (p. 280). In other words, Queerness/queerness challenges the taken-for-granted nature of the heterosexual matrix; it reminds people that hetero/cisnormativity is constructed, and consequently can be reformulated.

Hetero/cisnormativity as an interlocking knowledge system. Hetero/cisnormativity is linked to other discourses such as settler colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism. Gender and sexuality do not exist within a vacuum; people’s understandings of identities are always shaped within a cultural and historical context. Hetero/cisnormativity relates to settler colonialism because gender and sexual norms in our Canadian context are tied to Western values, which categorize people in hierarchical ways. Settler colonialism is the ongoing practice of one or multiple nations gaining control over another nation(s), occupying said land, and exploiting those territories economically (Kohn, 2010). Canada is a settler-colonial state; settlers took over and continue to occupy the land. Prior to French and British settlers arriving, along with other settlers, First Peoples had diverse governance structure, trade systems, languages, arts and education practices as well as varied understandings of gender (Laing, 2018). Many cultural practices have been endangered or even extinguished through violent assimilationist tactics. The gender binary was imposed on Indigenous peoples through Christianity, forbidding Indigenous languages, criminalizing/pathologizing sexuality, and segregating ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ into residential schools (Cannon, 1998; Danforth & McKegney, 2014; Deschamps, 1998; Estrada, 2011; Laing, 2018; Maracle, 2000;

McKiver, 2017; Syrette, 2016; Wesley, 2014; Wilson, 2007, 2015). Indigenous people have and continue to persist in the face of colonial violence, reclaiming traditional ways of being and knowing. Hetero/cisnormativity is linked to colonialism because our modern Western normative conceptions of sexuality and gender are informed by colonization (the belief systems of Western settlers).

The second discourse that intersects with hetero/cisnormativity is patriarchy. Hetero/cisnormativity is linked to patriarchy, and sometimes referred to as cis-heteropatriarchy or heteropatriarchy because, along with disparaging same sex attraction, Queerphobia often (re)inscribes the idea that women and femininity are weak and undesirable. Heteropatriarchy is the “social syste[m] in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent” (Arvin, Tuck, Morrill, 2013, p. 13). Gendered expectations are constantly reinforced and played out in different social circumstances. Studies such as that of Thorne and Luria (1986) and Renold (2000) indicate that peer socialization lends to boys and girls segregating themselves based on gender, and performing hetero/cisnormative roles to bond (Connell & Elliott, 2009). Groups of girls perform femininity and heterosexuality and groups of boys perform homophobia and misogyny (Connell & Elliott, 2009). Boys commonly hear and repeat phrases like ‘don’t be pussies,’ ‘man up,’ and ‘don’t act like a girl’ and many learn to equate being a girl or being feminine with an insult, much as ‘being gay’ is seen as an insult.

For example, in their national Canadian study, Taylor & Peter (2011) observed that on average, 73% of Canadian high school students reported hearing comments that

boys are “not acting masculine enough” every day or every week at school and 55% of students recalled hearing comments that girls “are not acting feminine enough.” These findings expand upon Bockenek & Brown (2001) who noticed through their first in depth examination of school-based homophobia in the US that:

the abuse of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth is predicated on the belief that girls and boys must strictly adhere to rigid rules of conduct, dress, and appearances based on their sex ... boys who reported the most harassment were those who were least stereotypically masculine. Trans youth are the most vulnerable to both violence by peers and harassment from adults (p. 49).

In this way, Queerphobia is linked to patriarchal conceptions of gender, whereas femininity is perceived and (re)produced as lesser. These trends to police boys and men so they avoid ‘feminine’ expressions conveys a strong link between Queerphobia and patriarchy.

The third and final discourse I see as linked with hetero/cisnormativity is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism refers to privileging capitalism and economic goals over other concerns in society (Apple, 2006, 2013). While less overtly linked to gender and sexuality, the economy is tied into notions of partnering and family (e.g, Ruti, 2017; Young, 2016). Mari Ruti (2017), like other queer theorists, critiques same-sex marriage because she sees it as a neoliberal “bipolitical too[l] of control” (p. 16). Ruti (2017) suggests that through marriage and other normalizing tools, society might be trying to “channel sexual desire into specific pathways in order to generate the necessary discipline for a well-oiled economic order” (p. 22). With the growing acceptance of same sex attraction and diverse genders, there may be the appearance that we are moving beyond

hetero/cisnormativity; however, this acceptance seems contingent upon whether or not Queer people contribute to society in ways that are deemed ‘productive’ (Ruti, 2017).

Besides channeling sexuality into familial structures that maintain the economic status quo, neoliberalism relates to hetero/cisnormativity because it may promote the idea that Queerness/queerness does not have much academic value. Schools can justify doing anti-Queerphobia work because it promotes keeping students in schools (Airton, 2013); however, they could easily overlook queerness as a subject worthy of teaching because it would likely not prepare learners for jobs in the same way teaching science or math would. Kumashiro (2002) offers a quote from a teacher candidate (his student at the time) who was resistant to anti-oppressive education to illustrate the ways that certain learning (‘academics’) is privileged over other knowledges. That pre-service teacher said:

There are only eight hours in a standard school day. If cultures, races, sexual orientations, etc. are going to be added to the curriculum, what is going to be taken out of the present system? The school day is already jam-packed with the basic classes. How can a curriculum incorporate all ideas and still leave room for math and science? Will not it seem like teachers are teaching their values on different ideas to their students (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 2).

Kumashiro (2002) explains that: “[m]any of [his students, teacher candidates] acknowledged and condemned the ways schools perpetuate various forms of oppression, but asserted that, as teachers, their jobs will be to teach academics, not disrupt oppression” (Kumashiro, 2002, pp. 2-3). In this way, neoliberalism broadly interlocks with hetero/cisnormativity because it filters the ‘academic’ value of Queerness/queerness through the lens of productivity.

Economic systems can, on the surface, accept Queerness but only if they promote neoliberalism (the status quo that values productivity, efficiency, and job stability). This superficial and conditional acceptance of Queerness/queerness, in relation to it having value for preparing students for jobs (valuable knowledge), reconfigures yet still (re)produces hetero/cisnormativity.

How is hetero/cisnormativity enacted in and around schools?

Following the reasoning that hetero/cisnormativity is an interconnected normative knowledge system, it is worth asking: *how does hetero/cisnormativity manifest in and around schools (and people's lives more broadly)?* I argue here that hetero/cisnormativity is enacted in and around schools through gender policing which ranges from overt violence to very subtle behaviours, words, signs, and constructions. Gender policing is “the social process of enforcing cultural expectations for ‘normal’ masculine and feminine expression” (Payne & Smith, 2016). The widespread Queerphobia in schools (e.g. Baum et al., 2014; Callender, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2013; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012; Taylor & Peter, 2011) is the most undisguised form of gender policing; however, gender policing does not stop there. Gender and sexual norms are also maintained through language, signs, ‘humour’, silence, omissions, and constructions of Queerness as excessive and controversial (brave/dangerous).

Language, whether consciously or not, can serve as a way to regulate others and ourselves. Up to 90% of all high school students hear transphobic comments daily and 70% of all students hear homophobic comments like “that’s so gay” everyday (Taylor & Peter, 2011). I can recall hearing phrases “that’s so gay” daily when I was in high school, and was saddened to still hear such phrases when I returned to secondary schools in an

educator role. This repetition means that most students are constantly associating being LGBTQIA2S+ with being lesser. Moreover, these “harmless phrases” do not just come from students; up to 10% of all youth hear Queerphobic comments from their teachers (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Words also do not have to be directly Queerphobic to be regulatory. Walking through a school and seeing that there are only washrooms designated as male or female emphasizes the dominant view that there are only two genders, and for anyone without a binary gender, there is physically no space for them to use a washroom. People are also constantly divided by gender. Consider the ways that ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ are often divided for PE classes. Or consider the ways that educators are most frequently addressed. Titles like Mr. & Mrs. provide no linguistic space for educators who do not fit with the gender binary to be legible.

‘Humour’ also functions as a way to subtly reinforce hetero/cisnormative norms in schools. In an ethnographic study examining a Grade 8 class in Sweden, Simonsson & Angervall (2016) described an incident where two cisgender male students did a skit where they pretended to be a gay couple. This scene becomes a joke to the entire class. Students shouted “No-Homo” and both the students and teacher erupted into laughter. After the skit ended, the teacher responded to the researcher, saying: *That was fun, right? I thought we needed to lighten things up a little bit.* That educator’s response indicates that she saw an expression of same-sex attraction between boys as humorous. Simonsson & Angervall (2016) assert that such an incident reveals what Kulick (2003) has noted about humour, femininity, and failed masculinity: that because “masculinity is seen as unproblematic and natural, masculinity is not seen as funny, whereas femininity is taken to require constant ‘doing,’ and effort to accomplish and is, therefore, also easy to

ridicule” (Simonsson & Angervall, 2016, p. 43). Anything which is not “natural” masculinity — be it femininity or masculinity which is not normalized — is constructed as a failure and open to ridicule. This is likely why even those who are not Queer can experience gendered harassment based on their expressions of femininity and masculinity (Taylor & Peter, 2011).

Beyond what is said or expressed, gender policing manifests in schools through various forms of silence. The first form of silence worth discussing is non-interventions. Educators often do not intervene when they witness gender policing, be it Queerphobic harassment or simply people talking about gender and sexuality in hetero/cisnormative ways (Taylor et al., 2015; Koswicz, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Meyer, 2008). Nearly half of gender minority high school students, and one third of sexual minority secondary school learners, reported that staff members *never* intervened when Queerphobic comments were made (Taylor & Peter, 2011). This inaction is not because teachers do not care about supporting Queer people (Taylor et al. 2015). In fact, researchers found that 98% of Canadian teachers reported it was important for them to address human rights and social justice, 87% felt it was important to discuss LGBTQIA2S+ issues, and 85% expressed it was necessary to talk about gender expression (Taylor et. al, 2015). Those statistics beg the question: *Why are more teachers not intervening about Queerphobia and championing social justice?* Elizabeth Meyer (2008) notes that there are both external and internal influences that contribute to teachers’ non-interventions, such as educators: (1) not feeling supported by administrators; (2) feeling overwhelmed by the existing provincial curriculum demands and workloads; (3) not knowing how to intervene effectively; and(4) not having clear

policies in place to support them. Meyer (2008) also suggests that the social norms and values of individual schools play a big role in teachers' willingness and capacity to intervene.

Another form of silence, outside of lackluster educator interventions, is a lack of learning about Queerness in curricula (both for K-12 students and teachers themselves). In an Australian national study, Jacqueline Ullman (2010) found that nearly two-thirds of secondary school students had not learned about LGBTQIA2S+ people or discussed Queer history or current events (see Ullman & Ferfolja, 2013). Two national Canadian studies confirm that the majority of educators do not infuse learning about Queerness in their classrooms (see Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor et. al, 2015). While 85% of educators reported that they approve of an LGBTQIA2+ inclusive education (BC having the highest approval rate of 90% out of all the provinces, see Taylor et al., 2015), there is discrepancy between this desire and action.

This gap may be related to the fact that most educators are not leaving teacher education programs equipped with the skills to infuse lessons and learning about Queer people and Queerness in their teaching practice (Taylor et al., 2015). In 2015, 64% of Canadian educators reported that their B.Ed. program did not prepare them to address issues of gender and sexual diversity in schools, with up to 74% claiming that they had not received *any* formal instruction from professors about LGBTQIA2S+ issues during their teaching program. Knowing that most educators are not being taught about Queerness/queerness during their university experience (and likely never learned about Queer people or histories during their high school experience), it makes sense they would lack the awareness, skills, and/or confidence to infuse Queer perspectives in their

instruction. This absence sadly perpetuates a cycle of omissions, wherein Queer perspectives are being overlooked or avoided.

So why is Queerness/queerness so often overlooked in schools? Queerness is often constructed as controversial and consequently deemed risky within the context of schools. Irvine (2002) found that when schools attempt to integrate Queer identities (particularly as they relate to sexualities) into the curriculum, their initiatives were often met with resistance from parents and/or administrators. Over fifteen years later, Irvine's observations remain relevant. Ontario received much backlash when it attempted to integrate a new sex education curriculum featuring content about sexual orientation and gender identity. Likewise, in BC and Alberta, different groups have risen up and resisted SOGI 123 (Sexual Orientation Gender Identity 123), an initiative in Western Canada aimed at supporting educators in infusing Queer learning into their teaching practice. In fact, there have been two protests in the span of this project in Victoria BC, where this research study took place, against SOGI 123. Those resisting SOGI 123 take the stance that sexuality and gender has no place in schools, and the leaders of such groups identify with certain faith groups. Callaghan (2016, 2018, 2019) examines the ways that LGBTQIA2S+ discrimination remains prevalent in Catholic schools across Canada. In some contexts, the argument that gender and sexuality is incompatible with certain religious beliefs is often used as a tool to squash efforts to address Queerness in schools. This is not to say religion is the only reason people are resistant to gender and sexual diversity work, but it is certainly a component. Regardless of the reason for resistance, the eruption of controversy functions to maintain hetero/cisnormativity.

A final form of silence and manifestation of hetero/cisnormativity relates to Queer (in)visibility in and around schools. Queer people may be overlooked or easily identified based on hetero/cisnormative assumptions. For example, I am regularly assumed to be straight by colleagues, students, and parents because I am more ‘feminine’ presenting. In some instances when I have ‘come out’ to colleagues, they are shocked or surprised. Others who defy gendered expectations are more often read as a Queer. Whether Queer visibility comes from other people’s assumptions or a person outing themselves, there can be a cost to visibility. Because Queerness is often constructed as controversial in the time/space of schooling (Ullman & Ferfolja, 2013), visible Queer people are often put in a strange position where, if they are perceived at all, they are seen as excessive – as brave and/or dangerous. For example, I was once told *you are so brave* by a stranger for being on a visible date with a woman. In the context of schools, I have noticed hetero/cisnormativity in the ways that I have been advised to not be so vocal about Queerness (to not ‘bring up controversial topics’) while teaching in certain contexts such as when I did practicums in Ontario and taught in northern Ontario. I have also seen it in the ways that all teachers and youth are often assumed to be straight and cisgender (unless they match stereotypes) and the ways that Queer people, particularly those that visibly defy gender norms, are sometimes positioned as *unprofessional* or *too out-there* (e.g. Ferfolja and Hopkins, 2013; Lugg and Tooms, 2010; Mizzi, 2013, 2016).

The same assumptions and perceptions are often made regarding Queer gender identities and expressions. If people do not look stereotypically trans, non-binary, two-spirit or intersex, they can be invisible both to the LGBTQIA2S+ community and people

who are outside of it. Max, a participant in this study, shared their own experiences of feeling invisible in their school as a non-binary educator. They wrote:

Being [Q]ueer at [my school] is like being a ghost. You are acknowledged only by a select few who don't see right through you to see what they want to see to make them more comfortable. There is no space for me to be more than a woman. I feel it in their gazes and in how they make no space for me to exist [easily] in this organization.

This participant is conveying that they feel invisible and invalidated in their school context because “there is no space for [them] to be more than a woman.” Jake Pyne (2011) notes that trans people are often “erased in institutional world[s] and [that] erasure ‘ultimately inscribes transexuality as impossible’” (p. 131). A feature of hetero/cisnormativity is therefore the ways that Queerness is habitually overlooked, and when it is seen, it is constructed as too much.

Ruitenbergh (2010) explains that visible minorities in institutions like schools are frequently perceived as a ‘surplus visibility.’ Within “the powerful silent force of the heterosexual matrix,” anything beyond straight and cisgender expressions and identities are “inevitably constructed as [a] scream” (Atkinson & DePalma, 2008, p. 33).

Ruitenbergh (2010) discusses that:

It is difficult for [Q]ueer and other minority groups to achieve a desirable degree of visibility. Daphne Patai (1992) proposes the concept of surplus visibility to describe the perception of excess and exaggeration whenever minorities become perceptible at all: ‘There seems to be no middle ground for ‘Others’ to inhabit: They are forced to choose between invisibility and surplus visibility, between

silence and the accusation that they are making excessive noise.’ This automatic amplification of audibility and magnification of visibility means for [Q]ueer subjects that it can be tempting to forfeit visibility and audibility rather than be accused of unnecessary flaunting and attention seeking. (p. 619)

Queer people (among other minorities) therefore find themselves in a position where their visibility is perceived as *excessive*.

Moreover, this *excessive* visibility can be read in one or two ways. Visible Queer people may be read as *brave*, such as how I was constructed by a stranger while being openly gay in a public space. These perceptible Queer people may be celebrated, essentialized, or tokenized in school spaces because they are seen as representatives who can potentially help educate those around them. Meyer, Tilland-Stafford & Airtton (2016) offer an example of sexual minorities being tokenized and essentialized. They note that sexual minorities are often treated as experts about gender diversity, even though being a gender minority is not the same as being a sexual minority. Alternatively and/or simultaneously, visible Queer people may be read as *annoyances* or *dangerous* – as individuals pushing an agenda. All in all, being visibly Queer in schools can illicit strong responses. The first reading of visible Queer people as *brave* is undoubtedly meant to be celebratory, but it still positions Queer people as a teaching tool for others. The second reading of Queer visibility as *annoying* or *dangerous* is arguably a defensive response. This reaction signals how Queer people, through their very existence, confront hetero/cisnormativity in spaces. Ultimately Queer people existing in school spaces should not require work and advocacy on their behalf; however, they often do. This difficulty to simply exist in these spaces arises because schools perpetuate gender and sexual norms

that position Queerness (and non-conformity as general) as other/lesser. Overall, hetero/cisnormativity is pervasive in schools. It surfaces in overt forms of gender policing, such as Queerphobia, and also in everyday language, sterilized curricula, silence, and (in)visibility. In this way, normative beliefs about gender and sexuality are taken up both consciously and unconsciously by those who navigate schools.

Why is hetero/cisnormativity prevalent in schools?

One question that came up for me while investigating the ways that hetero/cisnormativity manifests in and around schools is: *Why is gender policing so pervasive in these spaces?* I assert here that hetero/cisnormativity, and consequently gender policing, is omnipresent in these spaces for two main reasons. Firstly, schools have and continue to function as a regulatory force – to instill dominant societal values (Deacon, 2006; Devine, 2003; Foucault, 1976/1998). Secondly, because hetero/cisnormativity is a widespread Western knowledge system, schools (re)produce it. Some sociologists have argued that schools serve to socialize “the young into the culture and value system of the adult world” (Devine, 2003, p. 4). Marxist analyses have gone further to assert that schooling is “as an important tool used by the bourgeoisie to ensure hegemonic dominance ... [and] reproduce inequities based on gender, social class and ethnicity that exist in the broader society (e.g. Apple, 1986; Bourdieu, 1977 and 1993; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Lynch, 1989)” (Devine, 2003, p. 4). Following both analyses, schooling is about socialization.

It is important to note that our ““schooling-as-education” (Airton, 2013), where children and young people attend mandatory school and are taught prescribed learning outcomes, is a relatively recent phenomenon (Devine, 2003). It was the “move from rural

based economies to urbanized industrialized societies in the last century [in Western societies that gave] rise to mass state schooling for children ... [t]hus the advent of compulsory schooling” (Devine, 2003, p. 3). Rousmaniere, Dehli, & De (1997) argue that compulsory schooling in Canada, which emerged during the mid 19th century, was a moral tool – a way to shape children and youth as a new ‘nation’ was being formed. Deacon (2006) notes that Western schooling emerged from a desire to control and confine the masses, especially those deemed “disease[d] and disorder[ed] (p. 179). Based on these accounts of schooling, and considering that non-dominant sexualities and genders have been criminalized and pathologized historically and currently in various places around the world (Greteman, 2018; Rau, 2015), it ought not to be surprising that schools have and continue to overtly and/or subtly shape children and youth to fit within certain normative gender and sexual ideals.

Regulating students, and promoting desirable social norms, is not just a historical schooling phenomena; it continues to this day. Policing of non-dominant gender and sexualities in state schools can be seen in current Canadian bills. Take for example, Bill 44, also referred to as the ‘Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Amendment Act’, which was passed in Alberta in 2009. This bill occurred over a decade after Canada ruled that in 1998 “provincial human rights codes must include explicit protect from discrimination for non-heterosexual orientations” (Herriot, 2014). Most provinces, nine out of the 10 provinces (not including territories), changed their human rights codes to mirror this change in the human rights code shortly after 1998 (Herriot, 2014). Alberta, however, took its time. It resisted this change until Bill 44, which added sexual orientation as a ‘protected’ identity, was adopted. While on the surface this bill protects

discrimination against sexual minorities, it stipulates that “public school boards must provide notice to parents or guardians when teaching subject matter that ‘... deals explicitly with religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation’ (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 2009).” This means that parents and guardians in Alberta can remove their children from courses that address religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation should they want. The students have no say in this matter. This bill is hetero/cisnormative because while it adds sexual orientation as a protected status in the province, it reinscribes Queerness as controversial. It provides parents and guardians with the capacity to reject it as necessary and valuable learning for their children. This bill is an example of how hetero/cisnormativity is (re)produced through bills and policies.

So why do schools and institutions regulate children and youth and (re)produce societal norms? Foucault (1976/1998) argued that schools, like prisons and the media, engage us in a process of self-regulating our desires and bodies. Gender policing is an example of what Foucault (1980) calls biopower, which is when people internalize hegemonic discourses, model those norms to others, and socially punish them when they transgress. These words and behaviours are not necessarily consciously or intentionally punishing others for gender and sexual transgressions. It is just that hetero/cisnormativity is so prevalent in our society that many people internalize it as natural, becoming what Foucault calls “docile bodies.” Pylypa (1998) explains that

political order is maintained through the production of ‘docile bodies’ – passive, subjugated, and productive individuals. Through its many institutions – schools, hospitals, prisons, the family – the state brings all aspects of life under its controlling gaze. The institutional disciplining, surveillance, and punishment of

the body creates bodies that are habituated to external regulation, working ‘to discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls’ (Foucault 1980a:139), and thus produce the types of bodies that society requires” (p. 22)

For Foucault, power is productive, not repressive. Biopower means that people internalize hegemonic discourses and become the unconscious enforcers of those norms. Power does not exist as some external force; it lives through the ways we inscribe it on/through our bodies and overtly and subtly model/condition others to do the same. “We are ... the vehicles of power because it is embedded in discourses and norms that are part of the minute practices, habits, and interactions of our everyday lives” (Pylypa, 1998, p. 23).

Translating this understanding of biopower to gender policing in schools, people who are generally unaware of hetero/cisnormativity are perhaps more likely engaged in a process of bodily regulation. Phrases like “that’s so gay,” which is used as an insult, are subtle ways that students unconsciously remind themselves and others what is normative and desirable; they are simply reproducing values that people have internalized. Herein lies the great challenge of addressing gender policing in schools. If we accept that gender policing is not just Queerphobia, but enactments of hetero/cisnormativity, an interlocking normative knowledge system, our ‘diversity’ approaches need to be more expansive than anti-Queerphobia work. *But what is a more expansive approach? How do we enact such an approach? And how do we address the immediate needs of Queer people experiencing*

Queerphobia in schools now? Can we do that? Can one strategy/approach address safety, belonging, and Queer/queer thriving?

What are the effects of hetero/cisnormativity?

Before delving into how we can approach diversity expansively in schools – the overarching question of this research – it is worth clearly outlining the effect of hetero/cisnormativity on (Queer) people. So how does gender policing, both overt and subtle forms, translate to wellness and people’s capacity to thrive in these environments? I see two consequences of hetero/cisnormativity on people in and outside of schools: the first is a promotion of “minority stress theory” (Meyer, 2003), and the second is a diminishing of people’s capacity to self-actualize (Maslow, 1943/1970).

So what is minority stress theory? This theory, developed by Meyer (2003), correlates discrimination, stigmatization, and internalized shame – all products of hetero/cisnormativity – with poor mental health outcomes.

Meyer (2003) described four minority stressors that may be salient for sexual minority people: heterosexist discrimination, expectations of stigma, internalized homophobia/ heterosexism, and identity concealment (or low outness).

Researchers have documented the links of these minority stressors with various mental health outcomes in samples of people who identify as sexual minorities.

(Velez and Moradi, 2016, p. 1133)

While this explanation focuses on sexual minorities, it can easily be translated to gender minorities and other marginalized groups.

Schools are environments where all the factors for minority stress theory are present. Taylor & Peter (2011)’s landmark national study found that “homophobic and

transphobic comments and direct victimization both verbally and physically, as well as other forms of harassment, establish that LGBTQ students, youth with one or more LGBTQ parents, and youth perceived as LGBTQ are exposed to hostile school climates on a regular basis throughout Canada” (p. 73). In a later national study, Taylor et al. (2015) observed that LGBTQIA2S+ educators were also more likely than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts to be harassed. Many Queer educators reported that they did not disclose their identities prior to being hired and they were far less likely to discuss their personal life with colleagues and students (Taylor et. al, 2015). Only 21% of lesbians were out to their whole school community (including students and parents), 15% of gay men were, 6% of bisexual participants, and 0% of transgender educators (Taylor et. al, 2015). Because it is well documented that schools are environments where Queer people experience discrimination, stigmatization, and discomfort at being out, it follows that Queer people may experience harmful health effects (e.g. Brewster et al., 2013; Feinstein, Goldfried, & Davila, 2012; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; Schmitt et al., 2014; Velez, Moradi, & DeBlaere, 2015).

This context is also an environment that puts an unfair onus on Queer people to educate those around them – to do the heavy lifting of this ‘diversity’ work. Freitag (2013) observes that it routinely requires a Queer person entering into hetero/cisnormative spaces for non-Queer people to see that “these streets, malls, motels, and schools have been ‘produced as heterosexual’” and cisgender (p. 132). While interviewing educators who have worked with gender-creative students, Meyer, Tilland-Stafford & Airton (2016) found that “in the absence of transgender or gender-creative students, school staff tend to be uninterested or unmotivated in relation to learning more

about the topic” (p. 6). This apathy unfortunately often places a burden on those most affected by hetero/cisnormativity (Queer students, educators, and parents) to take on roles where they educate their peers, colleagues, and communities (e.g. Goldstein et al., 2019; Meyer, Tilland-Stafford, & Airton, 2016). Moreover, there is often pressure on people who are the first visible gender or sexual minority in school spaces to teach others by being ‘out’ (Meyer, Tilland-Stafford, & Airton, 2016). Different scholars have noted that it is often LGBTQIA2S+ educators, parents, and students who are most invested and vigilant towards ensuring schools have gender and sexual inclusive policies and curriculum, and yet they are most at risk for potential consequences of backlash because their advocacy is tied to their personal identities (Benson, Smith, & Flanagan, 2014; Goldstein et al., 2019; Meyer, Tilland-Stafford, & Airton, 2016; Taylor et al. 2015).

Max, one of the non-binary collective members, describes the unique struggle of being the only non-binary person working at their school and wishing they had support:

It is difficult to be non-binary at this school. [I]t is painful and anxiety inducing and invalidating. All these damaging experiences [are] being caused by an organization that supposedly purports pro-gay and pro-[Q]ueer values. It's bullshit. I'm tired. I want to exist in this world without this burden. This place makes me tired because I have to constantly think about and question my worth and whether I'm being accepted and valued in this organization. It's exhausting. And I deserve better. I deserve freedom and consensual engagements and safety at my work where I spend most of my time as a full time employee ... I experience a lot of people misgendering me and not getting any support from [administrative] leads ... [and] as far as I know I'm the only gender [Q]ueer

person ... and I [am] feeling frustrated that I'm the only gender [Q]ueer person. [There are] no supports about how to introduce myself, like how I want to introduce myself ... and when I was doing that I was pushing to make space for myself ... I struggle to trust people. At times it has felt like nowhere is safe. I feel like to have trauma and be [Q]ueer is be viewed as invisible and useless in this culture. To be perpetually unvalued is a way to manipulate people into working harder, pushing themselves harder, hurting themselves for acceptance to manipulate compliance and silence. It's structural oppression when the organization makes it difficult to exist within it.

Max's comment reveals that it is isolating and exhausting to work in an environment where people espouse LGBTQIA2S+ values but lack the resources, education, or skills to create environments that are actually supportive for trans, non-binary, two-spirit, and Queer people.

Building on the issue of minority stress, and drawing loosely on Maslow's hierarchy of needs/motivation theory (1943, 1954/1970), I posit that gender policing in schools – which includes Queerphobia, language, silence, and constructions of Queerness – interrupts the satisfaction of basic human needs for Queer people. Maslow (1943, 1954/1970) suggested that people need to have their physiological and safety needs met, then their belonging needs meet, followed by their love and esteem needs. He described *physiological needs* as food, water, shelter, warmth; *safety needs* as security, stability, and freedom from fear; *belonging/love needs* as having friends, family, a partner; and *self-esteem needs* as achievement, mastery, recognition, and respect (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) situated these needs in a sort of cycle, wherein *physiological needs* “are

usually taken as the starting point for motivation theory” (p. 372) and then if “physiological and safety needs are fairly well gratified, there will emerge the *love and belongingness needs*” (p. 380), followed by *esteem needs* which lead to “feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (p. 382). If these needs are satisfied, Maslow theorized that it could lead to a need to *self-actualization* (a term he borrows from Kurt Goldstein): where people “become more and more what [they are] ... [they] become everything [they are] capable of becoming” (p. 383). Maslow argued that: “thwarting ... these [basic] needs produces feelings of inferiority, of weakness and of helplessness. These feelings in turn give rise to either basic discouragement or else compensatory or neurotic trends” (p. 382). In this way, I see Maslow’s earlier theorizing about basic needs as linked to Meyer’s conceptualization (2003) of minority stress; they both hypothesize that if environments deprive people of safety and affirmation, the result can be a lack of human wellness.

While Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been critiqued due to him depending primarily on white cisgender men as subjects (McLeod, 2007; Koltko-Rivera, 2006), his conceptualization of self-actualization is an interesting springboard to think about effects of hetero/cisnormativity. According to Maslow (1970), self-actualization is the desire, need, and process of coming to fulfill one’s potential. Some traits he associated with being a self-actualized person include having a democratic attitude, being able to tolerate uncertainty, and being concerned with the wellness of others and the world. Taylor & Peter (2011) found that Queerphobia in schools not only mentally affects LGBTQIA2S+ students, but also non-Queer people. In fact, 58% of straight and cisgender Canadian high school students indicated that they found it upsetting to hear homophobic comments,

because some were targets of Queerphobia, some had LGBTQ2S+ family members or friends, some felt empathy, and some felt shame for participating in Queerphobic cultures or being bystanders (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Returning to Maslow's idea that self-actualization is tied to supporting those around us, it seems unlikely that people will be able to achieve this heightened state if they are complicit in causing harm. Consequently, being complicit in hetero/cisnormative cultures is also damaging to non-Queer people. While Freire (1970) did not use the language of self-actualization, he also claimed that oppression can dehumanize both the oppressed group and oppressor. Freire (1970) explained that "the oppressor ... is [themselves] dehumanized because [they] dehumanize[e] others" (p. 47). If we accept Maslow's (1970) idea of self-actualization and Freire's (1970) understanding of dehumanization as shared between the oppressor/oppressed, hetero/cisnormativity is not just a knowledge system that negatively affects Queer people. Gender and sexual norms limit possibilities for many people. Both Queer and non-Queer people should therefore treat hetero/cisnormativity as a hegemonic discourse that is worth addressing.

How Can (Queer) People Thrive in Schools?

Now that I have outlined how Queer people are suffering in schools – making a claim that hetero/cisnormativity is the root of the problem – I turn in the direction of queer thriving. Instead of simply demonstrating that LGBTQIA2s+ people are struggling in schools, I want to ask: *What now? What is a more expansive approach to gender and sexual diversity work in schools? How can we move in the direction of (queer) thriving, wellness, and self-actualization?* Drawing on various critical scholars (Airton, 2013; Blackburn, 2007; Brockenbrough, 2015; Formby, 2015; Rofes, 2003; Payne & Smith,

2016; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010), I suggest we start by moving away from relying on Queer deficiency narratives as an impetus for action. I then propose we listen to what Kevin Kumashiro (2002) writes about anti-oppressive stances towards education and what Adam J. Greteman (2018) discusses about queer thrival. In listening deeply to how these scholars critique and imagine ‘diversity’ work, I approach my research with the suspicion that *queering schools praxis* will involve disruptive work. I do not think it would be wise to abandon work that addresses the immediate needs of Queer people in schools. I see value in protection and inclusion measures. I wish, however, to consider whether compassionately disruptive acts can enhance our desire to make schools better places for Queer people and, if educators agree, how we can actually engage in such work on a day-to-day basis.

Why should we move away from Queer deficiency narratives?

Many researchers (e.g. Airton, 2013; Brockenbrough, 2015; Formby, 2015; Rofes, 2003; Payne & Smith, 2016; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010) have identified a common LGBTQIA2S+ suffering trope that positions Queer people, particularly young LGBTQIA2S+ people, as “targets-victims-martyrs” (Rofes, 2004). Elizabeth Payne & Melissa Smith (2016) explain this trope well here:

Mainstream educational conversations about [Q]ueer identities and education are dominated by risk and deficient-based interpretations of how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students experience school. That is, LGBTQ youth are understood as easy targets, victims, and different in ways that demand their peers and teachers express tolerance and empathy. The students who target them – the bullies – are understood as individuals who need school

intervention to correct their antisocial behavior. This bully/victim binary is repeatedly (re)produced in published research on school bullying. (p. 127)

In this way, Payne & Smith (2016) agree with scholars like Airton (2013) who observes that much educational research and school-based interventions are rooted in anti-homophobia/transphobia work. Payne and Smith (2016) elaborate by saying that this focus on Queerness through the context of bullying implies that: (1) youth who target peers do so because they are lacking in their psychosocial development; (2) the solution to LGBTQIA2S+ students' problems is simply promoting empathy for those who are different/Queer; (3) the entirety of the problem is Queerphobia; (4) and the problems that LGBTQIA2S+ people face – the rampant homophobia/transphobia in schools – comes from outside of schools and is not produced through its structure.

Savin-Williams & Joyner (2014) suggest that research documenting bullying, violence, and mental health challenges in LGBTQIA2S+ people has been and continues to be used strategically to demand public attention. In other words, such research serves as an impetus for creating policies and anti-Queerphobia interventions in schools. Regardless of whether this is true or not, a number of critical scholars (Airton, 2013; Brockenbrough; Formby 2015; Payne & Smith, 2016; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010; MacIntosh, 2007) have troubled the way that research and interventions generally focus on individual Queer people, generally youth, as opposed to schooling systems and norms. Airton (2013) discusses that there is “a particular narrative of the ‘the problem’ [that] seems to permeate conversations about sexuality[, gender] and school culture: ... a young person who must struggle to secure their safety and well-being during school hours because their particular needs are going unaddressed” (533). Airton (2013) does not

challenge the validity of studies that demonstrate the suffering that many Queer young people experience throughout their schooling experiences. Instead they “make a conceptual intervention in the idea that Queer children and youth have needs that differ from those of other children and youth on the basis of their gender or sexuality alone, and that doing well by them requires adults to act on the basis of this difference” (p. 533). They propose that “‘helping young [Q]ueers’ is not the only way to think about anti-homophobia interventions in education, or that making space for queerness in education is not the same as making space for [Q]ueers” (p. 533).

Although it may seem counter-intuitive to some, I agree with critical scholars that trouble this dominant focus on anti-homophobia/transphobia work because of how it constructs Queer people, particularly LGBTQIA2S+ youth (e.g. Airton, 2013; Brockenbrough, 2015; Formby, 2015; Rofes, 2003; Payne & Smith, 2016; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010). I advocate that we shift away from limiting our diversity work to protection and inclusion measures relating to LGBTQIA2S+ youth. I want to be clear that this shift is not because LGBTQIA2S+ youth do not need protections or support in schools; they most certainly do. Nor I am devaluing anti-homophobia or anti-transphobia work.

Many studies suggest that student support groups like Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), curriculum that positively recognizes LGBTQIA2S+ perspectives, and inclusive policies improve the wellness of LGTQIA2S+ youth and people (e.g. Black, Fedewa, & Gonzalez, 2012; Davis, Stafford, & Pullig, 2014; Russell, Day, Ioverno, Toomey, 2015; Mayo; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Savin-Williams (1990) claims that LGBTQIA2S+ youth report generally positive self-images when they are in supportive

environments. Various scholars agree with Savin-Williams' earlier claim (e.g. Fetner et al., 2012; Davis, Stafford, & Pullig, 2014; Mayo, 2017; Muños-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; St. John et al., 2014). For example, Muños-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds (2002) argue that students who “tap into already existing supports,” like GSAs, “while fostering new ones ... manage to develop positive and productive coping strategies to assist them through adolescence into adulthood” (p. 62). Fetner et al. (2012) likewise claim that “the sheer ... access to a comfortable social [Queer] space was what made high school a bearable experience [for many students]” (p. 203) in their study. Mayo (2017) talks about the capacity of Queer student support groups to cultivate joy, offering an anecdote of a friend's son who “had a series of happy events at his new school ... [saying] he's the happiest he's ever been in his life ... [after] finding [his] way into [the GSA] group, [an] formal or informal [space], where one's gender and/or sexual identity can become part of a conversation” (p. 48). Beyond these student support groups, Taylor and Peter (2011) found that LGBTQIA2S+ students who reported learning about Queer content in one or more of their courses felt “like a real part of [their] schools”, as if they were “treated with as much respect as other students” and had “at least one adult [they could] talk to in [their] schools” (p. 125). Other research correlates anti-homophobia/transphobia or ‘inclusive’ policies with decreased gender-based harassment (e.g. Black, Fedewa, & Gonzalez, 2012; Russell, Day, Ioverno, & Toomey, 2015). Alternatively said, creating Queer spaces, infusing Queer content into courses, and having protective policies is important work.

I do not disparage those efforts in any way; I wish only to articulate that if not accompanied by other efforts, the tendency to support Queer youth via protection and

inclusion *alone* (anti-bullying policies, support groups, periphery ‘add-on’ curricula if at all) may absolve our schooling system from looking more deeply at the ways it is complicit in (re)producing the conditions for overt and subtle forms of gender policing. This deficiency lens, seeing Queer people as “at risk,” can also neglect to showcase the love, strength, creativity, and resilience of Queer people (Formby, 2015), not to mention their agency in the face of (intersecting forms of) oppression (Brockenbrough, 2015). Even the phrasing of “at-risk” perpetuates this narrative of danger and a necessity to help or protect. Based on the literature, an element of *queering schools praxis* directs attention towards schooling systems, not just youth.

What can we learn from Kumashiro’s types of anti-oppression education?

I find that the deficiency lens, which dominates mainstream diversity work, relates to two types of anti-oppressive education that Kumashiro (2002) identifies. He loosely defined four types of anti-oppressive education: (1) *Education for the Other*; (2) *Education About the Other*; (3) *Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering*; and (4) *Education that Changes Students and Society*.

The first type, which Kumashiro (2002) calls *Education for the Other*, focuses on the harm and safety concerns of those who are Othered. I see this first type as linked to what most schools are doing regarding gender and sexual diversity work; they are not necessarily addressing Queerness/queerness through curriculum or pedagogy. Instead, schools are responding reactively to Queerphobia through anti-bullying policies, anti-homophobia/transphobia work, district policies, and supporting students through creating separate space spaces such as Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSAs). Queer people are constructed as needing help and extra support because they are being victimized.

Kumashiro (2002) sees three weaknesses to this approach: firstly, it focuses on those who are marginalized, not on the process of marginalization; secondly, it may miss the nuanced experiences of groups and the interconnected nature of oppression; and thirdly, it assumes that educators can adequately assess the needs of their students, which he problematizes drawing on Ellsworth's (1997) idea that there is an "unknowability" to teaching – that we cannot predict how people will respond to new information or experiences.

The second type he describes, *Education About the Other*, is slightly different in that instead of focusing on creating safer spaces, the reach expands more to curriculum. This type of anti-oppressive education seeks to expand the curriculum to include specific teachings about the Other, and to "integrate lessons and topics about the Other throughout the curriculum" (p. 41). We appear to be approaching this type of anti-oppressive education in some contexts, such as here in British Columbia with SOGI 123. According to Kumashiro (2002), the strengths of this approach are that it focuses on all students, not just those who are marginalized, and it can help people develop empathy towards the Other. One of the weaknesses of this approach is that it could essentialize marginalized people by "present[ing] a dominant narrative of the Other's experience that might be read by students as, for instance, *the [Q]ueer experience*" (p. 44). Moreover, this approach may position the Other as 'expert,' a concern that Meyer, Airton, & Tilland-Stafford (2016) have also highlighted in their research.

I see most mainstream efforts to include LGBTQIA2S+ people as connected to Kumashiro's conception of *Education for the Other* or *Education About the Other*. While well intentioned, I view these approaches as rooted in a protection/inclusion model that is

about absorbing the marginalized group into the larger dominant group. In fact, I see this protection model as connected to what Nick Mulé (2006) calls a neoliberal rights strategy. Through analyzing mainstream LGBTQIA2S+ activism and more radical mobilizing efforts, Mulé observes a trend: that mainstream efforts are concerned mostly with equality, and more radical efforts, what he calls a liberationist approach, are focused on changing the status quo. Ruti (2017) has also commented on the splintering within LGBTQIA2+ activist movements, commenting that there are some “lgbtq activists who are trying to escape painful histories of pathologization” and some “queer critics, who ... are asking: Why would we want to be normal? Isn’t the normal what has always oppressed us?” (p. 1). Mulé problematizes fighting only for rights and protections stating that: “[e]quality is ... a concept in which gender and sexually diverse populations seek the same rights and responsibilities as the heterosexual populations, without necessarily changing the status quo, except for their very inclusion” (p. 5). He goes further to say that “[m]any, yet not all, who pursue an agenda of equality have assimilationist goals with the more dominant heterosexual populations” (p. 5). Lin (2017) builds on this point and observes that “educators sometimes include LGBTQ content in ways that essentialize [Q]ueer identities and further entrench hetero[cis]normativity, if not homophobia [and transphobia]” (p. 23).

Mulé’s concerns relates to what Dunne (2009), Graham & Slee (2008) and Spandler (2007) have articulated about inclusion being assimilationist. While starting off with the intention to radically change schools, inclusion has quickly become a “new orthodoxy” (Graham & Slee, 2008): “a kind of truth in the present context,” bringing with it a “tendency for ... researchers to take inclusion for granted, to present it as if it

has always been ... without consideration that it is contingent upon the socio-political processes that constructed it” (Spandler, 2007, p. 4). Because inclusion is framed as a “moral imperative ... something that is self-evidently desirable and unquestionable” (Spandler, 2007), it has also become difficult to critique (Spandler, 2007; Dunne, 2009). Just because inclusion has been taken for granted as a “moral imperative” does not mean that the ways we currently seek to *include* people are always affirming or positive. This is because trying to support marginalized people to fit within current systems, our “schooling-as-education” (Airton, 2013) system for example, does not necessarily change that system and challenge the reasons why they feel excluded in the first place.

This potential lack of systemic change relates to what Kumashiro (2002) writes about empathy. A main function of *Education for the Other* and *Education About the Other* approaches is to cultivate understanding about the Other; however, Kumashiro (2002) argues that learning about differences and having an opportunity to develop empathy does not in itself challenge oppression. He states:

The assumption that information and knowledge lead to empathy does not account for times when feelings do not reflect intention, and for that matter when neither feelings nor intention gets played out in behaviour. And even if empathy were to be achieved, it could be argued that it might simply reinforce the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’; for ... the expectation that information about the Other leads to empathy is often based on the assumption that learning about ‘them’ helps students see that ‘they’ are like ‘us.’ (p. 43)

In other words, empathy is not enough to challenge systemic oppression because we can cause harm regardless of our intentions, and if we only care about people who are similar

to us, we are reinforcing the idea that there is an ‘us’ and a ‘them.’ *Education for the Other* and *Education About the Other* are therefore both approaches that seek to normalize the Other as opposed to problematizing society’s tendency to categorize beings in hierarchical ways.

In contrast to those initial approaches, Kumashiro (2002) suggests there are two more standpoints to anti-oppressive education. The third type is *Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering*, which focuses on critiquing and transforming oppression by looking at who is privileged, who is not privileged, and how systems (re)produce privilege. This stance is concerned with teaching learners about oppression, developing a critical consciousness, and working together for social change. While Kumashiro (2002) does not explicitly tie this type of anti-oppressive education to critical pedagogy, I see them as connected. The strengths of this approach are that it teaches students about oppression and engages them in a process of change making. Its potential drawbacks are that it can lack an intersectional lens, it may assume that critical awareness leads to social action (but one cannot control outcomes of learning), and it may be too prescriptive about how to approach change (Kumashiro, 2002).

The fourth type of anti-oppression for which Kumashiro (2002) seems partial is *Education that Changes Students and Society*. It is worth noting that while he breaks these approaches into different ‘types’ of anti-oppressive work, he appears to see them as overlapping. This final type highlights the “intersected and situated nature of Otherness and privilege” (p. 79), and is concerned with identifying and undermining dominant discourses that (re)produce harmful hierarchies. This approach appears to be rooted in

postmodernism and poststructuralism. Through this lens, Kumashiro calls first for creating a ‘curriculum of partiality.’ He explains that

[g]iven the problems with traditional practices of inclusion, and given the impossibility of fully including all differences and voices, some researchers have suggested a different way to think about inclusion and curricular change. The emphasis, here, is less on what each voice teaches directly, and more on what the collection of voices teaches indirectly ... if the expansion rests at staying ‘these other groups were also there, and now we have the full story,’ such a move does not really change ‘the story’ ... However, it is possible to include differences in ways that change the underlying story and the implications of the story for thinking, identifying, and acting in oppressive and/or anti-oppressive ways ... The inclusive curriculum, in other words, can not only tell more about women, [Q]ueers, and Japanese Americans; it can also change narratives ... simultaneously challenging and contributing to various oppressions. (p. 62)

Alternatively said, Kumashiro (2002) advocates for multiple, nuanced, and intersectional voices in curriculum.

Through a ‘curriculum of partiality,’ Kumashiro (2002) invites those doing ‘diversity’ work to think beyond simply including marginalized groups into lessons but showcasing that knowledge is always partial and limited. For example, in a history class a teacher could do a lesson about the Olympics and discuss the first time a visible trans athlete was allowed to compete. This is an inclusive lesson. It is an intentional and meaningful choice to include a perspective that is often missing. That being said, this lesson would likely situate the teacher’s approach in *Education About the Other*. To shift

this lesson to a ‘curriculum of partiality,’ or to the *Education that Changes Students & Society* approach, Kumashiro might suggest a lesson that looks at the development of the Olympics and why trans people were and continue to be excluded from certain sports. The educator may seek to facilitate an activity where students learn about different cultural understandings of gender. The first lesson is *about the Other*, whereas the second is about oppression and offers multiple perspectives. If the educator was not being prescriptive about what students should think, this would likely be an example of enacting *Education that Changes Students and Society*. On the other hand, if the teacher was focused on fostering certain worldviews, it would likely be an example of *Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering*.

Beyond a ‘curriculum of partiality,’ Kumashiro advocates for enacting ‘pedagogies of crises.’ A pedagogy of crisis involves “[l]earning that the very ways in which we think and do things is not only partial but oppressive” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63). This unlearning can be “an emotional process, a form of ‘crisis’” leading students to feel “both unstuck” (i.e. distanced from the ways they have always thought, no longer so complicit with oppression) and “stuck” (i.e. intellectually paralyzed and needing to work through their emotions and thoughts before moving on with the more academic part of the lesson) (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63). This learning can be emotional because it involves thinking about one’s own complicity within oppressive systems. For this approach to be successful educators “need to create a space in their curriculums in which students can work through crisis” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63).

The strengths of Kumashiro’s final type of anti-oppressive education are that it teaches students that knowledge is partial; it engages learners in a process of unlearning;

and it invites people to consider that oppression is intersected and situated in a specific context. Some downfalls of this final ‘type’ of anti-oppressive education are that it is unpredictable and uncontrollable. Using a ‘pedagogy of crisis’ evokes difficult learning; it involves asking people to consider their own complicity in systems and to work through potential feelings of confusion, shame, and guilt. If this learning is not facilitated in a way that accounts for these difficult emotions, learners could potentially shut off and disengage from learning anything further about oppression. Moreover, this type of learning asks a lot from students – an emotional, personal type of learning that is quite detached from a lot of the ‘academic’ type of learning we typically see in formal schooling systems. If educators are barely receiving learning in their teaching programs about Queerness/queerness and do not feel comfortable including ‘content’ about LGBTQIA2S+ people, it is unlikely that many will feel comfortable engaging students in deep reflective learning about identity. To engage with this type of anti-oppressive education, I suspect educators would need to have done their own self-location work first. A big weakness of this approach is therefore that it demands a lot of both students and educators. A final drawback that I see to this approach is it might lack practical application in some respects. Kumashiro (2002) advocates for not being too prescriptive in this stance; however, it is very difficult to act when one is constantly destabilizing knowledge. This is to say that there is value in promoting a curriculum of partiality, but educators should also be attentive to the ways that deconstruction does not inevitably lead to action or reconstruction; questioning the very values people take for granted is an unpredictable process, that if not mediated compassionately can lead to disengagement and rejection of the unlearning process.

Overall, I find all of Kumashiro's 'types' of anti-oppressive education highly enlightening, and while he appears to favour the final approach, he finds strengths and weaknesses in all. I, too, see strengths and weaknesses in all these stances. Kumashiro's four types of anti-oppression education also relate to other frameworks for gender and sexual diversity work in schools.

What stances do schools take towards gender and sexual diversity work?

Different scholars, like Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007) and Lin (2017) have identified different positions that schools and educators take towards Queerness/queerness. I have distilled these different frameworks into four positions/stances towards gender and sexual diversity work: 'resistant,' 'safe,' 'affirming/positive,' and 'queering.' A queering approach relates to what different scholars have written about *queer pedagogies* (Britzman, 1995, 2012; Bryson & Castell, 1993; Hoad, 1994; Luhmann, 1998; Neto, 2018; Niccolini, 2016; Parker, 1994; Rands, 2016), *queer literacies* (Lin, 2017; miller, 2016), and *queer curricula* (Sumara & Davis, 1999). In this section, I describe each of these stances. I posit that the majority of Canadian public schools operate predominately from a safe position, which aligns mostly with Kumashiro's notion of *Education for the Other*. In alignment with the critiques I have offered so far, I suggest there is value in exploring more queer approaches toward gender and sexual diversity work. For a summary of these four stances towards Queerness/queerness in schools, see the following page.

Figure 1. Summary of synthesized gender & diversity framework

Different Approaches/Positions Towards Gender & Sexual Diversity in Schools	General Anti-Oppressive Frameworks	Gender & Sexual Diversity Specific Frameworks	Pedagogies, Literacies, Curricula
<p>Resistant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This approach rejects and avoids LGBTQIA2S+ peoples, histories, and perspectives in schools • It is becoming a less common position in schools because of laws and advocacy work • The passive version of this approach ignores LGBTQIA2S+ people • The active version of this disparages LGBTQIA2S+ peoples (Queerphobia) 	N/A	<i>Homophobic/ Heterosexist framework</i> (Lin, 2017)	<i>Homophobic/ Heterosexist framework</i> (Lin, 2017)
<p>Safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This approach seeks to protect and include LGBTQIA2S+ youth through anti-Queerphobia work, possibly emphasizing the creation of safe school policies, establishing anti-bullying campaigns or trying to create safe spaces (e.g. gender-neutral washrooms, GSAs) • It appears to be the most common approach schools take in Canada • It upholds deficiency narratives if there are not other diversity efforts happening in schools • It focuses on the problems of LGBTQIA2S+ youth, not the problem of schooling and hetero/cisnormativity • It does not require schools challenge hetero/cisnormative thinking 	<i>Education for the Other</i> (Kumashiro, 2002)	<p><i>Safe</i> (Goldstein, Russell, & Daley, 2007)</p> <p><i>Tolerance/ Visibility framework</i> (Lin, 2017)</p>	<i>Tolerance/ Visibility framework</i> (Lin, 2017)
<p>Affirming/Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This stance tries to affirm LGBTQIA2S+ people by ensuring there is better representation of Queer people in school students • Students are learning about Queer people through curriculum, and spaces reflect the needs of Queer people • It appears to be happening more frequently in progressive places • SOGI 123 (BC & Alberta initiative) takes an affirming/positive stance by offering lesson plans and professional development opportunities for educators • This approach strives to normalize Queer identities as a medium for greater acceptance 	<i>Education About the Other</i> (Kumashiro, 2002)	<p><i>Positive</i> (Goldstein, Russell, & Daley, 2007)</p> <p><i>Social Justice frameworks</i> (Lin, 2017)</p>	<i>Social Justice frameworks</i> (Lin, 2017)
<p>Queering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This position focuses on more the systemic aspects of schooling (curriculum, pedagogy, the time/space or schools) • This approach emphasizes deconstructing hetero/cisnormativity and the problematic aspects of schools (e.g. the hidden curriculum) and trying to reconstruct it through a queer lens • This approach takes a more intersectional approach • This stance does not seem to be very common in K-12 schools nor does it seem to be prevalent in teacher education programs • This connects to queer theories, queer pedagogies, queer literacy frameworks etc. • It is about disrupting norms and systems (anti-normativity) 	<p><i>Education that is Critical of Privileging and Oppression</i> (Kumashiro, 2002)</p> <p><i>Education that Changes Students & Society</i> (Kumashiro, 2002)</p>	<p><i>Queering</i> (Goldstein, Russell, & Daley, 2007)</p> <p><i>Social Justice frameworks</i> (Lin, 2017)</p> <p><i>Queer framework</i> (Lin, 2017)</p>	<p><i>Social Justice frameworks</i> (Lin, 2017)</p> <p><i>Queer framework</i> (Lin, 2017)</p> <p><i>Queer pedagogies</i> (Britzman, 1995, 2012; Bryson & Castell, 1993; Hoad, 1994; Luhmann, 1998; Neto, 2018; Niccolini, 2016; Parker, 1994; Rands, 2016)</p> <p><i>Queer literacy frameworks</i> (Lin, 2017; miller, 2016)</p> <p><i>Queer curricula</i> (Sumara & Davis, 1999)</p>

What is a 'resistant' position? The first position that some schools take, 'resistant,' is without question harmful. A 'resistant' approach is what Lin (2017) calls a homophobic/heterosexist framework. In this stance, literature and curriculum "neglect[s] the existence of LGBTQ people and experiences" or "derid[es] characters who do not conform to gender or sexuality binaries" (Lin, 2017, p. 24). This is because "[h]omophobic/heterosexist pedagogy [would likely] restrict curriculum to heteronormative texts (as in the norm) and operate as if the whole world is heterosexual and gender conforming" (Lin, 2017, p. 25). Beyond curriculum and pedagogy, resistance can appear through policy. Take for instance, Harvest and Meadows Baptist Academy, two schools in Edmonton, Alberta that refused this past year to respect the passing of Bill 24, which requires all public, independent, and private school boards in the province support the creation of LGBTQIA2S+ student support groups. In response to this bill, 26 independent schools tried to stall these changes and Harvest and Meadows Baptist Academy, have, in violation of the bill, refused to change the language of their school policies. These schools offer an example of a 'resistant' approach towards gender and sexual diversity that is manifesting in their policy.

Overall, resistance to gender and sexual diversity in schools is less societally acceptable because of laws and advocacy work (Rayside, 2008, 2014); however, it is worth outlining that some students and educators are still operating in 'resistant' environments. Callaghan (2016, 2018, 2019) has documented widespread discrimination in many Catholic schools in violation of Canadian laws, policies from Ministries of Education, and other regulating bodies. This is not to say that all religious schools are discriminatory, or that religion is the only reason people would be 'resistant.' I draw on

this example to emphasize that not all schools across Canada, a province, or even a city are taking the same position towards gender and sexual diversity work. Even within a single school, educators can harbour a range of positions, meaning that some people might be trying to take an ‘positive/affirming’ stance and others are altogether ‘resistant.’ Moreover, it is unlikely that schools or educators who are ‘resistant’ will suddenly adopt a ‘queering’ position; I suspect if they are to shift perspectives, they are more likely to adopt a ‘safe’ position first, followed by ‘affirming/positive,’ and then maybe consider ‘queering.’

What is a ‘safe’ position? A ‘safe’ position, stance, or approach to gender and sexual diversity work can be understood as synonymous with anti-Queerphobia. It is a form of care work: addressing the immediate needs of people (particularly youth). It is arguably the most popular approach to gender and sexual diversity work. Schools create anti-bullying campaigns and establish protective policies. Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007) call this approach ‘a safe school model.’ Kumashiro (2002) calls it *Education for the Other*. It is important to recognize Queerphobia as a real problem worthy of solutions. The limitation of this approach is that it does not have a very expansive scope. Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007) describe a ‘safe’ approach as “safe school planning” (p. 184), which is using policies, strategies, and activities to promote tolerance. They (2007) explain that a

safe school model may allow educators to redress homophobic slurs, stereotypes and violence within school environments. However, this approach to providing safety and protection is limited for [Q]ueer students because it builds, in part, upon a discourse that homogenizes [Q]ueer youth into one hopeless category” (pp. 184-185)

Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007) identify various problems with this approach. They identify the same Queer suffering trope that many other scholars have observed (e.g. Airton, 2013; Brockenbrough, 2015; Formby, 2015; MacIntosh, 2007; Rofes, 2005). They (2007) likewise claim that a ‘safe’ approach “individualizes the problems [Q]ueer youth face while simultaneously normalizing heterosexuality”(p. 185). It “abdicates responsibility for challenging power systems and culture that privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality” (p. 185). Moreover, Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007) assert that this anti-harassment approach “constructs sexuality as private rather than political, thus, (heteronormative) sexual education is ‘closeted’ within the private domain of the family and/or health and physical education classes” (p. 185). Safety thus does not demand that schools address hetero/cisnormativity. A ‘safe’ position is merely a “band-aid” (MacIntosh, 2007): an attempt to heal the symptoms of Queerphobia without addressing its root causes, hetero/cisnormativity.

What is an ‘affirming/positive’ position? An ‘affirming/positive’ position, like a ‘safe’ stance, does not necessarily challenge hetero/cisnormativity, but it does go farther than the former approach. It considers care and reciprocity together on an individual level. My understanding of an ‘affirming/positive’ position connects with Goldstein, Russell, Daley’s (2007) understanding of ‘a positive school model’ and Kumashiro’s (2002) explanation of *Education About the Other*.

According to Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007), a positive school model moves beyond the scope of LGBTQIA2S+ students to also include LGBTQIA2S+ staff and community members and is about using a variety of tools to ensure a sense of safety and belonging for Queer people. “Positive schools model not only commit to meeting the

needs and safety of students, but to the needs and safety of employees, trustee, parents, volunteers, visitors, permit-holders, contractors, and partners who identify on the basis of sexual orientation [and gender identity] as well” (Goldstein, Russell, Daley, 2007, p. 185). This approach maintains that for anti-Queerphobic work to be successful it must be “internalized;” “students and staff [need to] learn [how] to respect, accept and affirm their own identities and those of others” beyond just regulating their behaviours (avoiding getting in trouble). In this stance,

[c]urriculum and teacher education are seen as powerful tools to challenge homophobic ideas and stereotypes. Finally political tools are also taken up alongside curriculum in order to address systemic expressions of bias. Thus, a positive school approach seeks to address [Queerphobia] through individual change and institutional and structural (system change)” (pp. 185-186)

A positive school model, an ‘affirming/positive’ stance, connects to Kumashiro’s (2002) *Education About the Other* because it utilizes the curriculum, policies, and other tools to spotlight the ways that people are Othered, and to help develop empathy around that group (the discrimination they face). Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007) identify two main issues with this approach: (1) it separates sexuality with sexual identities (anti-Queerphobia work and SOGI curriculums often distance themselves from Queer sexual education, which is often deemed too controversial); (2) and it perpetuates a suffering trope. Kumashiro (2002) also troubles this stance for the following reasons: in trying to explain Queer experiences to learners, it can essentialize LGBTQIA2S+ people and miss the complexity of Queerness/queerness; and it can inadvertently position the (Queer) Other as an expert, putting them in positions where people rely on them to teach others

about their experiences.

What is a ‘queering’ position? A ‘queering’ position is rooted in *queer pedagogies* (Britzman, 1995, 2012; Bryson & Castell, 1993; Hoad, 1994; Luhmann, 1998; Neto, 2018; Niccolini, 2016; Parker, 1994; Rands, 2016), *queer curricula* (Sumara & Davis, 1999), and *queer literacies* (Lin, 2017; miller, 2016). It connects strongly with the collective members discussions about disruption. This position also connects with Kumashiro (2002) understanding of *Education that is Critical of Privilege and Oppression and Education that Changes Students & Society*.

A ‘queering’ position connects with queer pedagogy, which “antagonizes identity while simultaneously claiming a radical visibility” (Wargo, 2016). According to Wargo (2016) who analyzes Britzman’s foundational piece “Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or Stop Reading Straight,” queer pedagogy operates as the “study of and argument against the limits of inclusion” (p. 301). Queer pedagogy, which operates from an anti-normative framework, can help learners and educators critique the ways some individuals are privileged. In allowing for an investigation into the ways identities are constructed and received in societal contexts, a ‘queering’ position also engages with Kumashiro’s *Education that is Critical of Privileging and Oppression*, which is about looking at how people are privileged in society and how oppression operates.

Beyond being a tool for critically analyzing systems of power in the context of classroom learning, a ‘queering’ approach also demands that those who engage with it question how they understand identity and schooling. A ‘queering’ position is one of perpetual inquiry – asking questions and refusing to settle on an answer. A ‘queering’ pedagogy would draw attention to how norms/systems are constructed in and through

teaching, refusing to accept the validity of those norms/systems, and refusing answers altogether (favouring inquiry and ambiguity). But this is not the only way 'queering' can be understood and applied in schools. A 'queering' approach can also be applied in the learning and work that educators, administrators, and policy makers do themselves. If we think beyond the scope of classroom and 'content' one can apply this understanding of *queering* to curriculum. Sumara & Davis (1999) noted that curriculum could be a tool for helping people examine the fluid, ever-changing nature of identities and sparking curiosity about desire, pleasure, and sexuality. Meyer, Tilland-Stafford, & Airton (2016) have also advocated for more flexible curriculum that models and promotes creativity/non-conformity and locates students at the center of their own growth/learning. This idea of inquiry, flexible learning, and exploration without limits/answers relates to what Kumashiro (2002) has written about *Education that Changes Students & Society*. Kumashiro wrote that that type of anti-oppressive education utilizes a curriculum of partiality, where people are taught that they will only ever have a partial understanding.

Besides taking a queering approach to pedagogy and curriculum, one could take a queering stance towards one's values, everyday language, and behaviour. Sj miller (2016) provides a queer literacy framework (QLF) that relates to values which in turn translate to everyday language and behaviours. miller outlines ten principles for a queer literacy framework. Educators (1) refrain from assuming students ascribe to a gender; (2) understand gender as a social, historical, material, cultural, economic and religious construct; (3) recognize that masculinity and femininity are constructs that are assigned as part of gender norms and are situationally performed; (4) understand gender as flexible; (5) open up spaces for students to self-define with chosen a/genders, a/pronouns

or names; (6) engage in an ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced in various aspects of society (literature, media, technology, art, history, science, math etc.); (7) understand how neoliberalism reinforces and maintains compulsory heterosexism; (8) understand that a/gender intersects with other identities (sexual orientation, culture, language, age, religion, class, body time, ability etc.); (9) advocate for equity; (10) and believe that students who identify on a continuum of gender identities deserve to learn in an environment free of discrimination and violence. These understandings embody a queer stance towards gender and sexual diversity work.

I outline these different approaches towards gender and sexual diversity work to showcase that not all schools or educators engage with Queerness/queerness in the same ways. There are strengths and weaknesses to the latter three approaches (safe, affirming, and queering). During my discussion chapter, I return to these stances and conclude that *queering schools praxis* for the collective was an engagement with all three positions.

What is queer thrival?

I conclude my literature review with a brief note about queer thrival, a “critical concept” (p. 310) coined by Adam J. Greteman (2018) that “articulate[s] ways that [Q]ueers might develop or grow vigorously” (p. 310). I do so because this idea of thriving represents what is at the heart of this research. For Greteman (2018),

to thrive is not simply to develop well but to develop in a way that does the work of queerness – taking a stance, an ever-changing stance, against social norms, well. Queer thrival takes risks. This work contests, makes strange, and disrupts space and time. It promotes and recruits. To engage queer thrival is to ask that we investigate, uncover, and invest ways of thriving upon and amid our surviving.

However, it does not replace the continued need to address and advocate for survival. Rather queer thrival looks to help guide [Q]ueers into a twenty-first century in ways that do justice to our existence utilizing our survival to cultivate our queer thrival (p. 310).

I wanted to end this section with Greteman's (2018) concept of queer thrival because I believe it weaves various scholars' appeal to move away from deficiency narratives with Kumashiro's conceptualizations of critical and postmodern anti-oppressive enactments of education. This study examines the question of how we can cultivate queer thriving in schools by analyzing the nuanced, and at times, contradictory ways diverse activist educators conceive of *queering schools*.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Now that I have offered an argument about why this research matters, I explain my methodology, which is a broad term to represent how a researcher designs a study. In most disciplines, researchers select a methodology that other scholars in their field have used. There are two broad categories of research: quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative research collects and analyzes numerical data. Qualitative research gathers and interprets words and stories. Quantitative research has specific methodologies, as does qualitative. Sometimes researchers take a mixed-methods approach where they collect both numerical and descriptive data. This study is qualitative, meaning that I gathered and analyzed descriptive data, specifically the words shared during interviews, discussions (focus groups), and journals. The methodology I ended up selecting was Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). I stumbled upon CPAR because I was looking for a research approach that prioritized action. Karen Potts & Leslie Brown's (2005) words about anti-oppressive research resonated with me. They explain that

[c]ommitting ourselves to anti-oppressive work means committing to social change and ... taking an active role in that change ... Anti-oppressive research involves making explicit the political practices of creating knowledge. It means making a commitment to the people you are working with personally and professionally in order to mutually foster conditions for social justice and research. It is about paying attention to, and shifting how power relations work in and thought the processes of doing research (p. 255).

Out of the methodologies I considered, CPAR seemed the most interested in taking an active role in facilitating change. In this section, I describe my researcher values, CPAR

as a methodology, my ethical considerations, and the recruitment process. I likewise offer a brief description of each collective member (co-researcher/participant).

My Researcher Values

My worldviews (ontology), my conceptions of knowledge (epistemology) and values towards research (axiology) are the following: that life can, and should be improved; that our current “schooling-as-education” (Airton, 2013) system is dehumanizing and oppressive in certain ways; and that we cannot facilitate systemic change without multiple, ongoing, collaborative efforts. I approach this project from a social constructivist lens (Brown, McLean, & McMillan, 2018), meaning that I see knowledge as something that people make together through constant interactions. I do not believe that only some people are allowed to legitimize knowledge. I believe we come to know and understand our world through discourses, which we can consume and (re)produce or disrupt and recreate. I do not think that discourses are always dehumanizing (Green, 2010). I think of interruption – “talk[ing] back” (hooks, 1989) to hegemonic discourses – as a site of resistance (Foucault, 1980; Green, 2010). I likewise see interrupting dominant discourses as agentic action – people using their “capacity to act and alter the relations of oppression in [their] own world” (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 258). Because I wanted to centre Queer people and educators and action, I chose critical participatory action as my research design.

Understanding Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)

What is CPAR?

Critical participatory action research (CPAR) is a qualitative, community-based, and social-justice-oriented methodology (research design). It “offers an opportunity to

create [a] foru[m] in which people can join one another as co-participants in the struggle to remake the practices in which they interact” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 20). CPAR strives to facilitate, document, and monitor a process of people coming together over a shared vision to imagine and enact change in a specific environment. This process of facilitating, documenting, and monitoring change is commonly referred to as the ‘action research spiral’ (Kemmiss, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014), which is associated with action research. While CPAR has elements of action research, it is different from action research because it takes a critical lens to itself and research production. Moreover, it is *participatory* action research because participants shape the research direction and projects. In sum, the word *critical* signals this methodology’s deconstructive tendencies; the word *participatory* emphasizes its commitment to having participants co-research; and the words *action research* emphasize its iterative nature (the cycling back and forth between reflection and action).

What are the stages of CPAR?

According to Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon (2014), CPAR involves participants doing the following: (1) reflecting on why people operate in certain ways in particular environments; (2) considering if their own practices are “untoward (irrational, unsustainable, or unjust)” (p. 87); (3) having “practical and focused conversations” (p. 87) about the issue, coming to “an unforced consensus” (p. 87) about what to do moving forward as a group; (4) making a plan for action; (5) trying out those actions while documenting and monitoring the effects; (6) and continuously asking oneself what is next. The critical components of this process relate to step one and two; they are about understanding the context one is trying to change. The participatory components pertain

to step three and four because in those conversations emerges a collective vision about the issue and/or research question. The action research components pertain to all the steps, but particularly to steps four and six, because in planning, acting, monitoring, assessing and reflecting, participants are engaged in the action-reflection spiral.

How is CPAR different from participatory research and action research?

This methodology's origins are diverse, "complex and difficult to map with any precision ... because the term is used loosely and often interchangeably with concepts such as action research ... [and] PAR is itself a blend of a broad range of research approaches and epistemologies that include participatory research, action research, feminist praxis, critical ethnography, [A]boriginal research methodologies, transformative education, critical and eco-pedagogies, and popular and community education" (Kapoor & Jordan, 2009, p. 16). Even though some people may view CPAR as synonymous with action research or participatory action research, there are some subtle differences between these methodologies.

Both action and participatory research have similar emancipatory goals, but their origins and epistemologies diverge in some key ways. Action research has been used since the early twentieth century in many fields and for many purposes, including the women's movement, Indigenous land rights, environmental activism, education, nursing, etc. (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). Action research emerged in American and British social research through German physician and social philosopher, Kurt Lewin (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). It is with Lewin that the 'self-reflective spiral' – the continuous steps of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning etc. – emerged (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). While action research has been used in many

different fields, and for different political, practical or epistemological reasons, this methodology has two defining features across differences: that “people living and working in particular settings . . . participate actively in all aspects of the research process” and that “the research conducted by participants is oriented to making improvements in practices and their settings by the participants themselves” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 4). Due to this focus on practice or settings, action research has commonly been used in organizational, industrial, and classroom settings.

Participatory (action) research (often called PR or PAR), shares some of the values of action research, but has different origins. It also values “shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation towards community action” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 11). Like action research, PR or PAR is concerned with engaging the community in a process of co-investigation, where participants are both researchers and actors. Although PAR/PR and action research share some values, they do differ in some important ways. Kapoor & Jordan (2009) note three ways that these methodologies differ:

First, action research has primarily European and North American origins.

Second, [action research] has been principally developed by academic researchers working from universities within the advanced capitalist world of the Global North. Third, [action research’s] ideological orientation has tended to be liberal, focusing on the improvement of professional practices—this is why it has proven to be so popular among researchers working with teachers and other professional groups (Kapoor & Jordan, 2009, p. 17).

It is from a concern with just improving professional practice – instead of unearthing what shapes those practices – that critical participatory action research has materialized. Kapoor & Jordan (2009) argue that PAR/PR has “increasingly ... been subject to forces that have compromised its revolutionary potential as a transformatory methodology” ... subordinating “the concept and practice of participation ... to a neoliberal agenda that in many respects mirrors the aims, objectives, and priorities of nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism” (pp. 5-6). In other words, some scholars have critiqued both action research and participatory (action) research, claiming that it does not address underlying discourses that shape these methodologies. From this criticism came a modified approach to action/participatory research that pays closer attention to “bureaucratic discourses, routinized practices and institutionalised forms of social relationships” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 12).

In sum, critical participatory action research is both similar to and distinct from action research and participatory (action) research. Critical participatory action research shares many of the aforementioned goals of engaging community in co-research and action; however, it takes a critical eye to itself and resists the idea PAR should be used for assimilationist, mainstream aims. Ultimately, the addition of the word ‘critical’ to participatory action research speaks to this approach’s attentiveness towards how hegemonic discourses shape research, making them particularly challenging to combat (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 12).

What paradigms inform CPAR?

Since critical participatory action research (CPAR) is concerned with liberation, this methodology seems to align with a “critically-reflective paradigm” (Aoki, 2004). A

critically reflective paradigm upholds the ontological idea that “[l]ife can be improved” and the epistemological stance that we can improve the “human condition by rendering transparent tacit assumptions and hidden assumptions apparent by initiating a process of transformation designed to liberate [people]” (Aoki, 2004, p. 100). This ontological and epistemological research stance relates to critical theories and critical pedagogy, particularly Freire’s idea of “‘conscientization,’ knowing reality in order to better transform it” (Lather, 1986, p. 67). While highly influential, critical pedagogy has been critiqued by some poststructural feminists (e.g. Weiler, 2001) who have noted that Freire leaves out the perspectives of women through his language and perspective. Although action research and participatory research have not been critiqued for gender reasons (as critical pedagogy has been), postmodern scholars have noted they too have their blindspots; that such methodologies may indirectly promote hegemonic neoliberal, colonial discourses (Kapoor & Jordan, 2009). The addition of a ‘critical’ to PAR therefore speaks to a postmodern/poststructural commitment to critique. Because CPAR is concerned with how discourses shape practice, it does not just operate from a “critically-reflective paradigm” (Aoki, 2004); it connects with a postmodern/poststructural paradigm. Critical participatory action research therefore seems to have a mixed, “conflicted,” and compound ontology and epistemology: a critically reflective and postmodern orientation.

Why is CPAR suitable for this study?

There are a few reasons why critical participatory action research fits well with the questions and aims of my study. My main research questions, which evolved throughout this process, are: *What is queering schools praxis according to a collective of*

local activist educators? How can schools' mainstream gender and sexual diversity efforts shift from an inclusion/protection model to a queering model (according the Queering Schools Collective)? Is that shift desirable or possible? And what role do / can educators play in queering schools praxis? One informational aim of my study was to co-construct knowledge with a group of activist minded educators about whether it is possible to *queer* schools in different ways. Another was to invite educators to reflect on their role in transformational education work. Some political and social aims of this study were to share our knowledge about *queering* with others and to create a compassionate and uplifting community where educators, particularly Queer and otherwise marginalized folks, could be seen, validated, and supported.

CPAR aligns well with my research question and aims because it strives to both *deconstruct* (critique) and *reconstruct* (transform). It is likewise “strongly represented in the literatures of educational action research, and emerges from dissatisfactions with classroom action research which ... does not take a broad view of the role of the relationship between education and social change” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 12). As previously mentioned, CPAR “focuses on how to create (or recreate) new possibilities ... through the revitalization of the public sphere ... that have become saturated with bureaucratic discourses, routinized practices and institutionalised forms of social relationships” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 12). Because this thesis is concerned with disrupting hetero/cisnormative discourses that are embedded within the “routinized practices and institutionalized forms of social relationships” found in schools, CPAR fits well. As mentioned previously, this research is rooted in various frameworks (poststructural feminism, queer theories, Native feminist theories, critical and queer

pedagogy) that address critique and transformation. The design of this study was framed with the awareness that discourse is everywhere and shapes our efforts to transform.

Besides being a good fit because CPAR is often associated with educational research and studying discursive power, this methodology is also well suited because it is concerned with the “ordinary” (Airton, 2013, p. 554). By the “ordinary,” I mean the everyday lived conditions of communities involved in the research. In an appeal to those of us who care deeply about changing schools, Airton (2013) has said that “the scale of our interventions does not have to be that of the systems we hold ourselves to oppose, and the grammar of our interventions does not have to mirror the ways in which gender and sexual non/normativity are currently constructed within that system” (p. 554). They (2013) go farther to say that “[e]xperiments with participatory action research carried out by school constituents with the goal of making local knowledge and increment change” might offer “strategies for affecting the ordinary” that “[t]op down initiatives, policies or curricula” do not offer (p. 554). It is with this desire to affect the “ordinary” that I have chosen to utilize a critical participatory action model.

Enacting Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)

Now that I have explained why I selected CPAR as a methodology, I explain how I enacted it. Specifically, I explain: ethical considerations for the study, participant selection/recruitment, data collection and analysis. I also offer brief biography statements for each collective member.

How did I ensure this study was ethical throughout?

“Ethics pertains to doing good and avoiding harm” (Orb, Einsehauer, & Wynaden, 2000, p. 92). One way that “[h]arm can be prevented or reduced [is] through

the application of appropriate ethical principles” (Orb, Einsehauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 92). I mitigated harm by firstly obtaining ethical approval from the University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) and the Greater Victoria School District and ensuring that I provided updates to the boards with any changes. Both ethics boards had their own applications that required me to clarify how I would protect participants in the study. In those applications, I mainly outlined how I would protect participants’ confidentiality and ensure ongoing consent. I acquired consent from participants, and explained that participants could not be anonymous to others or myself in the collective, but they could be anonymous in my findings. All participants have opted for pseudonyms in this thesis.

The second way I considered ethics related to ensuring the wellbeing, thriving, and agency of collective members. Having worked in schools, I am aware of how stretched teachers can be. Being a Queer person who has also been asked to do unpaid labour to educate those around me about Queerness, it was important for me to offer participants an honorarium to acknowledge this labour. Each collective member was therefore provided \$200 at the end of the project, which came out of my CSG-M SSHRC scholarship. Ongoing consent was also integral to this project. I asked continuously, during interviews, focus group meetings if I could audio and/or video record. For our focus group meetings, I asked everyone to close their eyes and raise their hands firstly if they agreed to have the meeting audio-recorded and secondly if they agreed to have it video-recorded. I also sent each participant a copy of their direct quotations to ensure they were satisfied with the representation. I likewise provided opportunities for any collective member to offer feedback on the project and thesis in general, with no

expectation of additional labour – only if they wanted to engage in that process.

Collective members took on very active roles in constructing knowledge and a few chose to provide additional labour in terms of offering suggestions regarding the representation of data. In sum, it was important for me to flatten the hierarchy of ‘researcher’ and ‘those being researched’ as much as possible. The collective members were co-researchers, not just participants. Overall, while I developed an initial research topic, question, and idea, the participants/co-researchers influenced this process at every stage.

How did I recruit and select educators?

My original intention was to recruit four high school classroom teachers from the Greater Victoria School District and four community educators doing sexual and gender diversity work in schools. This did not end up being the composition of the collective. I recruited educators by word of mouth and snowball sampling, searching for teachers with these backgrounds. While I ended up recruiting nine educators instead of eight and the majority were community educators as opposed to public/school board teachers, the reason why I opted to work with educators remains the same, and I realized that there was no real reason to focus specifically on public high school teachers.

Through having conversations with prospective participants it became clear that a better criterion for selection was people’s eagerness and passion for the project. Many public school teachers simply did not have the time to commit to a five-month project consisting of multiple focus group meetings and interviews. In contrast, without advertising to independent schools, I was approached by two independent school educators, named Max and Kat in this thesis. Because a big part of this project was to create a community, I felt it would be more effective to find individuals who were

passionate and committed to joining. I consequently adjusted my ethics so they could be part of the project. The same was true for the two youth educators who ended up participating. While I had initially thought to exclude youth because I did not consider youth educators when devising my question, one person who joined the collective, Reagan, asked if she could invite two youth educators who worked with her organization. This self-selection process ultimately led to individuals who were very passionate about discussing *queering schools*.

Why did I focus on educators?

I decided to recruit educators, Queer educators, and allies in particular, because I wanted to focus on the structural aspects of schooling. I suspected that educators might be more cognizant of the systemic aspects of schooling. As I illustrated in my literature review, there is a tendency in research and school efforts to focus exclusively on including/protecting LGBTQIA2S+ youth. With attention to this trope, I wanted to focus on schooling systems, not youth, and thought that educators might be well located to consider ways we can *queer* curriculum, pedagogy, learning spaces, and the general structure of schools. I have since thought about this focus on educators because two of the collective members, who I refer to as Lauren & Ronnie in this thesis, ended up being youth peer educators (in their early twenties) for community organizations. It became apparent that youth should have an active voice. The collective consistently conveyed a desire to connect with more youth moving forward.

The second reason I wanted to work with educators is because I believe they can play transformative roles within schools. Giroux (1993) frames educators as engaged intellectuals. He (1993) writes that:

[a]dministrators and teachers need to work under conditions that allow them to function as intellectuals and not as technicians or clerks. If we are to take the concept of intellectuality seriously as part of theory and practice of leadership, it means giving educators joint power to shape the conditions under which they work, to produce curriculum that is suited to the interests of the students they actually teach (p. 24).

Educators greatly impact a school's culture and can act as information gatekeepers for students. They wield power within schools and can either perpetuate hegemonic discourses or interrupt/reconfigure them along with their students. I selected these types of educators for two main reasons. I saw classroom teachers as being 'insiders' with unique insights about schools and I perceived community educators as having unique 'specialist' perspectives.

Who were the collective members?

There were nine co-researchers/participants. Throughout this thesis, I use the words participants/co-researchers and collective members synonymously. A few of the participants wrote their own biographical statements.

Figure 2. Collective members bios

<i>Bridget</i>	is a cisgender, heterosexual white settler ally and sex educator at a local health organization in Victoria BC, who has been doing educational programming in schools for the past fifteen years.
<i>Gabby</i>	works as an educational assistant at a local elementary school in Victoria BC. She is a Queer identified cisgender woman who comes from Jewish ancestry.

<i>Kat</i>	is a Queer white settler who teaches art and other subjects at an independent school and public high school. She is also a visual artist and sometimes likes to go by she/her pronouns and sometimes prefers they/them.
<i>Lauren</i>	is an Aninishaabe two-spirit peer/youth educator. They work for an Indigenous network doing sexual health work. They see asking difficult questions as a crucial part of their role as a two-spirit youth.
<i>Max</i>	works at an independent school in Victoria BC and is passionate about outdoor education and supporting Indigenous governance/resurgence. They are a storyteller and plant enthusiast. They identify as a non-binary settler.
<i>Gayle</i>	is an Indigenous educator, cisgender/heterosexual teacher, and ally who has been teaching for the past six years. She currently works with Greater Victoria School District and Sooke School District.
<i>Sarah</i>	is a local Queer visual artist who does creative workshop development for schools and private organizations. She/they are also a drag performer. They live in the notion that the artist is here to bring spirit to the masses. She strives to effect positive change through creative empowerment. Creating new pathways for healing through a process of multi-disciplinary art practice. Cross-pollinating psychology, mythology, and spirituality towards holistic effects.
<i>Reagan</i>	is a community sexual health and harm reduction educator, who does a lot of work supporting lgbtq2+ youth to lead peer education programs. She is a cisgender white settler who identifies as queer but holds heterosexual privilege. She believes queer youth should be the ones informing, designing,

	and changing the system of education.
Ronnie	is a youth educator who helps lead and facilitate Queer-related community workshops for other youth. They are a non-binary, white settler who also works on a local farm.

What data did I collect?

I collected through three mediums: interviews (initial and exit), focus groups, and journals. In this section, I outline in chronological order when and how I gathered data.

Initial Interviews. Each participant was interviewed after being selected. This initial interview provided information about participants' values and understanding of concepts like inclusion, hetero/cisnormativity as well as their experiences and feelings working in schools (see questions in Appendix C). This initial interview informed what we discussed at our first meeting; I developed discussion questions and a format based on those comments.

Focus Group Meetings. After each participant was individually interviewed, we had our first focus group meeting in late October. The transcription generated from that meeting informed our second meeting in late November. The same was true for our third and final meeting in early January. While I drafted an agenda, which I called "Journey" for each of these meetings, it took on a very loose format and was used as a starting point.

Exit Interviews. After our final focus group meeting, each participant was interviewed. They were asked about how they experienced the process and what they learned, if anything (see questions in Appendix D).

Journals. At this time, participants were also given the opportunity to share journals if they had been using one. Only one collective member, Max, shared a physical

journal with me. Others had taken electronic notes. Overall, three out of the nine collective members shared journal or additional thoughts (electronic reflections) with me.

How did I code and analyze data?

I coded and analyzed the data thematically. After each collection period (the initial interviews, each focus group, exit interviews, and collection of journals), I would thematically code the data and see what ideas were emerging. I looked for similarities and differences between participants' thoughts, noting areas where collective members seemed to have different or overlapping perspectives. I would share these themes with participants as a way to open up our group conversations. Overall, I coded all the data according to sub-categories, which I later connected to larger categories. My coding and analyses were an iterative process, where I read and re-read transcriptions at various stages.

How did I measure validity in this study?

“Validity refers to whether methods undertaken in quantitative or qualitative research examine what they are intended to examine and thus produce credible findings” (Bailey, 2010, p. 921). Each type of research determines validity differently; “[t]he criteria that determine[s] whether a given study is valid differ based on which philosophies and theories guide the research, the research purpose, and whether the research is qualitative or quantitative” (Bailey, 2010, p. 921). In alignment with the critically-reflective (Aoki, 2004) and post-modern orientation of critical participatory action research, I am measuring legitimacy and validity through *communicative action*

(Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014), *verisimilitude* (Hopper, Madill et al., 2008), and *catalytic validity* (Bailey, 2010; Kvale, 1995; Lather, 1986).

Communicative Action. The first measure of validity for this research is *communicative action*, which is “the kind of action we take when we engage one another in genuine, open dialogue” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 35) According to Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon (2014), it occurs when people “stop and ask what is happening ... enter[ing] a different kind of action from the usual *strategic action* of getting things done” (p. 35). *Communicative action* takes place when people “make a conscious and deliberate effort to reach (a) *intersubjective agreement* about the ideas and language they use ... (b) *mutual understanding* of one another’s points of view in order to reach (c) *unforced consensus* about what to do in their particular situation” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 35). *Communicative action* is a critical feature of CPAR and it is only when participants decide for themselves what they believe to be understandable, to be true, to be authentically stated, and be morally right/appropriate (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014) that CPAR becomes valid.

Verisimilitude. The second measure I used to determine validity for my findings is *verisimilitude*, which can be understood as “a truth that has practical meaning and relevance, one that captures an experience in a way that might shed new understanding for the reader” (Hopper et al., 2008, p. 229). Hopper et al. (2008) explain this type of validity as when “[k]nowledge is uncovered through the recalled experiences, emotions, and feelings of the individual living through an experience” (p. 228). They (2008) explain that while claims to knowledge are not generalizable when individuals are recalling personal narratives (experiences), because they are on a personal and subjective level, it

can evoke a sense of truth to the reader who engages with it. Like with communicative action, verisimilitude does not require that all participants reflect the exact same “truth.” Nor does verisimilitude require that data occur frequently to be considered valid; what makes the research valid is the relevance to the lives and actions of the participants and those that interact with the research.

Catalytic validity. Catalytic validity is similarly about the relevance of research to participants and broader communities. Bailey (2010) explains that researchers have historically “adapted traditional scientific criteria associated with quantitative research to establish qualitative research as valid” such as “systematic data collection techniques, triangulation, and multiple coders to reduce researcher bias and ensure valid findings” (p. 921); however, in the past few decades, different qualitative scholars have questioned the standards that are used to measure ‘good,’ ‘legitimate,’ and ‘valid’ research (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 2002; Holliday, 2012; Lather, 1986, 1991; Lincoln, 2010; Sparkes, 1995, 2002; Yakushko et al., 2016). Catalytic validity is a measure that has been proposed for certain types of qualitative research, namely transformative, praxis-focused inquiries. “Unlike traditional forms of validity, catalytic validity is not achieved through creating and following a checklist of standard criteria to demonstrate research credibility” (Bailey, 2010, p. 921); it is instead about seeing if the research project achieves its transformative goals.

When assessing the validity of this study by asking the following questions: *Were participants engaged in a process of open dialogue where they were able to investigate and articulate their ideas and vision for queering schools (communicative action)? Were participants given consistent opportunities to check that the ways I interpreted their*

thoughts and represent them here in my thesis are accurate/truthful (communicative action)? Is this research relevant to the lives of the participants and to other people (verisimilitude)? Did this research enable personal and social transformation for the participants (catalytic validity)? Will this research potentially evoke further discussions and actions that can mobilize transformation when it comes to queering schools (catalytic validity)? I discuss validity more in my discussion chapter.

In the two upcoming chapters, I outline key findings, offering an initial interpretation (Chapter 4), followed by an expanded discussion (Chapter 5).

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I delineate and interpret findings from individual/exit interviews, focus group meetings, and journal entries. Specifically, I describe four clusters of data: (1) how collective members defined queer(ness)(ing) generally and in relation to schooling; (2) how collective members responded to the word inclusion; (3) how collective members described their role as educators; (4) and how collective members talked about the impact of this research. I have selected these clusters of data because they each address elements of my overarching research questions. Cluster one, definitions of queerness/queering, relates to the first part of my inquiry: *What does queering schools (praxis) mean?* Clusters one and two, understandings of queerness/queering and inclusion, relates to the second part of my question: *Would it be possible and worthwhile for schools to shift from an inclusion/protection model to queering model in schools?* Finally, clusters three and four, the ways educators perceive themselves and view the process of CPAR, connects to the final element of my research question: *What roles do / can educators play in queering schools praxis?* In the subsequent chapter, I address each of those questions making further connections to the literature.

Cluster 1: How Collective Members Defined Queer(ness)(ing)

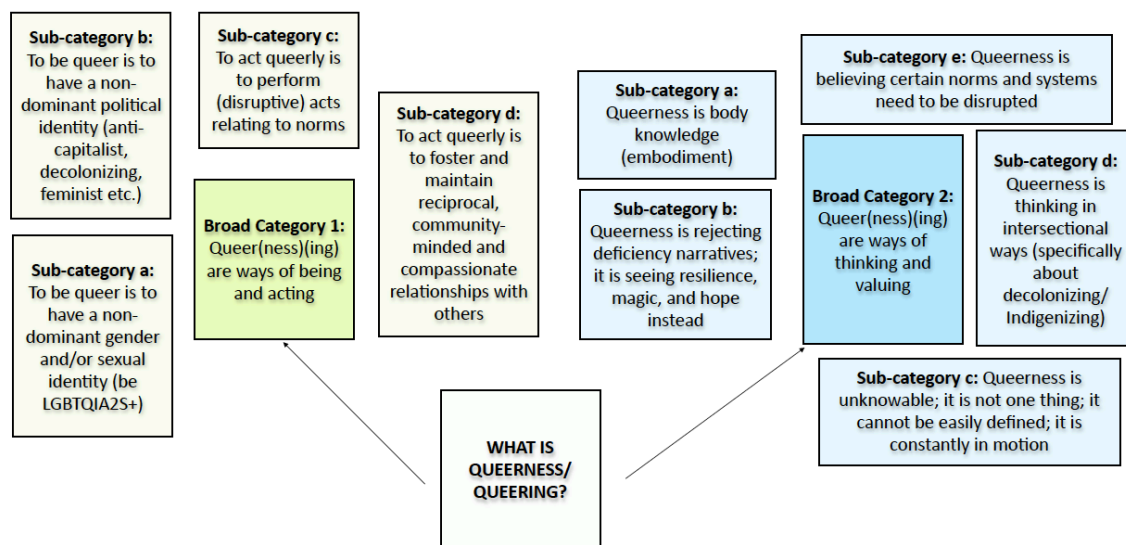
For this first cluster, I focus on what queer(ness)(ing) generally means to different collective members and their reflections about how people can *queer* schools (space, pedagogy, and curriculum).

How did collective members define queer(ness)(ing) in general?

This data comes from focus group transcripts, select journal entries, and exit interviews. All the nine participants engaged with the question of what ‘queerness’ or ‘queering’ means to them. Collective members defined the word queer(ness)(ing) in various ways. I gave them the choice to define queer, queerness, or queering. Some discussed queer as an adjective (‘queer’), as a noun (‘queerness’, ‘queers’), or as a verb (‘to queer’, ‘queering’).

Re-reading the data over and over again, I organized collective members’ thoughts into two broad categories: (1) queerness/queering as ways of being and acting; (2) and queerness/queering as ways of knowing and/or valuing. Out of the first broad category, queerness/queering as ways of being and acting, I identified three sub-categories: (a) Queer as an LGBTQIA2S+ identity marker or political label; (b) queer as performative (disruptive) acts; and (c) queer as acting in reciprocal, community, and compassionate minded ways. Out of the second broad category, queerness/queering as ways of knowing and valuing, I observed the following five sub-categories: (a) queerness/queering as body knowledge (embodiment); (b) queerness/queering as resilience, magic, and hope; (c) queerness/queering as unknowability; (d) queerness/queering as solidarity work (specifically decolonization/ ndigenization); and (e) queerness/queering as a desire/investment in disruption. For a summary, see figure on next page.

Figure 3. Visual summary of broad and sub-categories for queer(ness)(ing)



On the next page, I begin offering quotations from collective members that illustrate these categories and sub-categories. Before I do, I wish to clarify that not every sub-category is echoed in each participant's words. By that I mean that not every collective member's words engaged with each sub-category. Most of these sub-categories emerge through multiple participants' voices and others are just said by one participant. I do not privilege sub-categories that are echoed by multiple participants over ones that only one participant describes. This is because an idea does not need to be stated more frequently for it to be considered more valid in critical participatory action research according to communicative action, verisimilitude, and catalytic validity (see page 84-87, for more information about these measures of validity). Each of those measures prioritizes the value of the research to the participants and broader community over the frequency an idea appears.

Broad category 1: Queerness/queering as ways of being and acting. The first broad category relates to how people can *be* queer or *act* queerly. The following sub-categories relate to different identity labels (personal and/or political) and ways of enacting non-conformity and care in everyday situations and relationships.

Sub-category a: To be queer is to take on a (non-dominant) personal identity about gender and/or sexuality. Sarah, Gabby, and Max, who all identify somewhere on the LGBTQIA2S+ spectrum, talk about Queerness/queerness as an identity of some sort. While they are the only ones who talk explicitly about Queerness/queerness as an identity, it is worth stating that many of the participants identify as Queer, meaning they *are* employing the word to indicate a personal and/or political identity. Sarah exemplifies this understanding of Queer as a gender and/or sexual identity when she wrote the following: “I use [Queer] as an umbrella term for any sexuality that steps outside and any lifestyle that [is] disrupt[ings] cis normative structure.” She added that: “I disrupt and *queer* spaces just as my breathing narrative,” which I read as meaning that simply being LGBTQIA2S+ confronts hetero/cisnormativity. This response suggests that Sarah sees being Queer, a gender and/or sexual minority, as implicitly disruptive to hetero/cisnormativity.

Sub-category b: To be queer is to take on a (non-dominant) political identity. Beyond seeing Queerness as a personal identity/label to represents being a gender and/or sexually creative person, Max and Gabby defined another type of queer identity. Max distinguished between a gender/sexual ‘Queer’ term, and a political affiliation ‘queer’ term. They stated in their exit interview that people “can be [Q]ueer and not politically queer.” I took that to mean that Queerness/queerness simultaneously refers to a non-

dominant gender and/or sexual identity *and/or* a political identity. During the second focus group meeting, Gabby also described queer in political terms. She stated that “queer is political and anti-capitalist,” elaborating that

anti-capitalist is a big piece of [queering/queerness] ... We are here for joy and to be alive ... sometimes I'm at work and I see how we are creating workers ... one of these things [a teacher] does is a clap ... everyone responds ... I see that as preparing [children] to be workers ... I want one of the kids to be like 'why are we clapping?' ... but nobody challenges it ... and so many moments that I'm like 'nobody is challenging [this]'. That thing about wanting to manage children ... is so ingrained because we want them to grow up to be workers and be people that will continue to produce ... and part of decolonization and being anti-capitalist is challenging ... it is building community and question-askers and building defiance ... which is terrifying to a teacher because they will never do anything ... queerness is all of those things.

According to Gabby, being Queer/queer is intricately linked with anti-capitalism and decolonization, which are both worldviews that call into question dominant discourses (neoliberalism and colonialism respectively). I interpreted Max and Gabby's responses as meaning that a political queer identity is disruptive to hierarchical systems.

Both sub-categories *a* and *b* position queerness as an identity; however, one concept relates purely to gender and sexuality whereas the other connects to one's politics. The differences between how Sarah sees being a gender and sexual minority as implicitly disruptive and how Max and Gabby associate disruption with anti-capitalism and decolonization suggests that there are diverse ways of understanding the term

Queer/queer. It reinforces what I have stated during my introduction that identity terms often take on highly subjective meanings to those that employ them. It also reinforces another sub-category that I discuss in detail later on that queerness is difficult to pin down (unknowable in some ways).

Sub-category c: To act queerly is to perform (disruptive) acts relating to norms.

The previous sub-categories were about identity. The following sub-category is about action, specifically calling attention to oneself in intentional ways through gender expression, performance, and relational acts that defy norms. Sarah is the only collective member that discussed queer(ness)(ing) in this way. While others did not discuss queerness in this fashion, it felt important to acknowledge that this is her experience and may resonate with others (as a form of verisimilitude). She explained that “queering ... means disrupting spaces by being odd,” which for her includes being in full drag during the day or wearing clothing people associate with costumes to challenge what is appropriate dress. In a written response, Sarah wrote:

In the past I have randomly arrived spaces in what some ... would term as full drag. It has often been met with giddy delight but at times as caused older officials in space to become odd towards me as in prior cases [where] they had been quite warm ... I also disrupt space in the ways that at times I will wear large [men's] underwear over top of a 'sexy' dress and move around school and the city – when confronted I express and explain my physical discomfort with dresses and being regarded as female, 'Sexy,' and that this instead feels more comfortable to have massive white old man briefs with a hamster tail overtop. I will [also] at times wear bunny ears or just random items that others deem to be

for Halloween to disrupt people's expectation of what is normal dress, and when we should or shouldn't be in costume.

Sarah's examples of being in full-drag connects to gender performance and her example of wearing costumes relates generally to defying societal expectations. Both examples are about disrupting spaces through expression that confront norms.

Moreover, Sarah's understanding of queering is not just about gender expression, how she dresses, but also about how she behaves and relates to people in conversation. Sarah wrote that if she "can drop information about trans subject matter and if [she] hear[s] anything [she] disagree[s] with [she] will ... educate the person as compassionate[ly] as [she] can on the subject". Sarah also brings up "taboo subjects ... [like] sex and trauma ... so that if and when someone has something to ask they know [she] is willing to talk about all things without judgment." I see Sarah's various examples of queering, dressing and behaving in ways that others might deem as taboo or confronting as intentional disruptive actions. Moreover these are everyday acts that start with one person. In this way, queerness or queering can be disruption in a personal sphere; it does not need to be on a system-level.

Sub-category d: To act queerly is to enact caring: foster and maintain reciprocal, community-minded, and compassionate relationships with others. This final sub-category for queering as ways of being and acting positions queerness as a form of care rooted in flattening hierarchical relationships, suspending judgment, and prioritizing compassion over productivity. Five collective members (Bridget, Gabby, Max, Reagan, and Ronnie) talked about queering in these ways.

Ronnie, Reagan, and Bridget discussed fostering and maintaining reciprocity through flattening hierarchies. They described the value of altering the roles of people who are usually in charge of leading movements and educating. In our second focus group meeting, Ronnie stated that queering is making sure that gender and sexual diversity in schools work is “youth, queer, trans, [and] non-binary led.” Their comment centers LGBTQIA2S+ people and particularly youth at the centre of their own liberation, which connects to shifting power to marginalized groups. Reagan’s response during her exit interview expands on this idea of shifting power. She described queering as “co-authoring [learning] space ... it’s what we are *all* learning in the moment”. By co-authoring, she explained that it’s not what an educator or expert wants to teach, but what everyone learns and how we can all learn from each other. Bridget’s response about queering during the second focus group meeting expands Reagan’s point. Bridget explains that queering for her means “taking [her]self out as expert ... so hopefully it’s [more of] an exchange ... [the relationship is] reciprocal.” According to Ronnie, Reagan, and Bridget, changing the power dynamics (who is leading, who is considered an expert, and shifting power to others) is important because it emphasizes that we all have value, strengths, and knowledges that we bring to every interaction. According to these three, destabilizing the binary between leader/follower, expert/inexpert, and educator/student are queering acts. They are all ways of moving towards more reciprocal relationships.

Besides describing queering acts as those that establish reciprocal dynamics, some collective members (Gabby and Max) talked about queering in terms of building community, suspending judgment towards others, and prioritizing compassion over productivity. During the second focus group meeting, Gabby said that part of queering is

“building community.” She did not elaborate specifically about what that means. In their exit interview, Max described queering as specific types of compassionate acts: not judging people for their ‘weirdness’ and prioritizing compassion and people’s embodied needs over productivity. Max said that queering is accepting

people being weird ... creating space for that ... accepting people being weird with full hearts (that ‘there isn’t even a part of me that’s judging you’) ... the more people hold space for each other ... the less ... oppression will have power.

Max did not specify what they meant by weirdness. They did not limit ‘weirdness’ to gender and sexual creativity and so their idea of making space for ‘weirdness’ could be applied in many different contexts. In whatever context one applies acceptance of ‘weirdness,’ Max emphasized that this type of acceptance is healing; it means “oppression will have [less] power.” They elaborated by stating that “compassion can be disruptive ... relations of care can be disruptive ... moving away from ‘we need to just do this to get through this lesson plan ... thinking about needs ... addressing needs ... doing things in embodied ways’ can be disruptive. In this way, compassion and care are about prioritizing wellness, the bodily needs of students to move, for example, over being productive, or getting through an already planned lesson. Ultimately, changing power dynamics between people and suspending judgment towards others are all forms of care. Bridget, Gabby, Max, Reagan, and Ronnie therefore discussed ‘queering’ in terms of caring acts.

Broad category 2: Queerness/queering as ways of knowing and valuing. Up until this point, I have described queerness/queering as ways of being and acting. From the sub-categories I listed under category one, queerness (as a noun, ways of being) can

be understood as a personal and/or political identity, and queering (as a verb, ways of acting) can be understood as fostering reciprocal, compassionate relationships and dynamics. I will now focus on queer(ness)(ing) as ways of knowing and valuing.

Sub-category a: Queerness as body knowledge (embodiment). Kat and Max described queerness as a type of body knowledge. By that they seemed to mean that knowledge comes by paying attention to how one perceives one's own body, how others perceive it, and consequently how one's body traverses through spaces. In the second focus group meeting, Kat stated that "to me queering ... [is] about centering body knowledge ... and embodied experiences." In that same focus group meeting, Max added

queerness [is] a continuous process of changing ... just how our nervous system changes ... when I see your face I have all of these memories ... same with queerness ... all of us have different embodied memories of what queerness means and [the] experiences that we've had.

Max's comment suggests that queerness is highly subjective. Ultimately both Kat and Max position queerness as a type of knowledge that people acquire through their bodies – their lived experiences navigating the world with certain body parts, with certain gender and sexual identities, and being perceived as such. According to them, because knowledge emerges through our bodies and the unique experiences we all have, queerness is subjective. This idea of embodiment connects to what some scholars have said about the importance of focusing on the lived/bodied experiences of gender and sexually creative people (e.g. Kirsch, 2006; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018).

Sub-category b: Queer as resilience, magic, and hope. One collective member, Max, discussed queerness as resilience, magic and hope. This sub-category relates to my

literature review and many scholars' call to move away from Queer deficiency narratives. Max talked about queerness as "hope and resilience," stating that queerness means "embodying hope ... magic ... [and] cultivating other ways of being ... doing cultural production from ... different way[s] of being in the world." Their response suggests that queering is productive: it is "cultivating other ways of being." It also connects to Greteman's (2018) notion of queer thrival as LGBTQIA2S+ people not just being "well but ... develop[ing] in a way that does the work of queerness – taking a stance, an ever-changing stance, against social norms, well" (p. 310). Greteman (2018) likewise situates queering as productive acts – doing culture-changing work ("taking a stance ... against social norms" p. 310). Moreover Max wrote in their journal that: "queerness is the embodied ontologies of hope, resistance, softness and diverse ways of knowing." Their emphasis is not on suffering, as is how many people talk about Queer people in schools and society, but about how LGBTQIA2S+ people, and other oppressed groups, transform experiences of marginalization into "hope, resistance, softness, and diverse ways of knowing." Max therefore locates queerness/queering as positive worldview that challenges Queer deficiency narratives.

Sub-category c: Queer as unknowability. A few collective members (Gabby and Max) talked about the challenge of defining and understanding Queerness/queerness. Unknowability connects to how Queerness/queerness can be a personal and political identity, but it more broadly relates to the idea that Queerness/queerness rejects being one thing. Both Gabby and Max described how people can never really understand Queerness/queerness fully because 'queer' means many things. In the second focus group, Gabby describes Queerness/queerness "as many things." In their exit interview,

Max said: “queering is so daunting because we have no idea of what it looks like.” They likewise noted during the second focus group meeting that: “you can’t put [queer] in the dictionary ... that’s the beautiful part of how it’s constantly in motion and alive.” In this way, some collective members like Max saw Queerness/queerness as refusing to be defined, as a concept that lives through our experiences. During that same focus group meeting, Max articulated that this “unknowable” quality of Queerness/queerness is “rebellious ... un-cooptable”; queerness says to those that try to define it: “‘you can’t put a pin on me and decide what to sell [me]’ ... because I’m constantly changing ... being many things at once ... messing with people’s understandings of binary by being many things at once.” According to Max, a part of queer knowledge is refusal – it rejects whole truths and instead opts for partiality and for ambiguity. This connects to Kumashiro (2002) understanding of a curriculum of partiality. This ambiguity or unknowability is “daunting” because arguably it is easier to act when one has a sense of certainty about how one should act.

Sub-category d: Queer as solidarity work (specifically decolonizing/Indigenizing).

Another recurring sub-category and point of discussion that threaded throughout this study was that queering must be intersectional. Our two Indigenous collective members Lauren and Gayle said respectively that “queering is decolonization” and “[q]ueering equals Indigenizing to me” during the second focus group meeting. Gayle stated that she had not paid attention previously to how queering can be Indigenizing. She offered the group “a sweet metaphor ... a tree ... [where] the trunk itself is the history of education and if we continue to grow the same way, what we need to do is pay attention to the branches ... we need to make sure to not let people trim the tree.” I interpret this

metaphor as meaning that there is value in Indigenous traditional ways of learning and they should be preserved, like the branches of the tree. I found that this metaphor connected well with what Lauren said on the matter. They explained that

queering is more about remembering something and reminding people of something that is very, very old ... instead of creating something new ... but then I catch myself ... because we do have to create new things and one of the biggest gifts that two-spirit and Indigenous [Q]ueer youth have is the ability to create change ... it's about knowing and reminding each other that it's not something new that we are trying to do ... we aren't trying to reinvent the wheel ... we are trying to remind each other of something that is very old ... that we actually also have trans and [Q]ueer ancestors who left their intentions for us as well and we can walk their truth ... all our ancestors were ... creating the spaces they could survive in and spaces that the next seven generations could survive in.

For me, Lauren's comment signals that queering can be deeply connected to Indigenous resurgence. They remind us that queering is both a remembering, a recalling of non-dominant worldviews and new actions that we project onto the world (a form of cultural production). I agree with Lauren that queering can be both a remembering and a re-imagining/ordering of our worlds.

It was not just the collective's Indigenous members who discussed decolonization/Indigenization; the collective's settler members also expressed a desire/need for decolonizing. Ronnie said that in their exit interview that: "I do feel that more than ever that queering and decolonization and Indigenization need to be done together ... they aren't separate ... it can't just be on Indigenous folks [who] do the

work.” Kat said that queering engages with “decolonizing methodologies ... and [has] an intersectional lens” and Reagan echoed that “there are so many intersections ... about [how] decolonizing and Indigenizing and queering fi[t] together.” In this way, there was a consistent desire to consider how queer connects to decolonization and Indigenization.

Overall, the collective discussed decolonizing and Indigenizing the most out of other social justice movements. Most collective members did not overtly connect queerness/queering to feminisms, anti-ableism, anti-classism or anti-racism (outside of discussing Indigenous peoples). One member, Max, asked about how this project considers accessibility during their initial interview, but we did not have in depth conversations about how queering relates to anti-ableism, anti-classism, anti-racism (beyond decolonization/ Indigenization). As I have outlined earlier, Gabby and Max drew attention to queering as being political and “anti-capitalist”; however, the collective did not discuss class beyond talking about anti-capitalism. Sarah did bring up class in a different way. She addressed a desire for greater awareness around class differences, saying:

I noted that I haven't come through the university to this knowing [like other collective members] ... so I don't have procedure down ... how we queer and approach schools ... it was interesting to note that I'm a bit of a rule-breaker, but also I don't know [what] the rules are ... so I haven't been hammered into the process ... the rigour of critique ... that does shape your perception of every movement forward ... critiquing instead of just moving forward.

Sarah found this critique and theorizing, considering the ramifications of every action, a bit tiring. She emphasized wanting to move forward with actions instead of talking in

depth about ideas. She also said: “it would have been nice if there were more people from low-income grassroots organizers and ... [because] at times [she] g[o]t lost in the language and ... wasn't sure if [she] was offending people because [she] wasn't reacting to the language in a certain way.” Beyond wanting more collective members from different socio-economic backgrounds, most collective members talked about the desire to expand our collective to include more people of colour (POC). Our group consisted of two Indigenous members, one Jewish member, and six members who described their ancestry as being from somewhere in Europe. This collective therefore positioned intersectionality as tied to queering, meaning that queering is far more expansive than gender and sexuality.

Sub-category e: Queer as believing certain norms and systems need to be disrupted. The final sub-category related to defining queerness/queering as disruption, which was a recurring word throughout the data. Even when it came to ways of being and acting, Sarah's understanding of expressing her gender was talked about as forms of disruption. Other collective members' discussion about reciprocity and caring also relate to disruption because they relate to shifting hierarchical relational norms. Disruption is therefore an undercurrent to many sub-categories. A few collective members described queering as synonymous with disrupting mainstream knowledges and systems. Reagan said that she saw “the act of queering as ... [a] goal of disrupting and completely changing the current structure of academia and everything ... it can be based in ... disrupting [our] knowledge base.” Sarah talked about queering as “breaking things down to their metanarratives” and challenging the mainstream stories and images people see on regular basis. Max wrote in their journal that that “queer is outside the norm ...

rhizomatic ... [a] process of becoming ... blurring and challenging binaries,” stating that that “queer things ... are considered dangerous by the dominant order” because they are rebellious and unknowable. What kept appearing for some collective members was the idea that queering is: unsettling hierarchical norms; encouraging non-conformity in various forms; and as Gabby eloquently said: “building community ... question-askers and ... defiance.” Disruption was therefore an important aspect to many conceptualizations of ‘queer.’

How did collective members understand the project of queering schools?

Only two collective members reflected on what queering pedagogy and curriculum means to them. We ran out of time to discuss these topics in detail during our focus group meetings; however, Max and Gayle shared their thoughts through writing. They reflected on the following questions: (1) *How could someone’s pedagogy (how they teach and facilitate learning) be queer?* (2) *What is a Queer/queer curriculum? Is it about including more content about LGBTQIA2S+ people, is it about challenging what we have taken for granted as true (i.e. challenging dominant narratives), both – or something else entirely?* In some ways Gayle and Max answered my questions, but in other ways they presented new questions, refusing to be limited by the focus I presented. Ultimately, they offered their own unique insights about queering schools: how we teach (pedagogy); the environments we teach and learn in (space); and what we teach (curricula).

Queer pedagogy is about using non-Western teaching strategies, challenging the idea that some ways of being are superior, and positioning learners/educators in reciprocal ways. Focusing in on what individual educators can do in schools, I offer

Gayle and Max's thoughts on queer pedagogy. When asked the question of how someone's teaching could be queer, Gayle wrote:

Depends on how we define the 'norm,' if there is one ... Teaching in high school [at my last school in a remote community] meant that we had limited/no use of digital technology – to people in urban areas, that's queer. I always assigned final projects instead of having students write final exams [which I see as queer]. Taking classes outside [is queer]. Reading only from one book without students' access to reading along with it (teaching based on oral traditions) [is queer]. Student-led activities/conferences/anything [is queer]. Having students become the teachers, and doing project-based and inquiry-based learning [is queer].

Looking at Gayle's list of queer pedagogy, one might think: is this not just 'good' critical pedagogy? Centering students through different pedagogical approaches are certainly gaining momentum, and often positioned as 'good' pedagogy in our present context (Devine, 2003). Gayle's examples of project and inquiry-based learning are certainly enactments of student-centred pedagogy. That being said, Gayle does not just provide these examples to make a point about centering and engaging students more; Gayle is advocating for disrupting pedagogical norms. She perceives *queer* teaching as doing things differently than how they are 'normally' done. That difference relates to changing the environment/site of learning (i.e. going outside instead of being in a classroom with rows), changing the mode of learning (i.e. teaching based on oral traditions, Indigenous ways of teaching/learning, and having student-directed activities), and changing how that learning is assessed (i.e. doing inquiry project based learning and giving students final projects instead of exams). Many of those examples relate to the notion of breaking down

binaries between teacher/learner and shifting power from an expert figure to a community of learners/teachers. Likewise, Gayle's examples of outdoor education and using oral traditions infuse Indigenous ways of teaching, which disrupt Eurocentric teaching norms. All her examples are disruptive. In this way, while they are related to best educational practices in this provincial and local context, her examples are concerned with disrupting dominant norms and knowledges. At the heart of each of her examples is a destabilization of taken-for-granted ways of teaching. Gayle's understanding of queer pedagogy matches with what Neto (2018) has observed, namely that "queer pedagogy works to question situations of apparent normality in the classroom and concerns itself with the social production of what is learned" (p. 256). Queer pedagogy is therefore about identifying and challenging teaching and knowledge norms. Those norms could include, but are not limited to, the dynamics between students and teachers, instructional design, and assessment.

Max discusses queer pedagogy in terms of sharing power and changing the environment/sites of learning and modes of learning. Max explained that they *queer* their teaching practice by having "horizontal power relations – breaking down hierarchy between teachers and students." Max also tries to queer their teaching through facilitating learning through land-based, experiential learning opportunities. Max says:

I love that I can take kids out into the woods ... it's so different when you can teach kids in a way where there aren't walls around them ... they have to use their senses to navigate a landscape ... you never know what is going to happen in nature ... which messes with the dynamic ... totally derails any fantastical plan ... we are responding to the environment ... we are totally emergent ... it breaks

down hierarchy ... I try to do that at every opportunity ... I think also queerness is normalizing lack of predictability ... there are so many questions when you are out in nature

Their response reveals that a part of queer teaching is being able to respond to one's environment, to be mindful of one's body and to teach others to do the same, and to be able to foster spaces where unpredictability (organized chaos) is allowed. Responding to ongoing bodily needs is disruptive because schools are not designed with unpredictability in mind. Schools categorize and organize students in specific ways. Students and teachers' days are broken up in specific timeslots. There is often not 'time' to stop and consider bodily needs. Consequently, being responsive and creating room for flexibility is queering (disruptive).

Max also asked reflective questions about queering schools, writing:

Another thing I think about is queering space and architecture. What is the learning environment we can access and how are we using the spaces we learn in[?] How are we using these spaces in a way that subverts utilitarianism and androcentrism[?] When we are out on indigenous land, how are we subverting imperialism, colonial/capitalist conceptions of space, community governance in order to build a sense of belonging, mutual aid and connectivity beyond our human relations[?] Subverting capitalist/fordist usage of space and tools like desks, rows, bells- these things may exist in the space we teach in, but how can we use them differently, imbue them with new meaning[?]

In their question asking, they reinforce Gayle's point that queering can be about subverting the ways we teach. According to Gayle and Max, queer pedagogy therefore

seems to be about acknowledging the ways that power lives in the spaces and architecture of schooling, breaking down binaries and flattening hierarchies between student and teacher as much as possible, using one's awareness of these structures to challenge and subvert them, and allowing for unpredictability, uncertainty, and bodily awareness (embodiment/mindfulness).

Queering schools spaces means fostering environments that are consent-based, transparent, and responsive to ongoing needs. I include this section about space because when I asked the question of how one could queer teaching, Max discussed pedagogy but also expanded beyond my original scope. They asked a question I did not: “*how can we thoughtfully and meaningfully create safer space for [Q]ueer educators and students?*” I saw their interpretation of my question about pedagogy to be a reminder of my own biases. Throughout this process, I have focused on exploring the need for disruption and upholding narratives of resistance because I read a lot about pain narratives in social science research (Tuck, 2014) and did not want to inadvertently perpetuate them. Consequently, I avoided asking questions about safety. I similarly avoided asking questions about youth because I read many articles that discussed how focusing on Queer youth might inadvertently reinforce a victim narrative. Max's response reminded me that it is important to concentrate on Queer experiences and there are ways of doing so that do not perpetuate Queer deficiency narratives. This focus is important because safety remains a pressing issue in schools. Along the vein of focusing on youth, Lauren and Ronnie, the collective's two youth educators, helped me realize through their responses about this work being “youth-led” that there is a difference between talking about youth and working with youth collaboratively. I bring up this detail because Tuck & Yang

(2014) have noted that redirecting or refusing to answer certain questions is “not just a ‘no,’ but a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned” (p. 246). In this way, Max’s redirection to safety, and Lauren and Ronnie’s redirection towards youth, suggested there is a way to focus on the specific challenges that Queer people experience in schools and to engage Queer youth in related research without reinforcing narratives that they are in need of protection.

Reading Max’s response, I identified tenets of what they believe could make schools safer – or *queerer* – for both educators and students: consent, transparency, and orientation to resources. Max wrote that there needs to be “cultural shifts” in schools. They elaborated that

queering a school need to be facilitated through healthy systems of accountability, transparency and resourcing. If these systems are not functioning well, change may not be as sustainable or effective. As communities who value consent, these values must permeate all our politics and policy. This includes how we make safer space for [Q]ueer educators and students.

I see their point about consent being related to Gayle’s understanding of sharing power between teachers and learners and other collective member’s comments about co-authoring space. Max also said that transparency is key, noting that

Prior to [a teaching] position commencing, educators and students can be informed of the capacity of the school to ensure emotional and physical safety [for LGBTQIA2S+ people] realistically. This is a matter of consent because people need to be given the information they need to make a good decision for

themselves. [They need to tell people:] ‘This is how we can support our staff and students. This is what is beyond our capacity.’

Max also noted that it is important to orient educators and students to resources. They stated that educators and students need to know “how they can express concern ... [for example by saying]: ‘This is who to talk to and the process we will take [to support you].’” Max stated that such processes could “build a sense of security, clarity of process that can contribute to feeling valued, safer and confident in trusting leadership.” Finally Max articulated that there ought to be places and people with who staff and students can have intentional, confidential conversations about their experiences. By that, they mean a “confidential space to have concerns heard and [to] collaborate on solutions [about gender policing, hetero/cisnormativity, queerphobia, erasure] including resources and staff training.”

Max’s point that schools need to “build a sense of security [and] clarity of process” relate to governance: a school’s structure and leadership. Max articulated that “strong working leadership systems of accountability [and] transparency [are] important ... because [people] need to be systematically ‘walking the talk’ in terms of queering and decolonizing.” They noted that “[i]f there is a disconnect between how [schools] treat employees and students ... the kids notice and the hypocrisy can breed discontent and distrust.” In other words, it is not enough for an organization to espouse Queer/queer and decolonizing values, it has to understand what those values mean, be transparent about them, and accountable to their community when they do not live up to them.

Queering curriculum is recognizing minority perspectives and emphasizing that knowledge is always partial. When asked to consider curriculum, Gayle explains she is

excited by the work she does in schools “because [she is] constantly showing students work from ... Indigenous folk and constantly talking about ... oppressed, minority [perspectives].” While bringing in minority perspectives seems to be part of her anti-oppressive work, Gayle added that because “some may define the norm as binary ... queering curriculum for them could include content about LGBTQIA2S+ [people].” Including Queer content (i.e. information that focuses on Queerness as gender and sexuality) would be aligned with *Education About the Other* (Kumashiro, 2002), which is concerned with helping students recognize diversity and difference. That being said, Gayle does not see queering curriculum exclusively in that way. For her, “queering ... curriculum is having a more metacognitive or meta-educational ... approach.” She elaborates that a meta-educational approach means: “hav[ing] the students think about the system, why we’re learning what we’re learning, and [teachers asking themselves:] ‘is there a different way to do things?’, ‘do they want to be assessed differently?’, ‘can I make that happen?’” Max made a comparable comment. They said that while it’s important to teach “queer analysis,” they believe educators should also broadly teach “critical thinking skills and be *queer* in what [they] do.” Both Max and Gayle’s comments suggest that this is similar to a critical pedagogical approach.

This finding caused me to pause and re-ask the question: is queer pedagogy the same as critical pedagogy? Are they synonymous? Are they separate? If so, how? Returning to Gayle’s earlier comments that suggest that a variety of social justice approaches to teaching and learning are ‘queering’ approaches, it seems that ‘queer’ pedagogy could hypothetically be anything that challenges oppressive norms. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, ‘queer’ is very subjective. It is hard to define and

operationalize. I see critical pedagogy and queer pedagogy as closely linked but slightly different. The main difference I see between the two is that critical pedagogy focuses on how learning about oppression (the connected nature of oppressor/oppressed) can evoke action. Queer pedagogy, in contrast, does not seem to consider action in the same ways. Queer pedagogy is a lot more vague and consciously so. None of the scholars I have read explains how to ‘enact’ queer pedagogy. There is a frustration and tension within that. The reason I talk about both critical and queer pedagogy in my theoretical framework section is because I think that queer pedagogy on its own is hard to operationalize. Gayle and Max’s attempts to define and operationalize queer pedagogy are perhaps conflicted then; they are trying to engage with a theory that rejects being defined. It makes sense they would draw on other more action-oriented frameworks. Perhaps the better question is not: what is queer pedagogy exactly – in a pure sense of enacting queer theories – but what pedagogies/theories can we draw on to facilitate meaningful action. It seems that queer pedagogy and critical pedagogy both have a place in *queering schools praxis*.

These collective members’ thoughts compare to what different scholars have noted about anti-oppression education and queering curriculum. Max and Gayle’s theorizing about queering curriculum connects to *Education About the Other*, *Education that Critical of Privileging and Othering*, and *Education that Changes Students and Society* (Kumashiro, 2002). Gayle’s comment about taking a metacognitive/meta-educational approach relates to Kumashiro’s idea of a ‘curriculum of partiality,’ where people are questioning taken-for-granted knowledges and ways of operating. Gayle and Max’s thoughts also tangentially connect to Sumara & Davis’ (1999) earlier theorizing about Queer/queer curriculum. Sumara & Davis (1999) made four suggestions: (1) that

curriculum positions sexuality (and gender) as “a necessary companion to all knowing” (p. 203); (2) that curriculum renders problematic heteronormativity (and cisnormativity); (3) that instead of simply teaching people about identities, curriculum engages people in exploration about how identities arise or manifest differently in various environments (i.e. people may identify or perceive themselves differently in they are living in a highly hetero/cisnormative environment versus one that is very progressive); (4) and that curriculum be curious about “experiences of desire, of pleasure, and of sexuality” (p. 204). I see Max and Gayle’s points as connected to Sumara & Davis’s second and third suggestion: that curriculum troubles hetero/cisnormativity and that it engages people to think critically about identity and knowledge. Gayle’s idea of a metacognitive education ties into thinking about how power is (re)produced through our schooling as education system and how we might challenge those narratives by changing the ways we teach and present ‘knowledge.’

Ultimately, collective members’ responses offer an initial sketch of what Queerness/queerness could look like in schools beyond anti-Queerphobia work. Distilling their thoughts down, and focusing on queer(ness)(ing) as ways of acting, thinking, and valuing (because these are aspects that anyone could take up in and around schools), there are three connecting threads between all of their responses: queer(ness)(ing) as disruption, as reciprocity, and as care. According to the collective members, queering schools can be understood as: pedagogical and curricular choices/acts that *disrupt* (destabilize) norms and knowledges (including but not limited to hetero/cisnormativity, colonialism/Eurocentrism, patriarchy and neoliberalism) on an intersectional level; and relational choices/acts that foster and maintain *reciprocity* (shift, share power and amplify

those that are marginalized) and *care* (suspend judgement and value compassion over productivity). According to collective members, queering can be understood as disruption, reciprocity, and care.

Cluster 2: How Collective Members Responded to Inclusion

In this section, I focus on categorizing collective member's responses to inclusion, which I relate in Chapter 5 to my research question: *Is it possible to shift from an inclusion/protection model to a queering model? Is a shift desirable and for whom?* Making sense of collective member's understanding of inclusion is crucial to answering that question because it helps clarify what an inclusion/protection model is and its limits and merits.

How did collective members respond to the idea of inclusion?

There were three moments when I probed about inclusion. Each collective member offered an individual response about inclusion during their initial interview, where I asked them: *What does inclusion mean to you? What comes to mind when you think of the word?* I coded their answers thematically and shared my initial findings with the nine educators at our first focus group meeting. Sharing these findings prompted a group discussion about inclusion at our October meeting, where most collective members added further thoughts about the concept. This was the second instance where I gathered data about their thoughts on inclusion. The final instance where I asked participants about inclusion was at the end of the research during their exit interview. I asked them if their perspectives about inclusion had shifted at all. Three collective members had predominately negative associations, three had ambiguous perspectives, and three had

largely positive associations (see figure below). As displayed below, these perspectives are equally split, meaning there was not a consensus about this term.

Figure 4. Collective members associations with the word inclusion

<i>mostly positive associations</i>	<i>ambiguous or conflicted associations</i>	<i>mostly critical associations</i>
Gayle Bridget Sarah	Ronnie Reagan Kat	Gabby Lauren Max

From their responses, I coded two broad categories: (1) inclusion is a problematic framework at an institutional level; and (2) inclusion can be a ‘beautiful thing’ on an individual level, depending on how it is done. Out of the first large category, critiques of inclusion, I identified two sub-categories: (a) inclusion can be paternal and maintain oppressive power dynamics; (b) and inclusion can be poorly implemented and consequently cause harm. Out of the second broad category, which was a “reparative” (Sedgwick, 2003) reading of inclusion by the collective members, I identified one sub-category: (a) inclusion can be about fostering care (sharing space, amplifying voices, and cultivating safety/belonging). Overall, participants had mixed feelings about inclusion throughout the process. Collective members expressed becoming more aware of different perspectives toward inclusion, but there was not an agreement about whether or not the word was positive/‘good’ or negative/‘bad.’ The collective let these multiple associations co-exist; they did not try to dispel tensions or force a consensus.

Category 1a: Inclusion can be paternal and maintain oppressive power dynamics. Three collective members (Gabby, Lauren, and Max) articulated strongly that

inclusion was problematic at an institutional level. Another three collective members (Ronnie, Reagan, and Kat) also troubled inclusion; however, they took a more “reparative” lens to the idea, noting mixed (both negative and positive) associations.

Lauren, Max and Regan discuss the first two critiques: that inclusion can rob people of agency (be paternal) and (re)produce oppressive power dynamics. During the focus group discussion, Lauren said:

I have a lot of [thoughts about inclusion], so maybe I'll get mine out of the way, so I can sit back and listen. I don't have very many positive associations with the word inclusion ... One place to start as an Indigenous person, I don't think it makes sense to be included in something ... I haven't seen sense of that. We're already here. What do you mean you're including us? ... It feels like it cements the power dynamic of who is being allowed to be included, who is making that decision, and then who built that structure that they've been included in? ... All systems and structures are patriarchy, misogyny, hetero/cisnormativity ... they are built off the backs of racialized people ... and often racialized women ... to speak more to that if you think about a school ... think about who does the work of cleaning that school? It's usually a brown person who is not getting paid as much as they should be ... there is something about that power dynamic that doesn't acknowledge we're already here ... Indigenous [Q]ueer people ... Indigenous [Q]ueer youth ... we've been here for thousand of years ... much longer than a public school district ... that those school districts wouldn't work without the work of racialized people.

Lauren troubled the idea of including people when they are already there existing. I interpreted this comment as meaning that inclusion efforts might be patronizing; people come in and try to “include” others they perceive as missing. In doing so, they overlook the reality that those people have always been there and perhaps just do not feel safe or able to be visible/public about their identities. In any case, focusing on those that do not fit misses why there is a need to “include” them in the first place. Lauren’s elaboration about inclusion cementing the power dynamic of who is being included and who gets to make that decision of who is included directs attention to the ways that these efforts may not be reciprocal in nature. In Lauren’s description, the group that is trying to be “included” does not have much agency. Others decide who gets to be included and how, not the group itself. According to this understanding, inclusion is paternal and lacking self-determination.

Max shared a similar response during the focus group meeting paralleled Lauren’s concerns about paternalism and power dynamics. They said:

I don’t like [the term] ... Inclusion kinda denotes that there is an existing group ... and that outside group is going to be included in the main group on the terms of the main group.

Max identifies two groups: an existing group (dominant group) and outside group (non-dominant group) within the framework of ‘inclusion.’ Similar to Lauren, they do not see the “outside group” as having much agency; they are being “included in the main group on the terms of the main group.” This means that the group who is actually excluded lacks agency in this process. In this description, privileged groups maintain their privilege, and oppressive dynamics are reinscribed.

Ronnie, who was slightly less critical of inclusion than Lauren and Max, saw similar issues with inclusion as not always engaging with marginalized groups. They discussed how inclusion efforts could leave out certain perspectives, writing that

I feel like [inclusion] is something that should be good but it['s] sometimes kind of tied with the idea that if ... we can all just stand in the circle and hold hands and sing happily and that'll make the problems go away ... there's definitely ... room for [it] ... people need to be included and brought into the conversation ... that is super important for sure ... I just think there's more nuance to it that is maybe not always captured and that in some of it too it's focused on one particular [thing] ... which I feel like can leave out their marginalized students ... inclusion isn't ... always inclusive.

Kat agreed with Ronnie stating that: “[inclusion] feels positive and important on the one hand and on the other hand it feels like maybe it’s coming from a framework that is aligned with certain norms.” Unlike other collective members, Reagan, did not offer an evaluative reaction to the term inclusion, but added a caveat that for inclusion to be successful it “has to be determined by the people who will be in that space accessing it.” Her response suggests that she also values agency and self-determination in diversity efforts. In sum, the first main critique of inclusion is it can be patronizing and rob people of agency and self-determination.

Category 1b: Inclusion efforts can be poorly implemented; they can cause harm to the groups they seek to support by lacking resources and rely on marginalized group to do the ‘diversity work’ themselves. Besides being conceptualized as potentially paternal and (paradoxically) oppressive, some collective members (Gabby and Max)

talked about inclusion as a poorly implemented process. Gabby and Max described two different situations in their respective schools where “inclusion” is not going well because there is a lack of infrastructure (i.e. lack of resources, transparency, consent etc.). Gabby offered an example from her work as an EA and discussed inclusion through the lens of special education. She said:

In the school system right now, the concept of inclusion right now is being used to put everyone in the same classroom even though that might not make sense for all kids ... I'll use the example of neurodiverse kids, and any kid can't sit forever god, so they close down all these amazing special ed programs that actually had space for play for laying down and having sensory experiences, because apparently we are moving up and improving ... which actually looks like putting everyone in the classroom and not adding any more support and having so many kids ... falling through the cracks because teachers can't hold [all their responsibilities] ... it's really sad and so the word term inclusion is being used in this way ... it's how it's being used to justify this mixed bag ... it's really backwards ... paint[ing] it like we're moving forward, but it feels like really backward ... as an EA, you can't bring everyone together and then not triple me ... some schools still have a sensory room ... and it's the most important room in the school ... and it's wildly dated ... [inclusion is] all connected ... it's not gender based or sexuality based ... it's about ability ... there's so many kids not having the support they need ... it's not just the language, but the intent ... how are we considering everyone's needs as we're shifting.

Gabby's critique of 'inclusion' is helpful because it illuminates the ways that diversity shifts in schools require institutional changes on various levels. As she explained, "you can't bring [all the kids together in the same classes] and not triple me." She has therefore identified a gap in some inclusion efforts; there can be a lack of infrastructure in place to support changes.

Max also drew attention to lackluster school infrastructure when it comes to 'inclusion' efforts, specifically the lack of resources schools often have and consequently the way that the onus falls on marginalized groups to do the 'diversity work.' Talking about their own work environment at an alternative school, Max described inclusion as the process of their school hiring Queer people. They spoke about how such efforts can backfire when environments are not equipped to support Queer people (i.e. when they do not make an ongoing commitment to disrupt hetero/cisnormativity and consequently safety and belonging by following the lead of Queer people themselves). Max explains:

[inclusion is] not conducive to actually supporting [Q]ueer kids ... the school can hire me ... and be like yay we have a [Q]ueer educator ... but not actually change the fabric of the culture ... to weave our lives together in a meaningful way ... then we are not really getting anywhere ... we're just perpetuating the same assimilationist bullshit ... I'm not particularly interested in that ... I'm not sure of what a different word would be ... a kind of reciprocity ... we're different ... and that's okay ... and what I give is one thing and what you give is another thing ... and how we meet each other in a mutually respectful way ... and where I don't feel like I need to sacrifice anything to be part of the inclusionist group ...

maybe we are both sacrificing and changing as we enter into this intentional relationship ... mutual change and growth.

Their answer reveals that hiring Queer people, or any marginalized group, is not sufficient for diversifying schools. According to Max, liberatory diversity work must be disruptive, not just be “assimilationist bullshit” that does “not actually change the fabric of [oppressive] culture[s]” of schools. Hiring Queer people and expecting school cultures to change puts the responsibility on Queer people to do the work; it lets schools off the hook of looking at the ways they (re)produce hetero/cisnormativity through omissions and constructions of Queerness. Moreover, if there is a lack of resources, ‘inclusion’ can hit a standstill. For example, Max’s school

has [inclusive] values, but in reality, they aren’t sourced to act on them. [Max has had] teachers drawing on [them] to teach others ... it’s not [those teachers] fault ... it’s nobody’s fault ... [it’s] how [schools are] resourcing people.

Max articulated that it is important for schools to do more than hire Queer people or other marginalized groups. Max invites schools, administrators, and educators to ask: “Are we willing to risk change? Is the school willing to let go its sense of ‘we’re doing everything right’? How are we intentionally making space?” Ultimately, the second issue some collective members (Gabby and Max) identified with inclusion is that schools often do not have sufficient resources to implement ‘inclusion’ successfully. This can cause harm: people can slip through the cracks and the onus can fall on marginalized people to advocate and educate others. These are the critiques of inclusion, which the majority of collective members engaged with in some ways (except for Bridget, Sarah, and Gayle). While most collective members expressed these critiques, it is important to highlight that

not all collective members had negative or critical associations with the term inclusion. There was therefore not a consensus regarding the associations co-researchers/participants had towards the concept.

Category 2a: Inclusion can be about care (sharing space, amplifying voices, and cultivating safety/belonging). Three collective members (Gayle, Bridget and Sarah) had mostly positive associations with the word inclusion and described it in terms of sharing space equally with others and cultivating safety. Gayle said:

From a social justice lens, inclusion for me means people ... all [people] have a voice and that voice is represented equally ... and even when voices aren't being spoken it's not ... being overpowered.

Bridget's response echoed some of Gayle's sentiments, adding that inclusion is about autonomy. Likewise she emphasized that inclusion is a process, not something static. She stated:

Inclusion to me is space for people to be safe and comfortable and validated and to have autonomy so [that they have] the ability to have independence and to shape that space to meet their own needs. I think it is I see it as dynamic ... not static.

Sarah's answer also referred to sharing voice, noting that inclusion was about listening openly. They said:

inclusion means ... being given the space to take the floor and share yourself and be heard and witnessed in a safe space so I think to include everybody ... is to teach people how to appropriately listen and to be curious about others.

These understandings of inclusion demonstrate that Gayle, Bridget, and Sarah are not seeing inclusion in exactly the same way as the other collective members. It is not that they disagree with the other collective members' values. Gayle, Bridget and Sarah are all describing actions that cultivate care. In fact, their descriptions of inclusion connect with how many collective members describe care and reciprocity as a crucial part of queer(ness)(ing). For example, Gayle talked about inclusion in terms of all people "hav[ing] a voice and that voice [being] represented equally." In this way, Gayle's notion of voices being equally represented in spaces connects to Reagan's point that queering means co-authoring space. Moreover, some collective members associated autonomy with both inclusion and queering. For instance, Bridget described inclusion in terms of ensuring that people feel "safe and comfortable and validat[ed] ... to have autonomy so [that they have] the ability to have independence and to shape ... space[s] to meet their own needs." This notion of autonomy connects to Ronnie's understanding of queering. According to Ronnie, queering is about LGBTQIA2S+ leading their own movements. Finally, sharing power dynamics is connected to both inclusion and queering for some members. For example, Sarah said that "inclusion means ... [you are] given the space to take the floor and share yourself and be heard and witnessed in a safe space ... [it is] to teach people how to appropriately listen and to be curious about others." This definition of sharing space and being "heard and witnessed" relates to Regan's point that queering is co-authoring space. These examples demonstrate that there is an overlap between how those who saw inclusion positively defined queer(ness)(ing); for those who saw inclusion positively, both inclusion and queering related to cultivating reciprocal, caring spaces and relationships. I will end this section with Bridget's idea that

there can be tensions within [the] idea [of inclusion] ... [I see inclusion] as just appreciating and recognizing where people are ... understanding the space in between ... creating that space for people to work through it ... it's okay to hold difference ... to have empathy ... hearing people say 'tell me what you meant by it' ... [I see it as] appreciative inquiry ... giving people an opportunity to define ... as a sort of co-constructive process ... [I see inclusion] as dynamic, parts of it that might be more static ... I see it as a give and take relationship ... it holds space ... we can move in that ... and I think that it's our responsibility ... to include people who have been on the outsides (most marginalized) ... we should listen to them first and foremost.

In sum, collective members did not come to a consensus about inclusion. Three collective members described inclusion in positive ways. Bridget, Sarah, and Gayle described inclusion as being actions that foster care. In contrast, six collective members took issue with inclusion in two main ways. Lauren, Max and Gabby were highly critical. Ronne, Kat and Reagan were less critical, but still saw issues with inclusion as a framework. The two main issues collective members identified were: inclusion can be paternal and reinforce oppressive dynamics; and inclusion can be poorly implemented and consequently cause harm if schools lack infrastructure to make meaningful changes. Both of these critiques suggest that diversity work in schools (whether it is called inclusion work or not) needs to prioritize the following. Firstly, diversity work should ensure that marginalized groups have agency and self-determination (i.e. create spaces where marginalized people can lead and direct their own movements). Secondly, diversity work involves accountability and transparency on behalf of institutions and

majority groups (i.e. create spaces where dominant groups see themselves as complicit in systems of oppression and take responsibility for doing ‘diversity’ work on various schooling levels). I will expand on the relevance of these findings in Chapter 5, focusing on how queering schools praxis can be understood as ‘inclusive’ and ‘disruptive’ work, so long as it includes the following three components: disruption, reciprocity, and care. I will also discuss the idea that inclusion/protection is not entirely separate from queering. There are certainly tensions between inclusion and queering; however, they are connected in some important ways.

Cluster 3: How Collective Members Perceived Their Role as Educators

In this next cluster, I focus on the role of educators. I asked educators twice about how they see their role as educators: firstly during their initial interview and secondly at the end during their exit interview. In Chapter 5, I relate these findings to answering the question: *What role can/do educators play in queering schools praxis?*

How did collective members see themselves as educators?

Regarding how collective members saw themselves as educators, two broad categories emerged: (1) some saw themselves as non-experts who function to facilitate learning, not to direct it without consent or to impose colonial ways of teaching; (2) and others saw themselves as advocates and role models because they are marginalized themselves. Comparing responses from the initial interviews (done in September and October 2018) to exit interviews (January 2019), collective members maintained their feelings about their self-perceptions. They did not put forward new ideas about the roles that educators play from the beginning to the end. They reiterated the following ideas: that educators are non-experts and (marginalized) educators are role models.

Educators are non-experts. Bridget, Reagan and Lauren offered examples of the first category of being non-authority figures (i.e. rejecting a sense of having power over others and opting instead for co-authoring the learning process). Bridget, who works as a community sex educator, discussed how she sees herself as a non-expert. She said:

I'm often referred to as the expert and that is not how I see myself. I see my role as an educator as more of like a resource person ... to hopefully work collectively with [people] to identify what needs they have and hopefully match that with the resources that I have.

Reagan, who also does school based programming, echoed Bridget's thinking. She said that as a school programmer, "you don't get to [teach] in a formal way because you're not considered part of the team." By that she seemed to mean that those coming into to schools have a different role than full-time or itinerant teachers who are working with students regularly. Reagan, another community educator, also said that, at times, she feels strange using the term 'educator.' She "get[s] a little bit weird about calling [herself] an educator just as far as maybe older notions of what [education has] historically look[ed] like in and some ways in [it] still ... looks like in the public education system. [She] see [herself therefore] ... more as a facilitator than an educator." Another participant, Lauren, one of the youth educators, went farther with Reagan's stance. Lauren rejected being associated with teachers in public schools. Lauren stated that they are not interested in being associated with teachers, who "tak[e] on ... positions of power." They explained they did not want to be associated with teachers because "those positions of power," being a teacher, "also come[s] with ... trauma and ... colonial schools ways of learning."

Ultimately, I see Bridget naming herself as a non-expert, Reagan's hesitancy with the term educator, and Lauren's rejection of the image of a public school teacher as an undermining of the traditional banking model of education (Freire, 1970), which positions teachers as all-knowing figures (experts) and students as receptacles of knowledge. I likewise see it as them rewriting and reconfiguring the roles they want to occupy within school spaces.

(Marginalized) educators are advocates and role models. Gayle and Gabby offer examples about being advocates and visible role models. As an Indigenous educator, Gayle talked about how she sees her role as trying to “make [schools] a little bit better ... trying to support all Indigenous students in the system and trying to advocate more for students who don't have a voice or who need some stronger voices.” As a Queer Jewish woman, Gabby talked about how she “shows up for ... the ones that aren't centred ... and tr[ies] to be visible to them.” She mentioned how she wanted to be visible to them and represent their truths. Through answering this first question, all collective members simultaneously positioned themselves as educational rebels – non-traditional teaching figures that want to reconfigure power dynamics in schools – and visible role models that can disrupt norms and narratives in and around schools.

Besides asking them how they viewed themselves as educators, I invited them to reflect on how their various identities shaped their educational practice. All of the members were marginalized in some way: whether as a woman, a Queer person, a non-binary person, an Indigenous person, or a combination of those identities. Many of the collective members correlated their marginalization with greater awareness of themselves and others. Gayle, for example, said that her identities, as an Indigenous woman who has

a sibling that identifies as two-spirit, allows her to “think of different perspectives at all times both the ones that [she] ... [has] but also the ones that [she doesn’t] have.” As a cisgender and heterosexual ally, Bridget talked about how looking inward allowed her check in with the “places that ... are niggling and uncomfortable ... the places where maybe [she’s] too comfortable.” Gabby talked about how she could see students not being centered in schools and relate as someone who has not felt her life experiences reflected during her schooling. She said that she “see[s] some of the struggles ... students ... go through in terms of ... having their identities ... recognized ... [and] definitely can relate to not feeling that [one’s] experience is reflected” in an environment. Gabby added that our “identities [give us] an empathy of understanding for what it feels like to not be centred and so [she] actively tr[ies] to hold space for others.” In this way, many of the collective described their identities as a conduit for developing empathetic and connective ways of thinking, which translated into their teaching practice.

In sum, the collective perceived their role as educators in non-traditional and rebellious ways; they saw themselves as figures who shift power dynamics between educators/learners and who advocate on behalf on marginalized people. I discuss the implications of these categories in Chapter 5. Specifically, I discuss how educators are “engaged intellectuals” in praxis-work (Giroux, 1993).

Cluster 4: How This CPAR Project Impacted Collective Members

In this final cluster, I outline the role that this research had on the participants’ learning and sense of agency in the collective and their respective environments. This data came from the exit interview. Each participant was asked the following questions related to the experience/their learning: *How did you find the experience of working with*

other educators in this context? Did you enjoy this dynamic and/or find it useful to you as an activist-minded educator? What is the most meaningful thing you will be taking away from this experience? Do you feel like you acquired new knowledge or skills? If so, how do you think this will affect your educational practice working in/around schools?

How did educators experience CPAR?

Some collective members identified the following positive results of participating in this CPAR project: (1) deepening their understanding of educational work; (2) expanding their understanding of inclusion and queer(ness)(ing); (3) feeling renewed in their efforts and/or having a greater sense of agency towards disruptive educational work; (4) feeling seen and validated as part of a supportive community.

Greater awareness of educational work. In their exit interviews, many collective members described having a deeper understanding of different schooling structures. Max and Kat, the two alternative school teachers, described learning more about formal schooling systems from public school teachers and developing a deeper understanding of how that institution works. Max said: “I learned so much ... especially getting insight into public [school] systems ... I am not well-versed in public systems.” Kat said she is more aware of “the differences between an independent and public school.” Gayle, the public school teacher and Aboriginal educator for Greater Victoria (61) and Sooke School District, (62) said: “I certainly got to learn more about the organizations that work within education that aren’t ‘education.’” Learning about different types of schooling systems was therefore an outcome of this process.

Greater awareness of inclusion and queer(ness)(ing). Besides learning more about various schooling structures – and broadening an understanding of what

educational work can be – some collective members discussed finding value in discussing and defining concepts like inclusion and queer(ness)(ing). Lauren described learning more about inclusion from Gabby’s special education perspective, which was different from their perspective within Indigenous sexual health and education programming.

Sarah, Reagan, and Gayle talked about the value of discussing queering.

Sarah said:

I had some really intense personal reflections ... looking at narratives that go on within myself in the context of self-worth ... the queering questions at the very beginning of ‘what does queering mean to you?’, ‘how do you disrupt spaces?’, ‘how do you queer spaces’ were very interesting for me to reflect on ... the ways I already do that ... to demand that there is visibility ... that was beautiful to reflect on the ways that I have disrupted space for my own safety for others’ safety ... those questions were lovely because I never really thought about that ... it awakened my voice a little more again ... it’s nice to be back [in the Queer community] and to explore deeply how I disrupt and queer spaces just as my breathing narrative.

Sarah’s response suggests she found value in discussing queerness. She described such discussions as enabling her to “awaken [her] voice a little more.” Reagan also articulated finding strength in the collective’s discussions about queerness. She associated it with deepening her learning. Reagan said:

I found it helpful to have a collective of folks working in different communities bringing different lived and learned experiences ... under the guise of talking about queerness and queer pedagogy ... there was so much opportunity to learn

from and from the prospect of doing disruptive work together ... we talked about things we all share a passion for ... I think it was a great format ... there was guidance but it still flexible ... we could still learn and grow in a way that works for each of us individually ... it's great because it's going to continue.

Gayle agreed with Reagan that there was valuing in talking about queering. She said:

Having queer being named queer ... having conversations in my brain about what that means to me and what that means in education ... can I make things more or less queer ... how I see the structures operating ... what is working and what isn't working ... what needs to change and what's okay to leave for now.

These three collective members therefore found value in discussing queer(ness)(ing).

Greater sense of agency to be disruptive in/around schools. Beyond deepening their understanding of certain concepts, certain collective members (Max, Gabby, Reagan, and Bridget) expressed feeling more hopeful – less isolated in their diversity efforts, and consequently more able to “talk back” (hooks, 1989). Max explained this here:

The biggest thing [about this collective] for me has been capacity to make change ... capacity to speak my truth and having the space to do that has given me the ground to stand on more firmly ... I've tried it out where it's safe [here in the group] and then I go into another space where ... 'there's no space for you' and I'm going to say it anyway ... that's been a really great piece of this.

Gabby also gained vitality through this project. She was reminded that there

is strength in numbers ... People are coming at [this work] from different angles [and] there is momentum ... inside with teachers and outside with different agencies.

By seeing how different types of educators are engaged in ‘diversity’ work, Gabby felt more hopeful. Reagan agreed that this experience was meaningful. She said that there was a “connection that was forged between a number of different folks in this community.” She explains that “a lot of what happened in that space ... reflects what [the collective] value[s] and would like to see happening in the classroom ... [she] fe[lt] like that [was] so meaningful ... because the relationships were really taken care of ... [and] that’s something that has longevity.” Reagan appreciated the process because she feels that the relationships that were formed have “longevity.” Reagan elaborated that “there are relationships built through this collective that will benefit this community ... [that can] maybe disrupt [each collective member’s] own work.” Reagan’s response indicates that the community that was formed through this process was beneficial for various members and this is just a starting point. This connects with Gabby’s point that there is strength in numbers and Max’s feelings that the collective was a ‘practice’ space for standing one’s ground. Max said in their exit interview that they realized that

we’re all trying to find ways to queer ... to normalize queerness ... to craft those spaces ... I’ve realized instead of waiting for those opportunities to be included ... I should help shape them... instead of waiting for opportunities for spaces to be made ... if I keep waiting I don’t think it’s going to happen ... and I do have power ... I have [the] power to speak.

This process therefore gave Max a greater sense of agency in their environment – they now know they “have the power to speak.” Max’s expressed that “vitality [and] agency [have] been ... theme[s] for [them] ... that [have] been informed by this intentional process.” Bridget’s response also echoed Max’s answer. Bridget said that, as an ally, she “feel[s] more confident and sure of interventions.” She expressed feeling “way better in terms of being assertive and having boundaries in being an ally. She feels a “greater sense of responsibility ... real sense of obligation to speak back ... [to] advocate ... not to speak *for* [others] but to set a boundary.” In sum, Max, Gabby, Reagan, and Bridget all expressed that this experience furnished them with a greater sense of agency, confidence, and ability to “talk back” (hooks, 1989) in their respective environments.

Sense of feeling seen and heard (validated). Beyond feeling more able to be more disruptive in their educational environments, one collective member (Max) expressed that collaborating with other people in this capacity has helped them feel seen and heard. According to Max, being in this collective has

been a really profoundly validating experience first and foremost ... in my job there are other [Q]ueer folks but not other gender[Q]ueer folks ... all of us have different experiences in the organization and mine is very specific and the ways that I feel invisible are very specific ... I haven't found a lot of spaces to feel valid and heard ... I was invited in ... I asked to be in ... but I feel like it was a welcoming into a group of people who are intentionally coming together to speak about these things ... diving into queer theory ... I've spent about six years thinking about queering ... it is very exciting [to me] to be around folks who are thinking about these things and it's important to them and having common

experiences ... it's created such a beautiful space ... its created a beautiful space of mutuality ... it's been very empowering.

Another result of this collective was therefore creating a supportive environment where gender and sexually creative people feel validated.

Summary of Findings

Before moving into my analysis in Chapter 5, I offer this brief summary.

What is queer(ness)(ing) according to these educators?

All collective members defined queer(ness)(ing) at various points of this study. Some of their understandings overlapped, whereas other definitions did not. The word queer(ness)(ing) thus has multiple meanings. To clarify usage in this thesis, I have capitalized Queer when it refers to LGBTQIA2S+ as an identity, and not capitalized it when it represents more of a worldview, action, or value system. Beyond seeing Queerness, as an identity, collective members envisioned queerness/queering as non-dominant ways of being, acting, knowing, and valuing that relate to disruption, reciprocity and care. More specifically, collective members defined queer(ness)(ing): as a personal and/or political identity; as performative (disruptive) acts; as reciprocal, compassionate and caring acts; as body knowledge (self and world awareness that arises through an attentiveness to bodies); as resilience, magic, and hope (rejection of deficiency narratives and proliferation of diverse ways of being); as an embrace of partiality, unknowability, and ambiguity; as solidarity work (specifically decolonization/Indigenization); and as a belief system that societies need to identify and disrupt oppressive narratives at a systemic level. Queer(ness)(ing) does not necessarily need to be all of those things. Those are just the myriad of ways queer(ness)(ing) was described.

How can we queer schools according to these activist educators?

All members were invited to reflect on how people could *queer* pedagogy and curriculum; however, only two collective members (Max and Gayle) talked specifically in detail about enacting queer(ness)(ing) in schools. In terms of teaching (pedagogy), they described queer(ness)(ing) as using non-Western teaching strategies, challenging the idea that some ways of being and knowing are superior to others, and positioning learners/educators in reciprocal ways. In terms of considering school spaces, the two collective members described fostering environments that are consent-based, transparent, and responsive to ongoing learner/teacher needs. Finally in terms of what people learn (curriculum), they described two components: showcasing minority perspectives, and teaching learners that knowledge is always partial. These suggestions tie into all of the collective member's general description of queer(ness)(ing) as disruption, reciprocity, and care.

What are the limits and merits of inclusion according to the collective?

Collective members had mixed feelings about the concept of inclusion; no consensus was reached about if the word/idea is "good" or "bad." Six collective members saw inclusion as a problematic framework. Three out of that six were highly critical, and the other three saw strengths and weaknesses in inclusion. The two main critiques against inclusion were: it can be paternalistic (about the majority group benevolently inviting the marginalized group to the 'table' on their own terms) and consequently lacking opportunities for agency and self-determination (i.e. reciprocity); and inclusion can be poorly implemented because institutions lack infrastructure to support systemic changes (i.e. disruption). While the majority of members voiced these

concerns (three very strongly), another third of the collective had predominantly positive associations with the term inclusion. Three collective members saw inclusion as fostering care through sharing space, amplifying voices, and cultivating safety/belonging. Interestingly those who saw inclusion in a positive light defined inclusion and queer(ness)(ing) in similar ways. In the subsequent chapter I discuss the idea that inclusion appears to be more about fostering care (immediate safety and belonging for marginalized groups), but is not necessarily about disruption and reciprocity. The main difference between inclusion and queering therefore appears to be that the former is about care, whereas the later is about disruption, reciprocity, *and* care.

How do these activist educators see themselves?

Collective members described their role as educators as non-experts and advocates/role models. All of the educators, whether Queer-identified or not, were marginalized in some way and discussed how their own experiences of marginalization enhanced their understanding of oppression and the need to interrupt networks of powers. They all described education as a site for intervention.

What was the value of forming a collective according to these educators?

Different collective members described the following outcomes from this project: having a deeper understanding of different schooling models and terms; having a greater sense of agency to be disruptive; and feeling validated and part of a community. They attributed building community to feeling more capable of acting in their respective environments. In the following chapter, I relate these findings to my research questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Building on my findings, I divided this chapter into three sections. The first section connects to cluster one (definitions of ‘queer-’) and answers the following: *What is queering schools praxis?* The second section draws on cluster one (definitions of ‘queer-’) and two (definitions of inclusion) to address this question: *Would it be possible and desirable for schools to shift from an inclusion/protection model to queering model in schools?* The third section is informed by cluster three (educators’ self-perceptions) and four (educators’ perceptions of the research process) to engage with the final aspect of my inquiry: *What roles do/can educators play in queering schools praxis?* Ultimately, this chapter relates my findings to my overarching research questions.

Understanding Queering Schools as De/Reconstructive Work

In this section, I draw on the categories that emerged from my findings to suggest that *queering schools praxis* is both deconstructive and reconstructive work according to collective members. Queering strives to unsettle norms and reconfigure schools through a queer lens. Consequently, queering can be understood as counter-discourse and a critical imagination; it offers people a language and lens to critically examine gender and sexual diversity efforts in our “schooling-as-education” (Airton, 2013) system. This is at least how the collective utilizes the language of queering – as a medium for dreaming about queer(er) schooling possibilities.

In my introduction, I defined praxis (pp. 25-26) as the moments that anti-oppressive theories intersect with practice: the ways that people enact anti-oppression in their lives initiating a process of self and communal liberation. Building from that understanding, I use the phrase *queering school praxis* to signify moments, actions, and

processes that are about enacting 'queering' as anti-oppressive work in schools. So how does one enact queer(ness)(ing) as a way to cultivate liberation in schools? Is 'queerness' and 'queering' already happening in schools? What does 'queering praxis' look like? According to collective members, queer(ness)(ing) is many things: it is a personal and/or political identity; it is performative (disruptive) acts; it is viewing others as having inherent value and fostering reciprocal, compassionate, caring relationships; it is the belief that knowledge arises through our bodies and lived experiences; it is believing that queerness (as non-conformity and ambiguity) is resilience, magic, and hope – worthy of cultural production and recognition in/outside Queer communities; it is believing that our understandings of the world and ourselves are always limited; it is believing that movements are interconnected and we have a responsibility to do solidarity work; and it is a belief that disrupting norms and systems are necessary for liberation. From those diverse understandings emerge three connecting threads/themes: disruption, reciprocity, and care. Queering is about *disrupting* various norms and systems (not just those related to gender and sexuality). Queering is about fostering and maintaining *reciprocal* relationships and dynamics where people and things are seen as having value and importance. And queering is about *care*: suspending judgment towards others, considering the bodily needs of people, and honouring different understandings through a recognition that our knowledge is only ever partial, contextual, and historicized. Based on those three connecting threads, queering can be understood as deconstructive (disruptive) work and reconstructive (irruptive) work.

Queering schools as deconstructive (disruptive) work.

As I have illustrated in my findings chapter, many collective members talked about queer(ness)(ing) in terms of disruption – particularly disrupting social and system-level norms. In making this connection to disrupting norms/normalization, collective members were conceptualizing queerness as a way to reject biopower (the internalization and regulation of gender, sexual and other social norms). For example, Sarah talked about how dressing in drag or ‘costumes’ during the day is a purposeful choice to disrupt spaces. She discussed how she also talks about sex and trauma openly with people as ways to challenge taboos (norms about what are appropriate topics). Both of those examples demonstrate that she is aware of the pressure to dress and speak in certain ways. Nonetheless, she rejects dressing and speaking in ‘appropriate’ ways. Max and Kat also positioned queerness as resistant to being pinned down to one thing. In that example, they are rejecting the idea that knowledge is stable. Gayle and Max talked about disrupting teaching norms by changing the environments that students learn in (i.e. by going outside in places where the site can be less controlled) and the teaching mediums (e.g. by using oral traditions to challenge Eurocentric ways to teaching). All of those examples showcase disruption.

Based on those conceptualizations, I see deconstructive work as one part of *queering schools praxis*. This is because deconstruction can be understood as synonymous with disruption. Returning to the definition I provide in my introduction, deconstruction involves identifying and challenging the boundaries of our personal, cultural, and societal knowledges. Young (2016) notes that “the theoretical parentage of disruption emerges from [q]ueer and critical theories, poststructuralist philosophy, and

feminism as they employ the concept of deconstruction,” meaning they understand disruption through the lens of queer and critical theories. For Young (2016),

[d]isruption purposefully confronts the cycle of normalization by making two significant moves ... First disruptive work involves recognizing and naming technologies of normalization ... Second, disruption entails noting the implications and impact of those technologies on real lives and potentialities by offering purposeful critical evaluation (p. 58).

Based on this definition, I see parallels between disruption and deconstruction; they both engage in a process of critically analyzing and refusing limits (“recognizing and naming technologies of normalization”). In the examples that all of the collective members provided – from wearing gender-bending clothes or costumes, talking about taboo topics, rejecting the idea that knowledge is stable, and changing teaching environments/practices – participants were countering norms. They demonstrated awareness of various social norms and responded in ways to reject them. In this way, a big component of conceptualizing and enacting queering is rooted in disruption/deconstruction: identifying and challenging various norms on personal and system levels.

Queering schools as reconstructive (irruptive) work.

While disruption is crucial to collective members’ perceptions of queering, it is not where queering ends. Collective members also described queer(ness)(ing) in terms of reciprocal/caring acts and cultural production. Ronnie, Reagan and Bridget described queering as acts that flatten hierchical power relationships. Gabby and Max discussed queering as building community and prioritizing care over productivity. For example, Max described the importance of flexible pedagogy in the way it prioritizes people’s

lived momentary experiences over being productive – ‘just getting through a lesson plan.’ Max also described queer(ness)(ing) as “the embodied ontologies of hope, resistance, softness and diverse ways of knowing.” Max’s description of queerness as “ontologies” showcases how queer(ness)(ing) is a form of cultural production: cultivating and proliferating new stories that are told by Queer people for Queer people.

Those examples illustrate that queer(ness)(ing) is not just about deconstruction (disruption); queer(ness)(ing) is also about reconstruction, repair, and what Young (2016) calls irruption. For Young (2016), disruption/deconstruction facilitates irruption (reconstruction). “Disruptive work makes room for irruption, which exemplifies the active infusion of queer possibilities” (p. 58). Irruption is moments during and after disruption when “norms are both dismantled and recreated” (p. 58). These irruptive moments – which are “constructive and destabilizing” (p. 58) – re-orient people, “politics, and discourses *away from* the power of [normalizing] technologies” (p. 58). Collective members are orienting themselves and discourses away from normalizing technologies because they have an awareness of those mechanisms and want to interrupt their processes. Irruption is therefore the agentic refusal of norms on the part of marginalized groups and their reconfigurations of norms and possibilities. Irruption is entangled with disruption. Young (2016) sees both disruption and irruption as necessary interacting elements that together “contribute to the overarching goal of transformative praxis and illustrate the ongoing ethical exchange between moral reflection and action” (p. 57). This process is both “critical and practical” (Young, 2016, p. 85) because it deconstructs norms and strives to reconstruct them in new ways. If we enact queer(ness)(ing) as a disruptive-irruptive process in educational contexts – something that

involves ongoing deconstruction (critical analysis/refusal of limits) and reconstruction (reparative action/reconfiguring of realities) – we will be mending the critiques that postmodern and queer theories are elitist in that they focus on exclusively on theory and not embodied realities (Browne & Nash, 2010; Foley, 2003; Kaufmann, 2010; Krish, 2006; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018; Rubin, 1998; Teo, 2010).

Bringing together ‘Inclusion’ & ‘Queering’ in Praxis

Following my discussion of queering schools praxis that is deconstructive and reconstructive work, I address the second part of my research inquiry: *Should schools shift the ways they engage with gender and sexual diversity work from an inclusion/protection model to a queering model? If so, how?* Earlier in this thesis, I outlined four different stances that schools take to gender and sexual diversity work: resistant, safe, affirming, and queering. A safe and affirming position connects to an inclusion/protection model. This section looks at how collective members engaged with these different stances toward gender and sexual diversity work, and concludes that my original research question about how we shift from inclusion to queering might be misleading. It assumes that inclusion cannot be interconnected with queering. This in turn sets up a dichotomy between inclusion and queering, which does not advance the conversation about how we can actually change schools through various strategies.

Through examining the collective members’ words I posit that the language we use, whether we say inclusion or queering, may be less important than the driving actions behind our efforts. What appears to be important for collective members is that the work we do in schools centres on disruption, reciprocity, and care. I argue that inclusion appears to be an engagement with care, but not necessarily disruption and care. *Queering*

is the language that this collective used to imagine schooling possibilities beyond care. What is at the heart of the collective's transformative desires are: widespread disruption of normalizing technologies; a cultivating and maintenance of reciprocal, mutually giving and supportive relationships; and a prioritizing of care and compassion in/around schools. These efforts are intersectional and not limited to the scope of gender and sexuality.

Inclusion as care, but not necessarily reciprocity or disruption

As I have argued in my literature review, most schools and educators operate from an inclusion/protection model. This inclusion/protection model connects to Kumashiro's conception of *Education for the Other* or *Education About the Other*, which are both concerned with drawing attention to difference and Otherness. It is also connected to a safe and/or affirming stance toward gender and sexual diversity work. This model, while well intentioned, is about absorbing a marginalized group into the larger dominant group and institutional structure. As I noted in my literature review, inclusion can be understood as an assimilationist framework and queering as a liberationist strategy (Mulé, 2006; Ruti, 2017). Lauren, Max, and Gabby also talked about inclusion in this way, describing it as a problematic framework because it does not require institutions to fundamentally change; it puts the emphasis on the people who need to be protected/included instead of why exclusion and discrimination is occurring and being produced in that institution.

Because I have asserted that there is a need for normative schooling practices to be disrupted – as they (re)produce hetero/cisnormativity, an interlocking hegemonic discourse that result in dehumanization for Queer and non-Queer people – I ask whether it would be possible and worthwhile to shift from an inclusion/protection model to a

queering model. Collective members were never asked this question explicitly – *if schools should shift from an inclusion/protection model to a queering model* – because we did not have conversations about diversity frameworks towards gender and sexual diversity. We did not discuss this because of time constraints and because I was trying to balance conversations with action planning during the focus group meetings. Even though the collective never explicitly discussed an inclusion/protection model, collective members’ perspectives about inclusion and queering engage with that question.

As I outlined in my previous chapter, three collective members had positive associations with the word inclusion. The rest had some negative associations (three were highly critical, and three had conflicted feelings). Interestingly, out of those who had positive associations with the term inclusion, they defined queering and inclusion in similar ways. Those three collective members defined both inclusion as queer(ness)(ing) as being about fostering compassion, autonomy, and self-determination in learning environments and life. Their responses reveal that inclusion can successfully address care on an individual level, and maybe even reciprocity in terms of personal relationships; however, as a framework, inclusion is not reciprocal nor does it require disrupting norms in any way. Kat’s words summarize this idea succinctly. She said: “being included in a group is a beautiful thing ... but institutional [inclusive] policy is different.” By that she seemed to mean that when people make efforts to ensure that those around us feel safe and like they belong that is “a beautiful thing” that cultivates a sense of belonging – people feel they have a place to exist in that environment. On a personal level, that is care. Care is an idea that all collective members engaged with on some level as being important. However, as Lauren, Max and Gabby noted, inclusion is not reciprocal on a

systemic level. In contrast, it can be patronizing. Inclusive policies and models establish the binary of inside and outside groups, where it is typically the majority group deciding who gets to be included and how they can be included without working with the “excluded,” marginalized group. These efforts to integrate LGBTQIA2S+ people and content is touted as success. These efforts are often celebrated and cisgender and heterosexual people are recognized for their benevolence; however even in environments where there are inclusive policies, Queerphobia and hetero/cisnormativity persists. This is likely because including “different” groups into mainstream systems, without fundamentally changing those systems, (re)produces hierarchical power dynamics. In this way, inclusion can be understood as care on an individual level, but not necessarily as reciprocity or disruption on a system level. So how does this understanding of inclusion fit into gender and sexual diversity frameworks? And where exactly do the collective’s understanding of queering schools fit within these existing frameworks?

Queering schools praxis as changing stances

As I have explained, schools and educators often take one or a combination of these stances: resistant, safe, affirming, and/or queering. A resistant approach denies the existence and presence of LGBTQIA2S+ people in schools. It suggests that there is no value in Queerness/queerness. Consequently, it actively produces Queerphobia by being overtly hetero/cisnormative. A resistant approach is the only out of the four that is not an engagement with queering schools praxis. The latter three approaches at least acknowledge that schools are unsafe and unaffirming spaces for Queer people. A safe approach tries to protect LGBTQIA2S+ people. An affirming stance is more about belonging and inclusion. And queering is about disruption.

When I first read about different frameworks (e.g. Goldstein, Daley & Russell, 2007; Kumashiro, 2002; Lin, 2017 etc.), I admit that I saw these stances as more separate. After listening to collective members, I now see a safe, affirming, and queering perspectives as interconnected. This is because collective members engaged with safe, affirming, and queering perspectives when they talked about praxis and made plans for enacting it. Their approach towards praxis was therefore conflicted; it was not one thing, but an array of strategies that addressed different needs and goals.

How did collective members engage with a safe stance?

Some collective members engaged with a safe stance when they discussed safety concerns of LGBTQIA2S+ people in schools. None of the collective members were wed to a 'safe' position. As I mentioned above, three collective members discussed care in relation to inclusion, and some collective members emphasized safety and the importance of policies and considerations for LGBTQIA2S+ people in their responses. For example, Max focused on cultivating safety for Queer people in schools when I asked the group to reflect on queer pedagogy and curriculum. Max recounted being misgendered on a regular basis in their school, and how they feel like a 'ghost' in that space. In Max's journal, they described the importance of schools offering safe spaces where educators and students can share their experiences of Queerphobia and hetero/cisnormativity without fear of repercussions. Max was focusing on safety in those examples; however, in other responses, Max talked in detail about how doing gender and sexual diversity work is not just about acknowledging LGBTQIA2S+ people and teaching students about queer analysis, it is also about cultivating critical thinking skills, and teaching in ways that are *queer* (disruptive, non-conforming, unsettling). In this way, some collective

members considered safety but none were *just* considering safety; they were also engaging with ideas that relate to disruption and reciprocity.

How did collective members engage with an affirming/positive stance?

Some collective members engaged with an affirming/positive stance (*Education About the Other*, Kumashiro, 2002) when they discussed using curriculum, resources, and workshops to build empathy and understanding about LGBTQIA2S+ people. For example, the collective talked about creating a resource guide and doing educational workshops with students and educators to increase their understanding of Queerness. These activities are arguably an engagement with an ‘affirming/positive’ approach because they relate to infusing Queer representation and knowledges in schools. While collective members engaged with an affirming/positive stance in the same way, they were not myopic about safety; they considered more than belonging. Some collective members also thought about queering in terms of disruption, which relates to a queering position.

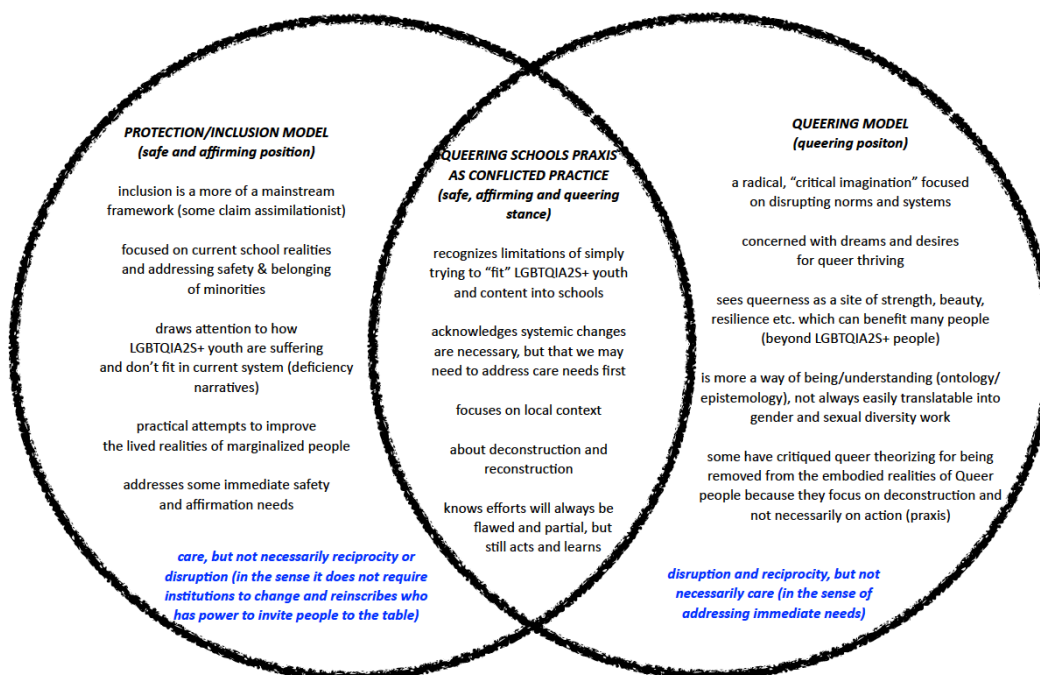
How did collective members engage with a queering stance?

Some collective members engaged with a queering stance toward gender and sexual diversity work when they discussed disruption and unsettling norms in terms of space, pedagogy, and curriculum. Max and Gayle’s comments were especially related to queering in terms of challenging schooling norms. Ultimately, collective members thought about queering schools’ praxis in various ways. They were not aware of these different frameworks during our discussions, but their ideas touched on various aspects of safe, affirming, and queering positions towards gender and sexual diversity work. This suggests that queering schools’ praxis is conflicted.

Conflicted Practice: As Long as There is Disruption, Reciprocity & Care

I return to Armstrong’s language of “conflicted” because I have found it helpful throughout my research and writing process. For Armstrong, “conflicted” means holding multiple ideas together without needing to resolve the tension and confusion that they cause. As I mentioned, when I first approached this research I thought about this work in more separate or binary ways. I was immersed in critiques of inclusion and felt frustrated by narratives of safety and protection. I now sense that queering schools praxis – that is the practical enactment of disruption, reciprocity, and care – involves all those stances: considerations about safety, belonging, and disruption. For these educators, doing anti-oppressive gender and sexuality work was not one thing. As a process, it was a flexible response to a local environment. See the figure below for a breakdown of where a protection/inclusion model and a queering model overlap.

Figure 5. *Queering schools praxis as conflicted*



The Role Educators & Communities Can & Do Play in *Queering Schools Praxis*

Up until this point, I have focused on explaining queering schools praxis as a flexible, situated process in/around schools that involves multiple strategies that disrupt norms, cultivate reciprocal dynamics, and foster caring relationships. I now want to consider the role of educators in praxis. One aspect of my original research question was to explore the role educators can and do play in queering schools praxis. The data suggests that these educators see themselves as agents for change and education as a site for critical intervention. While that data is interesting, I was more intrigued by how this process facilitated engagement in disruption, reciprocity, and care (queering praxis). I found this more interesting because every collective member commented on the process itself. They had similar perceptions of educators as role models and agents for positive change through the process. Many of them noted that being part of this collective grew their capacity for targeted actions. It appears that this collective acted as a ‘subaltern counterpublic’ (Fraser, 1992) and ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) that allowed participants/co-researchers to build their disruptive capacities. In the section below I define those terms and focus on how this process impacted the collective members. I suggest that educators can play a variety of roles in this praxis and that radical supportive communities enable them to act strategically and with their wellness in mind.

Fostering community enabled praxis for the collective.

Many collective members described the collective as a caring space that gave room for multiple perspectives to emerge. In not needing to come to a consensus about their feelings about inclusion, this collective disrupted the idea of knowledge as one thing, instead opting for multiplicity and ambiguity. Relational dynamics were also

disrupted in the sense that while I loosely facilitated interviews and focus group meetings, they were very much directed by the participants/co-researchers. In this way, I attempted to disrupt the hierarchy of researcher as the sole architect of the research project. Through these processes, disruption, reciprocity, and care were prioritized. The collective therefore was attempting to *be* queer and to *do* work queerly.

This *queer* space can be understood as a “subaltern counterpublic” (Fraser, 1992) because it was an arena where marginalized people, ‘subalterns’ – in this case Queer, non-binary, two-spirit and ally educators – came together to “circulate counter discourses [and] formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (Fraser, 1992, p. 67). This is precisely what collective members did; they gathered to discuss gender and sexual diversity efforts in schools through a critical lens. According to Wimmer (2016), the term counterpublic signals a specific social discourse or point of view (counter-discourse) that marginalized people try to bring into the spotlight. I see counterpublics as an extension of Foucault’s idea of counter-discourse (1972), expansive narratives that challenge hegemonic discourses. Collective members produced counter-discourses to hetero/cisnormativity and mainstream school inclusion narratives through their discussions. For example, collective members refused to be confined to thinking about ‘gender and sexual diversity in schools’ through the limited scope of gender, sexuality, and protection. They connected queering to decolonization, Indigenization, and anti-capitalism. And collective members conceptualized ‘queerness’ as both an individual identity and also more broadly as ways of acting, knowing and valuing. Members also had mixed feelings about the term inclusion, showcasing that the collective was not in consensus about the idea of absorbing “outside groups” into “mainstream groups.” In all

of those instances, collective members were producing and proliferating counter discourses.

Beyond just producing counter-discourses, the collective was and is a counterpublic because it is a sphere where people produce and share counter discourses with the goal of unsettling hegemonic discourses. The *Queering Schools Collective (QSC)*, now known as the *Queering Schools Network (QSN)*, can be understood as a counterpublic because the group gathered on a monthly basis, and continues to do so, to engage with, and consequently (re)produce the counter-discourse of *queering*. One of the collective's goals was to mobilize knowledge around *queering*. According to Fraser (1992), if “counterpublics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand discursive space” (p. 67). Expanding discursive space was precisely what the collective did and continues to do around schooling possibilities in our local context.

Besides being a “subaltern counterpublic,” the collective was also a “community of practice” – a community where people come together to reflect, learn, and improve upon their social environment in a collaborative and supportive way. Wenger first coined the term in 1998 and has since clarified its meaning (see Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002; Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Communities of practice have three characteristics. Its members (1) share a domain of interest; (2) commit to building relationships and fostering learning; (3) and are practitioners that strive to develop a “repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, [and] ways of addressing recurring problems” (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). According to Wenger-Trayner (2015)

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expressions, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers help each other cope. In a nutshell: communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (p. 1).

A community of practice does not need to be a formal process, but that does not mean it is a club of friends or a network of connections; it is a group of people that have a shared interest and expertise around a domain (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). In the case of the collective, members were all educators and have some expertise, experience, and/or passion for doing gender and sexual diversity related work in schools. Most of the members were Queer-identified, and if they were not, they were active, aware allies. There was therefore shared experiences and expertise in our group: members were either Queer or committed to supporting LGBTQIA2S+ people; and they were all educators with skills, or knowledge surrounding gender and sexual diversity work in schools.

Creating a space where people could identify dominant discourses and challenge them by producing counter discourses seemed to produce a greater sense of agency for many members. Lauren, Sarah, Reagan, and Gayle talked about how discussing inclusion and queering expanded their previous understandings. Sarah, Reagan, and Gayle noted that such discussions enabled them to consider how they *queer* spaces, relationships, and practices. Max, Gabby, Reagan, and Bridget articulated that being part of the collective

resulted in them feeling more hopeful about gender and sexual diversity work. Moreover Max talked about how the process gave them a greater sense of “vitality,” and “agency,” and was “profoundly validating.” Max stated that:

I've realized instead of waiting for those opportunities to be included ... I should help shape them... instead of waiting for opportunities for spaces to be made ... if I keep waiting I don't think it's going to happen ... and I do have power ... I have [the] power to speak.

This suggests that this process of being in community – of having the space to critique and dream – had a positive impact on educators and enabled many to feel more confident, competent, and supported in doing disruptive work. Bridget said that as an ally she feels more secure in standing her ground. While this cannot be generalized to a broader community, it seems significant to note that creating a community that reflects the values of queer(ness)(ing) cultivated a greater sense of agency in participants.

Summary of Discussion

Overall, this chapter explored the following themes: (1) that according to collective members, queering schools is de/reconstructive work, which involves identifying and reconfiguring norms on various levels; (2) that queering schools praxis is a flexible, situated process that involves multiple strategies; (3) that queering schools praxis overlaps with inclusion in the sense that both are about caring, but departs in the way that queering schools is also about disruption and reciprocity; (4) and that supportive communities (subaltern communities of practice) enabled these educators to do queering schools praxis work. With that note, I direct you to my conclusion where I outline the limitations of this project, significance of this research, and further considerations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Writing this final chapter was challenging. It was challenging because while finishing up my discussion chapter, and immersed in the disruptive, reciprocal, and caring possibilities of queer(ness)(ing) in and around schools, I was jolted out of the comfortable world of research and theory. The resistance to gender and sexual diversity work, which I have written about in the literature section of this thesis, crept back into my personal life. Much to my frustration, my active desire to distance myself from those who question LGBTQIA2S+ people, I found myself sitting in a room with people who deny the existence and dignity of trans, non-binary, two-spirit, intersex, and Queer people.

So how did I find myself in this room? A few days prior to writing this chapter, a speaker came to Victoria, where this CPAR project took place, to host a talk about the dangers of “trans ideology” and SOGI 123 in the local community centre of predominantly white, privileged neighbourhood. As I have touched on briefly in my introduction, SOGI 123, which stands for Sexual Orientation Gender Identity 123, is a growing initiative in Western Canada. It developed after the passing of Bill C-16 that added gender identity and expression as protections under the Canadian Criminal Code and Human Rights Code. SOGI 123 grew out of collaboration between the ARC Foundation (a not-for-profit), the University of British Columbia (UBC), and the BC Ministry of Education. It gained provincial support and many schools across BC have adopted a SOGI model, striving to address the three aspects it promotes: (1) establishing inclusive policies for LGBTQIA2S+ people, (2) promoting inclusive spaces (e.g. gender neutral washrooms, environments free of bullying etc.), (3) and producing inclusive

curriculum (e.g. curriculum that includes LGBTQIA2S+ perspectives). This initiative has been met with some backlash.

The speaker was a representation of that backlash. The week leading up to this talk erupted in impromptu community organizing. Armed with signs, many local Queer people and allies showed up to protest the event. They trembled and shouted. Some LGBTQIA2S+ youth stood up in front of a megaphone. They said why SOGI 123 mattered to them. Their voices punctured the air. Stillness and cheers. Stillness and cheers. But I was not outside. I could only hear their voices muffled in the background. I sat in the room where the speaker was, next to friends, scanning my surroundings. We had gathered to *disrupt* the event. There was a streaming of outbursts. The mother of a trans kid stood up, hand in the air for the duration of the talk. *I have a question*, she said. Another brought a clapper and would shake it angrily whenever the speaker spouted misinformation. Another eloquently rallied protestors to shout: *SOGI saves lives*. As I sat there trembling with rage, feeling the collective anger and sadness of Queer folks around me, I noticed that one of the people who was part of our pod (the group we had arrived with) was crying. *My mom is here*, she said. *My mom, who isn't accepting, is at this event*. We looked at her. We nodded silently. More outbursts cut through the room. *SOGI saves lives. SOGI saves lives.*

The event was eventually closed down. There were cheers. It felt like success. *SOGI saves lives*. A half success. Because why are events like this *still* happening? Why is SOGI, which operates from more an inclusion and protection standpoint, so controversial? Is safety not the bare minimum? How are we still at a moment in time where people cannot even agree on that? And what does that mean for more disruptive

schooling efforts? How can we get there? How can we get to queer(ness)(ing)? SOGI 123 does indeed save lives, but can schools not strive for more than safety? What about society more broadly? Can we not dream beyond safety? Inclusion and protection efforts are harm reduction. They are “band-aid” attempts to address wounds, but they are not healing. Healing requires deeper level changes.

Returning to Britzman’s question that opened this thesis – “What sort of difference would it make for everyone in a classroom if [LGBTQIAS2+] writing was set loose from confirmations of [Queerphobia], the afterthoughts of inclusion, or the special event?” (Britzman, 1995, p. 151) – collective members offered some ideas. They conceptualized queer(ness)(ing) in and around schools. This thesis has presented findings from a five-month critical participatory action research project that considers ways that Queerness/queerness can enter schools outside of merely trying to protect and include LGBTQIA2S+ youth who have been coded as “at risk.” This thesis features analyses of interviews, focus group meetings, and select journal entries from nine-activist educators who formed a collective called the *Queering Schools Collective*. Through partaking in this collaborative process, these local educators – public school teachers, independent school teachers, community educators, and an EA – dreamed about queerer possibilities in schools. Through an interpretation of their words, I have observed that queering (as a verb) involves: disrupting norms and systems; fostering reciprocal relationships and dynamics; and ensuring and maintaining care on various levels.

Listening to collective members, and making links to the literature, queering and inclusion both foster care; however, a LGBTQIA2S+ inclusion/protection school model differs from a queering standpoint in the sense that it is not disruptive or reciprocal on a

system level. Trying to fit an excluded group into an institution, without requiring that institution changes, (re)inscribes unreciprocal power dynamics. So where does that leave those of us trying to change schools? Where does that leave those of us trying to thrive as Queer people within schools as students, teachers, parents, and community members? Where does that leave those of us who are allies and want to facilitate change in liberating ways? How can we do gender and sexual diversity work that involves care as well as reciprocity and disruption? Before answering that question, the significance of this research, I briefly touch on a few conditions of this study. This conclusion outlines those conditions, what people can do with this research, and areas for further development.

Scope of Research

There are two main conditions to this research: time and scope. I had hoped that the collective would be able to try out our different action initiatives within the five months; however, this was not *my* collective and it did not go according to my timeline. Part of doing CPAR research means relinquishing control. With CPAR, participants shape and guide the direction of the process. Consequently, we spent the first two meetings discussing terms (inclusion, queering/queerness) and the final meeting talking about goals and action items.

We did have an opportunity to meet with the Ministry of Education. That being said, due to collective member's schedules I was the only one who was able to attend. Moreover, this action item was more about gaining information and connections to better understand how curriculum and policy is developed. Although the collective, now called the *Queering Schools Network*, is a community group and is trying to realize many of our

action items that we discussed during the final focus group meeting, this thesis does not analyze those aspects because they did not fall within the research phase.

The second condition to this research relates to generalizability. These findings are based on the thoughts of nine educators who live in a particular geographical context. Their ideas about queer(ness)(ing) – while valid and legitimate on the basis of communicative action, verisimilitude, and catalytic validity – cannot be generalized to a broad population.

Significance of Research

Even though collective members' perspectives are not representative of a large population, their words resonate and connect deeply to theorizing about queering. One significant detail of this research is that it echoes concerns about inclusion that is present in the literature. Many collective members articulated the same concerns that critical scholars note about inclusion. Max, Lauren, and Gabby described inclusion as a problematic framework and pinpointed the same issues that scholars did: it does not require institutional change, it can rob marginalized groups from agency, and (re)produce hierarchical power dynamics. While Kat, Reagan, and Ronnie did not see inclusion as critically, they articulated similar concerns about an inclusion model. Inclusion is therefore a problematic way of conceptualizing systemic change. People ought to strive to make everyone feel safe and included; however, inclusion should not be the end destination. Implicit in the framework of inclusion is a dichotomy between excluded/included that does not recognize the agency and power that marginalized groups wield. Those of us invested in transformative changes in schools need to dream big. We ought to think beyond the scope of “included” and “excluded” to the ways that we are all complicit and connected within various webs of oppression. That is why a

queering stance towards diversity work can be such a powerful paradigm shift; it redirects attention towards the strengths, desires, and resilience of those that are marginalized and pathologizes systems, not people.

This research has also taught me that even though an idea might be troubling, it is not always worth rejecting. I find inclusion to be a very problematic conceptual framework; however, I do not see it as void of value. It is a beautiful idea in many respects and when people try to make others feel included, it can be very powerful. Through observing the contradictory associations people have with inclusion, I have been reminded that it is not necessary to dispel tensions. Ideas, approaches, and efforts are never going to be perfect. Holding tensions also applied to when I came across a particular comment said by a few collective members. They talked about *normalizing Queerness/queerness*. This oxymoron was striking. It elicits a lot of questions: How can one normalize queerness? Does queerness not seek to disrupt norms? Does that mean that queerness rejects norms altogether? Is it even possible to disrupt norms altogether? While I do not have any answers to those questions, I interpreted that comment as a reminder of the messy nature of queering, especially when it comes to enacting it. Like in the case of inclusion, queerness/queering is full of contradictions. Perhaps queering work does involve disrupting norms but it also involves reconfiguring those norms. Perhaps queerness is an anti-normative norm. Perhaps that is okay or useful in a liberating sense.

Another informative element of the findings was how collective members defined 'queer' as multiple things at once. Similarly to how I was reminded of tensions, I was reminded that it is very hard to define things. Queer/queer was often described in contradictory or paradoxical ways by co-researchers/participants. For example, Queer

could simply be synonymous with LGBTQIA2S+ or it could be a specific political worldview. Some talked about ‘queerness’ in constructed/abstract ways whereas others talked about it in terms of lived experiences and embodiment. These discussions also connect to the literature and what I have tried to attend to in my introduction and discussion: that it is beneficial to think about Queerness/queerness as real and unreal, as embodied and constructed. By holding space for this multiplicity, that queerness is not one thing (and that our understandings can even be contradictory), collective members engaged with a curriculum of partiality (Kumashiro, 2002). They recognized that knowledge is always partial. Through seeing collective members hold these tensions, I was reminded that this is part of queering: recognizing the uncertain and unknowable nature of transformative change.

Beyond offering real/unreal understandings of Queerness/queerness, this process reminded me that action is messy. Based on how Max redirected my attention to space/safety, and how Lauren and Ronnie emphasized youth, I was reminded that there is not one ‘right’ way to do this work. Thinking about queering schools praxis as separate from inclusion/protection sets it up as a dichotomy. While we can draw lines to conceptualize different approaches to gender and sexual diversity work, these stances are connected. Ultimately, listening to co-researchers/participants, *queering schools praxis* appears to be conflicted. Collective members talked about queering schools in ways that convey it is a responsive, flexible process that balances practical and immediate safety/belonging concerns with more radical, disruptive aims. Queering schools can involve creating LGBTQIA2S+ support spaces, ‘inclusive’ (caring) policies, anti-bullying campaigns, and integrating more content about Queer people into curriculum;

however queering schools does not stop there. Collective members identified disruption, reciprocity, and care at the heart of this work. They described various ways to queer spaces, pedagogies, and curricula, including: (1) shifting power dynamics between students and educators; (2) allowing for learning environments that are experiential, student-centered, and unpredictable; (3) and creating/proliferating curriculum that not only reflects Queer voices, but is *queer*, in the sense that it teaches students that nothing is certain and there are always multiple ways of seeing.

Finally, this research reminded me that communities are important. I observed that the process of creating a collective inspired a greater sense of agency in many members. Different co-participants/researchers discussed that being part of a group where it was possible to discuss terms like inclusion, queering, and their educational hopes was a cathartic and mobilizing process. This suggests that queer spaces for educators are also beneficial.

Considerations for Future Research

Ultimately, this thesis presents queering as a critical imagination: a paradigm shift for doing gender and sexual diversity work. It does not advocate for abandoning school efforts that foster safety and belonging for Queer people; however, it does suggest that we look beyond the scope of safety. It operates from the belief that Queerness/queerness is not just about gender and sexuality; queerness relates broadly to non-conformity, anti-normativity, and shifting unequal power dynamics. As collective members have noted, queerness is building defiance, resilience, thriving, magic, and love. It is an intersectional process that is about unsettling a number of norms.

Further research could include diving deeper into how people can *queer* space, pedagogy, and curriculum. Scholars could examine existing curriculums to examine if

they reflect those three values of disruption, reciprocity, and care. Scholars could likewise survey teacher education programs to see if they incorporate Queerness/queerness. Finally, researchers could also investigate how queering connections to other social justice movements, like decolonizing/Indigenizing, within “schooling-as-education” (Airton, 2013) systems. Overall, there is much room for development in queer educational research. Queer(ness)(ing) is not one thing. It is a language for expansive possibilities.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Consent Form



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form

The Queering Schools Collective: Mobilizing Educators to Disrupt Hetero/Cisnormativity Through Critical Participatory Action Research

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “The Queering Schools Collective” that is being conducted by Lindsay Cavanaugh, a UVic graduate student in the department of Curriculum & Instruction in the Faculty of Education. As a MA in Educational Studies student, she is required to complete a research project as part of her degree program. You may contact her (queeringschoolscollective.sd61@gmail.com) or her supervisor, Dr. Katherine Sanford (250-721-7804) if you have further questions. This research is being funded by the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to bring together a group of local activist-minded educators passionate about gender and sexual diversity in schools. In bringing together a group of engaged, socially-aware educators, it is hoped that:

- These educators can develop a network of support surrounding the sometimes challenging work they do trying to educate people about gender and sexual diversity
- These educators can bring together their expertise and insights to come up with new strategies for challenging normative beliefs that are reproduced in schools
- These educators can develop resources for other teachers and community facilitators
- These educators can continue to reflect and act based on what they learn and the support they gain from the collective

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because various studies, both Canadian and international, suggest that gender and sexual minorities – both students, educators and community members – are not flourishing within our current formal education system. While important initiatives like SOGI 123 are underway, this project strives to build on the momentum of gender and sexual diversity in schools and approach it from a critical,

queer theory lens. This study does not wish to focus on protecting LGBTQIA2S+ youth, which is a common focus of this type of research, but instead to better understand how people working in schools can disrupt hetero/cisnormativity – the belief that gender is a binary and heterosexuality is the only normative, desirable sexuality. This study operates on the belief that hetero/cisnormativity underlies the discriminatory behaviour that manifests against LGBTQIA2S+ students and teachers in schools. This research therefore hopes to find creative strategies for challenging hetero/cisnormativity in schools.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are either a middle school, high school teacher in the Greater Victoria SD61 or a community educator who does gender and/or sexual diversity workshops in local schools. You have demonstrated a passion for gender and sexual diversity education and have previous experience advocating for the LGBTQIA2S+ community in some capacity.

What is involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

- An initial interview (30-60 mins)
- Approximately 3 Focus Group Meetings (2-4 hours per meeting)
- OPTIONAL: Noting instances when you notice hetero/cisnormativity in your teaching contexts or everyday life in a journal or blog (10 mins a week)
- OPTIONAL: Creating some type of product which the collective agrees upon (planning should not exceed the time allocated for the meetings)
- A final interview (30-60 mins)

You will be asked if you consent to have the individual interviews audio-recorded and focus groups audio and video recorded, which will be used solely to create transcripts. You may decline to have yourself audio/video recorded and still participate in the study.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time inconvenience. If you choose to participate, it is hoped you choose to participate for the entire 5 months, although you are able to withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks

Given the participatory action approach and its aims to disrupt systems of power, it is possible that some participants might experience or witness situations or reflect on memories that are emotionally difficult. To avoid this potential risk, the researcher will regularly check-in with participants and do debriefs at the end of each focus group. Should participants experience this risk, you will be reminded you can withdraw from the study and will be provided with contact info for a local counselor.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include connecting with like-minded activist educators, creating a network of support, using your expertise to support other educators, creating helpful resources and receiving an honorarium.

Compensation

As a way to honour your time commitment, knowledge and efforts in this project, you will be given a \$200 honorarium.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study you have the option to request your data is destroyed. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be asked at that time, if it is acceptable to still use your data. If you withdraw from the study before 3 months, you will not receive compensation. If you withdraw after 3 months, your compensation will reflect how many meetings you attended.

On-going Consent

On-going consent means that you will be asked throughout this study if you still agree to participate in various ways. You will be asked for ongoing consent about the following data collection methods:

- *Audio/Video Recordings:* The researcher will ask permission at each focus group meeting to audio and/or video record our discussions. Video recordings will only be used to distinguish between who is speaking when creating transcripts. These recordings will not be viewed by anyone besides the researcher.
- *Journals/Blogs:* The researcher will ask permission to read the journals/blog posts of participants each week and remind participants that they can share these responses with the group if they feel comfortable. Participants decide if/how they want to share. See the separate page about journal/blogs for more information.

Ongoing Action

It is hoped that this project results in ongoing action and the production of materials that can be shared with other educators (e.g. workshops, lesson plans, a resource package etc.). These products will be entirely dependent on the collective's goals.

Anonymity

As a result of the format of the study, anonymity is limited. What you share during your initial and final interview will be kept confidential; however, what is shared in the focus group meetings will not be confidential to others in the group. Those selected to participate will be asked to not share anything they hear in the focus groups, unless decided upon by the group. Should the collective decide they want to facilitate

workshops or create resources that require interaction with the public, full anonymity will not be possible, unless you decide to not participate in that component.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected through various means. Written files will be stored in a locked cabinet and digital files will be encrypted.

Dissemination of Results

Due to the participatory nature of the study, Requests for Modifications will be submitted to the Human Ethics Research Board when changes occur. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: resources for educators, community presentations, thesis, scholarly presentations etc.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of in seven years. Paper files will be shredded. Digital files will be deleted.

Contacts

If you have concerns, you may contact Katherine Sanford, Lindsay Cavanaugh's supervisor or contact the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project. Please view the document that explains the blog/journals in more detail before signing below.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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Please initial one of the following. You can change your mind at any time about anonymity.

I would like to be anonymous/not have my name identified
in the results of the study _____

I consent to be identified by name / credited
in the results of the study _____

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix B: Journal Explanation

JOURNALS & BLOGS: Recording Our Reflections

NOTE: This is optional. You decide if journaling would be useful for yourself and if you want to share anything with myself or the group.

Purpose

As part of this collective, you will be invited to record your reflections about hetero/cisnormativity in your teaching environments. The purpose of using journals or private blog posts is to keep track of:

- how hetero/cisnormativity operates in formal learning spaces , specifically your context
- how you respond to, are affected by, and try to challenge hetero/cisnormativity.

In summary, it's a tool to keep track of our experiences and resistance efforts.

Format

We will decide at our first meeting, the preferred format for recording our experiences. Some people might prefer to record their experiences in a private journal and some might prefer using a private blog. There are no expectations about how you write these responses. They can be as short or long as you want; they can be formal writing or point form. Write in a way that feels comfortable and authentic to you.

Sharing

It is entirely your choice if you want to journal and if/how you want to share these responses if you do journal. You have the following options if you decide to journal:

- record your thoughts in a private journal just for yourself and do not share it with the researcher or group
- record your thoughts in a journal/private blog post and share with just the researcher
- record your thoughts in a journal/private blog post and share with the researcher and the group

You can change your mind about if/how much you share at any point.

Best Writing Practices

If you consent to sharing your journal/private blog with others (the researcher or researcher/group), it is expected you will respect the anonymity/confidentiality of students, colleagues, community members, organizations.

Please do not use the real names of students, colleagues, administrators etc. to respect the confidentiality/anonymity of those individuals. For example, you can write: "Today, a student said ...", but avoid, "Today, my student John said ...".

At NO point will anything you record be shared publically. If you choose to share your journal/blog with the researcher and/or group, that will ONLY be available to either the researcher or the researcher/group. If someone has shared something with the group from their blog/journal, do not share that with anyone outside of the collective to respect the confidentiality/privacy of the participant. The only exception is if that participant has explicitly said otherwise and the story/experience does not reveal the identities of anyone who could be harmed from the sharing of that information.

Time Expectations

You can make this what you want. It's an invitation to reflect between our meetings since we are only meeting once a month. If you decide that journaling is a good way for you to reflect, you are not expected to spend anymore than 10 minutes on these reflections a week, unless you would like to spend more time on them.

Research & Dissemination

If you consent to have your journal/blog shared with the researcher, she will analyze the data looking for recurring between participants. If what the content included in the journals/blogs seems relevant to highlight in her thesis, she will ask for permission. At no point will she reference or quote anything produced in those texts without explicit consent from participants.

Appendix C: Initial Interview Questions

Initial Interview (Semi-structured Questions – Subject to Change/Evolve Based on Individual Conversations with Participants)

- how do you see yourself as an educator?
- how do your various identities shape you as an educator?
- what do you think your role is as an educator working in schools?
- what do you like or not like about working in schools?
- in what ways do you think schools encourage learning and/or stop it from happening?
- what's your relationship to gender and sexual diversity in life? in schools? why is it important to you?
- how do you see gender and sexual identities in relation to other identities?
- what do you think of when you hear the word inclusion? what's inclusion to you?
- what do you think of when you hear the word hetero/cisnormativity? what do you know about it?
- how do you feel about what's currently being done in schools regarding gender and sexual diversity? are there things that get you really excited/inspired? things that worry and/or anger you?
- if we could live in an ideal world, how would you envision gender and sexual diversity in the context of schools? what do you want to change? what areas would you want changed, built upon, totally changed etc.?
- (you've already answered this as part of your screening questions, but) what made you decide you wanted to be part of this project? (anything to add?)
- (you've already answered this as part of your screening questions, but) what are you hoping to get out of/contribute to this collective project? (anything to add?)
- is there anything else you'd like to share about yourself that I haven't asked?

Appendix D: Exit Interview Questions

Exit interview questions (Semi-structured Questions – Subject to Change/Evolve Based on Individual Conversations with Participants)

- How did you find the experience of working with other educators in this context? Did you enjoy this dynamic and/or find it useful to you as an activist/activist-minded educator?
- What is the most meaningful thing you will be taking away from this experience?
- I asked you to reflect on your role as an educator in your first interview. Do you feel like your perception of yourself as an educator, learner or person has changed? Have your perceptions about education or schooling changed at all?
- I asked you about inclusion at your first interview (your reaction to the word). Has your understanding of inclusion shifted or changed at all?
- I asked you about hetero/cisnormativity at your first interview (your reaction to the word). Has your understanding of hetero/cisnormativity shifted or changed at all?
- We talked about queering and disruption in our initial meetings. Do you feel like those discussions have enabled you to think about gender and sexual diversity in schools in new ways? If so, how?
- Do you feel like you acquired new knowledge? If so, how do you think this new learning will affect your educational practice working in/around schools?
- What do you see as next steps for yourself as an activist/activist-minded educator? How do you see yourself advocating in the future?
- Is there anything else you want to share about this experience?