



Volume 1, No 2 (2018)  
Date of publication: 08-11-2018

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3033>  
ISSN 2535-5406

## BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

# Queer pedagogies: LGBTQ education, democracy and human rights

Camicia, S. P. (2016). *Critical democratic education and LGBTQ - inclusive curriculum: opportunities and constraints*. New York: Routledge. 101 pp., £35.25 (hardback) ISBN: 978-0-414-70992-7; £16 (ebook) ISBN: 978-1-315-88525-4

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### **Queer pedagogies: LGBTQ education, democracy and human rights**

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This book emerges at a crucial moment in both democracy and in the work of LGBTQ inclusion in education, both in the US and in the UK. Trust in politicians and the media is very low in 2018, and 'identity politics' is often derided by those in power as shaky ground for the discussion of human and civil rights. This is of course precisely because those in power tend to claim their identity as the norm. As Camicia (2016) explains, the '...functioning of norms keeps non-dominant identities from being recognised because the dominant lens is one of deficit when in actuality the deficit rests in institutions, structures and societies' (p.16). Taking queerness as anything other than the norm, Camicia (2016) manages to interweave two clear and valuable concepts in one book. Firstly, he offers a detailed and practical comparative case study of two very different states (Utah and California) and their approaches to LGBTQ inclusion in schools. And secondly, he uses an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum as an exemplification for the development of a better informed, empathetic, and more critical democracy through the process of formal education.

The first chapter lays out the importance of considering the structures underpinning inclusion and curriculum in thinking about education for democracy. Camicia (2016) makes this point by outlining how 'an exclusionary curriculum demonstrates the quality and will of an undemocratic community to all students' (p.8). Chapters 2 and 5 bracket the data chapters by addressing the theory behind the approach, with the former making a good case for the implementation of democratic education through queer theoretical approaches in public schools, and the latter revisiting the negative impacts of a lack of visibility and the importance of recognition and inclusion in such an endeavour.

The third and fourth chapters look at data collected by the author on LGBTQ education in Utah and California. Schools in Utah are operating within a system dominated by patriarchy and religion, where students only recently endured a protracted courtroom battle to be allowed to meet at school in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). Books featuring same-sex parented families have been banned, and teachers find it very difficult to be out as LGBTQ at school. In comparison, California's legislative history is 40 years ahead of Utah's. GSAs started in California; LGBTQ students enjoy a range of protections and supports; and the state has established an indisputably inclusive curriculum. However, Camicia (2016) is careful to explain that the two states do not represent a dystopia/utopia dichotomy. There are differences

in rural areas and urban centres in both states; Salt Lake City in Utah is much more inclusive in many ways than rural California, and some teachers in urban Californian schools are unable to address LGBTQ education against a backdrop of compromised personal safety. Educators from both states have had to confront restrictions and opportunities in developing deep advocacy skills and drawing on a strategy of 'braiding' intersectional LGBTQ and democratic educational content throughout their curricula. What the data demonstrates is the difference between policy and implementation in education, and the resilience and creativity of educators and students who are committed to democracy and advocacy.

The epilogue outlines the author's autoethnographic account of his experience growing up as a gender non-normative child and adolescent, a closeted married man, and an out, gay academic. Camicia (2016) leverages this account partly to make visible his own positioning, and partly to demonstrate the use of autoethnography as a useful tool for both teachers and students engaged in education for democracy. In doing so, he demonstrates that a curriculum that provides counter-narratives and gives value to subjectivities can 'facilitate examination of "common-sense" knowledge as it is implicated in inequitable power relations' (p.85). He shows that this mode of thinking is situated, contextualised, and intersectional. Ultimately, the chapter concludes a book dedicated to demonstrating that listening to diverse people's stories can function as a key antidote to stereotyping and to the metadiscourses running through politics and the media that claim to speak for everyone but somehow omit the voice of experience.

The author thus draws on complex theory and philosophy and illustrates it in accessible, pragmatic ways which will appeal to both academic researchers and to school professionals. For example, he quotes Habermas's idea that a theory of rights must recognise the validity of people's contextual subjectivities, explaining: '(t)his recognition is necessarily a complicated conversation ... but without these conversations, schools are bound to maintain and construct social inequalities' (p. 13). Citing Judith Butler, he makes a clear case for the idea that although categories have been important for LGBTQ rights, they also function to exclude. To accept intersectionality, then, is to accept the impossibility of categories. The book makes it clear that alliances are more important - which is why LGBTQ education is for everyone interested in democracy, and not just for LGBTQ teachers and students.