# Disrupting Standard Practice: Queering the World Language Classroom

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*Abstract*

*World language education (WLE) offers students the opportunity to explore the linguistic and cultural identities of the target language. However, critical issues, such as the diverse sexual identities found within the target cultures and of the language learners themselves are often not addressed within the language learning experience. Also implicated are discourse and knowledge/power, which serve to erase certain students' identities from the curriculum. Queer theory/pedagogy, which resists normal (Jagose, 1996), has much to offer WLE related to addressing heteronormativity. Thus, this article explores the myriad ways in which queer theory/pedagogy could potentially be useful in WLE to challenge normative societal assumptions and provide different ways of thinking about WLE practice to include all students' identities.*

**Key words**: *world language education, queer theory, discourse, proficiency, power/knowledge*

## Background

> *"Ok, class. Does everyone understand the directions for this activity on family? After you choose who will be your husband/wife and children, then you must write a brief script for your performance in front of us. Who's all working together? Let's see. Kevin (all names are pseudonyms), you are with Lisa, correct? Ok. Aaron, you and Jill are a couple. Uh huh. Ben and Rachel, you're going to be their children. Excellent! Kelly, who are you going to work with? Are you and John working together? Oh, you're not? So, Kelly, you're going to work with Tara instead?"*

This situation represents a moment from my classroom experience as a Spanish teacher in a rural, southeastern part of the United States. While creating a role play where students were to choose a husband/wife, as well as children, a student, Kelly, who self-identified as a lesbian, decided to work with another student who was female, instead of a male-identified student. Although at the time, I was inadvertently perpetuating heterosexuality as the norm by asking my students to assume specific gender and sexuality roles based upon my own reading of their identities, Kelly's momentary disruption of heterosexual norms through a refusal of the heterosexual identity was a surprise.

As a gay-identified, former Spanish teacher in a rural area of the Southeastern United States, I often had to navigate a public and private life in my teaching, which affected the conversations afforded in the classroom. Additionally, the veil

of teacher professionalism (Connell, 2015) was consistently a regulating aspect in my pedagogical practice. Although there were limits placed upon what was allowed in the classroom, I now often wonder what could have transpired differently had I chosen to engage with the disruption in "normal" that Kelly created through refusing to repeat heterosexual norms. Moreover, drawing upon the principles of queer pedagogy, which challenges normalcy (Britzman, 1995), and social justice, or "the sharing social power and benefits equitably" (Osborn, 2006, p. 26), what other possibilities could have been afforded to challenge heterosexual norms in the classroom?

### The Potential for World Language Education to be a Critical Space

World language education (WLE) introduces students to the linguistic and cultural aspects of the target language, while encouraging reflection on comparable and competing elements in the students' languages and cultures. While WLE fosters exploration of other cultures' norms, critical issues are often avoided in favor of sanitized topics (Kubota, Austin, & Saito-Abbott, 2003; Osborn, 2006), especially when considering sexual identities (see Nelson, 2006). Thus, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA) students' identities are often rendered invisible in the curriculum and materials (Camicia, 2016). Heteronormativity, or the societal structures that perpetuate heterosexuality as the norm (Atkinson & DePalma, 2008), is pervasive in schools, classrooms, materials, and pedagogy (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Paiz, 2015; Pascoe, 2007), therefore solidifying heterosexuality as "natural." Although WLE has the potential to disrupt "normal" practices and instead invoke "a critical and self-reflective discourse for both students and teachers" (De Vincenti, Giovanangeli, & Ward, 2007, p. 67), WLE instruction often centers on proficiency (Kramsch, 1986). As this is standard practice in WLE, there is a need for critical reflection on how language learning and pedagogy are saturated with dominant assumptions and binaries, such as male/female, white/black, hetero/homo, proficient/not proficient, which serve to exclude certain groups, such as LGBTQIA students. For world language (WL) educators committed to social justice and critical WLE, which questions dominant discourses (Hawkins & Norton, 2009), the question then becomes, how can WLE create a space for LGBTQIA students? Additionally, how can WLE offer a space for discussing critical issues often relegated to the margins in favor of sanitized topics that are more aligned with producing proficient students of the target language?

Queer theory and pedagogy, a resistance to normalcy (Britzman, 1995; Jagose, 1996), has offered a way of deconstructing normal pedagogical practice, with queer inquiry providing a more useful framework than one of inclusion in interrogating heteronormativity (Nelson, 1999). As language is embedded with historical and cultural meanings, WLE affords possibilities for problematizing dominant discourses that produce exclusion of marginalized identities. Disavowing standard proficiency-oriented practice and incorporating elements of queer theory and pedagogy into WLE can offer ways of questioning dominant assumptions and foster more equitable classroom spaces. Furthermore, anti-heteronormative education, which "requires undoing old discourses and creating new ones" (Atkinson & DePalma, 2008, p. 33) can serve to further social justice in the classroom. In this article, I discuss the application of queer theory, queer pedagogy, and queer inquiry, broadly in education and

language education. Also related to this discussion is how discourse, power/knowledge, and proficiency potentially limit critical classroom discussions in WLE. Then, excerpts of participant transcripts are presented from a study centered on LGBQ WL educators' experiences in the classroom, the intersections of their identities, and topics related to gender and sexuality in the classroom. Through these examples of educators who have used classroom moments and classroom spaces to question students' assumptions, like Osborn (2006), I hope to encourage educators to critically reflect on their pedagogy so as to allow for different possibilities in the classroom where all identities are valued, thereby fostering social justice in the classroom.

**Queer What? Queer Theory and Pedagogy**

The 1960's gay and lesbian liberation movements sought affirmation of an innate sexual identity. For liberationists, the institution of heterosexuality caused the oppression of women and homosexuals and was also the focus of "liberationists sexual theory and politics" (Seidman, 2009, p. 20). However, queer theory developed as a reaction to the gay and lesbian liberation movements, which were predicated on a stable or coherent gay and lesbian identity (Sullivan, 2003). Queer theory's approach to identities posits them as having no internal essence, but as being produced in and through discourse (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978/1990). The innate view of gender has been reconstituted as performative, or "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990, p. 45). For Butler, gender is performative in the sense that there is no essential essence to gender, but rather it is accomplished through a subject's repetition of prior norms, thus, making the subject culturally recognizable. Gender performativity, then, is not a mask that a subject can take off at will, but rather constitutes the subject.

As a resistance to normalcy, queer theory asks us to rethink our practices. As Britzman (1995) explained, "Queer Theory insists, using psychoanalytic method, that the relationship between knowledge and ignorance is neither oppositional nor binary. Rather, they mutually implicate each other, structuring and enforcing particular forms of knowledge and forms of ignorance" (p. 154). Thus, queer theory invites examination of the types of knowledge we are reifying. Furthermore, as Britzman (1995) indicated:

> Queer Theory offers methods of critiques to mark the repetitions of normalcy as a structure and as a pedagogy. Whether defining normalcy as an approximation of limits and mastery, or as renunciations, as the refusal of difference itself, Queer Theory insists on posing the production of normalization as a problem of culture and of thought. (pp. 153 – 154)

In education, pervasive heteronormativity structures what is considered "normal" around gender and sexuality; thus, those who are unaligned with the presumed "correct" roles are subject to policing of their behaviors (Pascoe, 2007; Warner, 1999). Furthermore, the curriculum is often explicitly heterosexual, which often limits classroom discussion (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). To challenge heteronormativity, Armstrong's (2008) notion of a queer pedagogy of conflicted practice, which avows

LGBTQIA identities and recognizes them as historically produced, "challenges us (teacher, students, and administrators) to embrace contradiction, to expand our knowledge of LGBT experiential, historical, and literary events, and to concurrently acknowledge the mechanisms that make such events moments of history, not of absolute truth" (p. 97). Similarly, Meyer (2007) encouraged educators to engage with a queer pedagogy to reflect on "(1) how they teach and reinforce gendered practices in schools, (2) how they support traditional notions of heterosexuality, and (3) how they present culturally specific information in the classroom" (p. 28). For WLE, then, queer theory and pedagogy can invoke critical thinking around the practices we employ that serve in the production and normalization of heterosexuality in our pedagogy that lead to silence around LGBTQIA identities in the classroom.

**Discourse and Power in the Classroom**

In WLE, students confront the role of discourses in constructing identities in addition to the "truths" produced through discourses. As Nelson (2009) described, language learning encompasses "grappling with myriad meanings; making one's way without traditional anchoring points; and developing a heightened awareness of the centrality of language, the cultural specificity of knowledge, and the ways in which language and knowledge are infused with relations of power" (p. 12). Considering the roles of discourse, knowledge, and power, it is important for WL educators to reflect on how classroom practice may reify norms within the students' culture and target language's culture. Since students are not homogenous, but possess multiple identities, regulated and (re)produced through discourses, we must constantly be reflective of how we can open a space for all identities and forms of knowledge. Returning to the example of Kelly, discourse and power produced the forms of knowledge surrounding Kelly's and the other students' normative and non-normative identities. However, queer theory/pedagogy suggests a questioning of knowledge and normalcy that can foster other possibilities related to classroom practice. Yet, we must also be mindful of Butler's (1995) assertion that "there is no possibility of standing *outside* of the discursive conventions by which 'we' are constituted, but only the possibility of reworking the very conventions by which we are enabled" (emphasis in original, p. 136). Therefore, self-reflection on implicit bias can help negate repetition of dominant discourses.

The institutional discourse of school specifies certain identity performances, which limits discussions related to identities. The discourse of teacher professionalism "demands a classroom presentation of sexual neutrality" (Connell, 2015, p. 9), especially for those identified as LGBTQIA. Moreover, discourse and power function in determining "truths", as Foucault (1980) described:

> In another way, we are also subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power. (p. 94)

Discourse, following Foucault (1978/1990), is productive, influencing our linguistic and embodied performances. Recognizing how "language (or discourse) is the tool through which representations and meanings are constructed and negotiated, and a primary means through which ideologies are transmitted" (Hawkins & Norton, 2009, p. 32) can help contest our role in the (re)production of norms. Furthermore, classroom practices that involve questioning dominant discourses that structure the textbooks and curriculum can help students to recognize how heterosexual and other norms have been reified through discourse and construed as "normal".

**Proficiency and Critical Pedagogy in Language Education**

In WLE, norms and standards permeate our pedagogical practice from the emphasis on proficiency to state and federal standards, such as the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The proficiency movement in language education started with the 1978 President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies to emphasize the importance of language learning in understanding other cultures and to highlight how language education had not met the standards set forth by the 1975 Helsinki Accords (O'Maggio, 1986). The subsequent emphasis on proficiency within the fields of second and foreign language education resulted from the realization that citizens' second language competence was not adequate. In the report, the commission detailed how high school students were unfamiliar with international matters (O'Maggio, 1986). Through the recommendations of the commission, such as developing proficiency standards to enforce second and foreign language education, implementation of proficiency standards began that still reverberate today. While proficiency serves to imbue students with the necessary structures of the target language to foster communication, it often underscores other salient issues in the classroom, specifically related to classroom identities. Now, this argument is not in favor of discontinuing proficiency in language education, but rather advocates an examination of how proficiency has become a dominant discourse in WLE that takes attention from issues related to students' identities and discourages critical classroom discussions.

While the emphasis on proficiency is important in WLE, Osborn (2006) reflected on the importance of language learning for understanding our global society as paramount to proficiency: "the fact that words embody concepts and culture in a way that does not always include a one-to-one correspondence with words in other languages is a lesson learned only in the study of a second language" (p. 9). Thus, recognition of the ways language carries particular forms of knowledge and is implicated in the production of knowledge and culture is something that one learns through the study of languages. Returning to the classroom scene with Kelly, examining with students how the word "family" varies across cultures could have afforded different possibilities and conversations related to the normative structure of family that constitutes students' cultures. As WL educators, we are constantly making connections among vocabulary in the target and students' languages. By attending to the ways in which cultural norms vary, we can encourage our students to critically reflect upon norms that have produced their knowledge about identities. Through such an exploration, WLE can foster democracy and social justice in the classroom by offering other ways of thinking and being in the world. Concomitantly, opening the space for discussions of family by giving students opportunities to take on non-normative

roles and create their own versions of family, like Kelly did, can serve to validate all students' identities.

Although proficiency is a relevant aspect of WLE pedagogy, we must not forget the influence and importance of critical pedagogy. Discussing the role of curriculum, Pennycook (2010) remarked how the curriculum is not comprised of "timeless truths and knowledge but rather very particular ways of understanding the world" (p. 130). Through this understanding of the curriculum, "one can start to develop a critical form of pedagogy that addresses the marginalizations and exclusions of schooling by encouraging students to develop their own voice (Pennycook, 2010, p. 130). For Pennycook, voice is not simply the student's actual ability to speak, but rather a "broader understanding of developing the possibilities to articulate alternative realities" (p. 130). Returning to discourse and power, then, how do they function in the world language classroom to differentiate what is acceptable or not in relation to gender and sexuality? As Foucault (1980) reminds us, "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (p. 52); therefore, power is implicated in the production of knowledge and knowledge in power. Applying Foucault's concepts of discourse and power, as educators, we must be mindful of the ways in which they are productive and create "truths" in relation to topics, such as identities. In the classroom, power/knowledge and discourse function to make those identities that align with the norm recognizable, while erasing others, such as LGBTQIA identities. In the excerpt with Kelly, discourse and power functioned to create "truths" regarding which identities can be part of the classroom discussions and role plays. Therefore, as educators, reflecting on the role that discourse and power/knowledge play in specifying certain forms of knowledge as "truth" can have important implications in understanding how certain identities are privileged and become the "norm" over others. For WLE, then, educators' critical self-reflection is necessary as "it provides a window on the relationship between the individual and the social world, highlighting both constraints and possibilities for social change" (Hawkins & Norton, 2009, p. 34).

**Deconstructing Sexual Identities in Language Education**

Recently, language education has started to recognize the importance of including sexual identities in the classroom (Nelson, 2012). One of the first studies in language education to engage with sexual identities was Nelson's (1999) observation of an adult Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) class, in which the classroom discussion centered on a worksheet scenario of "two women walking arm in arm" (p. 371). Instead of advocating for the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the classroom, Nelson instead proposed how a queer inquiry framework predicated on queer theory and classroom inquiry would be more beneficial. Like Britzman (1995) suggested, pedagogies of inclusion only produce exclusion, to which we must ask who is included and who is not. Through introducing authentic images of gays and lesbians, we must be critically reflective of who and what is being portrayed in relation to race, gender, and class. Therefore, for Nelson, queer inquiry, which questions all identities and performances, is suggested as a way of examining the ways in which dominant discourses have created what has been incorporated as "normal" or "truth" in relation to sexual and gender identities.

Curran (2006) also addressed heteronormativity in the language classroom through deconstructing his students' normative questions about sexuality. In the discussion, Curran utilized the following questions in an attempt to deconstruct the hetero/homo binary:

- When did you know you were gay?
- Are gays born that way or is it because of the environment?
- What problems do gays face? How many people are gay or lesbian?
- Do gay men want to have children? (p. 88).

Although Curran reflects that this attempt failed, the questions are reframed using Nelson's (1999) queer inquiry to produce the following:

- What leads people to think that they're straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual?
- What makes people feel comfortable and confident about their sexuality, and what makes people feel uncomfortable or uncertain about this?
- What might make people question or re-think their sexuality?
- What makes you feel certain that someone is straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and what would make you feel unsure? (Curran, 2006, p. 93)

Of importance in Curran's reflection is the emphasis on how sexual identities are produced and become normalized through discourse. Indeed, Curran emphasizes the importance of deconstruction in the classroom as way of not bringing forth an inclusionary model, but rather as a way to encourage students to challenge their often "taken for granted assumptions about sexuality" (p. 92). As Sullivan (2003) stated, deconstructive analysis serves to "highlight the inherent instability of the terms, as well as enabling an analysis of the culturally and historically specific ways in which the terms and the relation between them have developed, and the effects they have produced" (p. 51). Thus, deconstruction is not a rejection, but an opening up that allows for one to get out of the structure to create a new space where something different can be thought.

Another example of introducing sexual identity in the language classroom is O'Mochain's (2006) work, which used local, queer narratives from the community to invoke discussion related to gender and sexuality in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Japan. In this work, O'Mochain advocated for the use of narratives for providing a way in which to engage in language teaching and learning about issues related to identity, gender, and sexuality. Meanwhile, in the university world language classroom, De Vincenti et al. (2007) sought to understand how queer theory could be applied in the teaching of French, Italian, and Japanese classrooms. According to De Vincenti et al., social practice and language are conjoined, thereby influencing one another. Thus, the implications for WL educators suggest that we hold the key to either reinforcing dominant views or challenging them in our practice.

**Queer Teachers' Engagement with Queer Topics**

As WLE offers the possibility to problematize students' normative assumptions, I turned to LGBTQIA-identified WL teachers to understand their experiences in the classroom and their engagement with topics related to gender and sexuality. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study, with teachers being recruited

through two world language teaching listservs. After contacting participants who responded to the initial and follow-up recruitment emails, five LGBTQIA teachers participated, with four teaching Spanish and one teaching German. A ten question semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) was used that centered on the teachers' classroom experiences, school climate for LGBTQIA students and educators, and classroom discussions related to gender and sexuality. For the purposes of this article, I chose to focus on excerpts from three participants, Brian, Diana, and Carmen, due to their explicit mention of instances where they challenged normative classroom assumptions. The three teachers represent a wide range of teaching experience, with Carmen who had taught three years at the time of the study, to Diana who had 22 years' experience. While some of the subsequent excerpts may not reflect a queering of the pedagogy, these examples are provided to encourage WL teachers to disrupt their normal, proficiency-related practice, and instead, work to foster a critical language education that deconstructs students' normative assumptions in the classroom.

*What If Your Son Were Gay?*

The first excerpt, from Brian, a Spanish teacher of five years, discussed how the pejorative term "fag" surfaced in the classroom:

> One day, this one freshman walked in who wasn't even in my class. His voice hasn't changed and the students began to make fun of him. They called him a fag and I addressed it. Then, we ended up having an hour long conversation about being gay. We asked, "Is it a choice? Is it this?" But, the kids were really having the conversation. I was stoking it, but a lot of the girls said, "Well, what if your son was gay?" A lot of the boys said they would just rather not know or would beat him – he wouldn't be gay. There were a lot of misconceptions in the room about where does one's sexual identity come from. I asked provocative questions like, "Okay, so you're straight. When did you choose to be straight? Do you remember the day that you came out as straight?" Those kinds of questions. I think they wanted to have that conversation. And I said to them, "Okay, well, we're done. We need to move on. We need to get back to the lesson". The students then said, "No, no, no, no. We want to keep talking about this." So, they talked about it probably for an hour and a half. (Brian – Spanish teacher)

In the excerpt above, Brian chose not to dismiss conversations related to sexuality and sexual identity, but rather encouraged the conversation. The questioning reflected in the transcript excerpt reveals how Brian was attempting to get the students to think about sexual identities, mirroring Curran's (2006) work that engaged students' normative questions surrounding gays and lesbians. Similar to Curran's work, the questioning techniques used by Brian reflect a more essentialized view of sexuality, or rather sexuality as something that one is born with, standing in contrast to queer theory's notion of sexuality as discursively produced (Foucault, 1978/1990). In connecting this with the reframing of the students' questions through a queer pedagogical approach, instead of essentializing sexuality, Brian could have provided inquiry that problematized all sexual identities, following in the line of Nelson (1999).

In WLE, keeping students in the target language is part of our practice. In this

excerpt, Brian's discussion with his students moved from Spanish into English to include a discussion on what could be perceived as a controversial issue for some students. Here, Brian chose to engage in a moment that not only invoked dialogue about sexual identities, but encouraged other forms of knowledge that possibly challenged students' heteronormative assumptions. However, Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), which emphasizes comprehensible input with co-creation of stories between the teacher and students, can be a plausible option for WL educators who want to maintain conversations in the target language, yet include discussions related to critical issues such as sexual identities. Thus, critical reflection on the co-created stories, as well as the implicit bias of the teacher, need to be taken into account when using this approach.

*"Chicken Drama" as a Teachable Moment*

In the excerpt below, Diana, a German teacher for 22 years, described how a discussion related to the chief operating officer of Chick-fil-A, Dan T. Cathy, and the donation of funds from Chick-fil-A to organizations against marriage equality appeared in the classroom conversation:

> *When the Chick-fil-A drama was going on, my husband and I were in the New York Times and on Reddit and the kids saw our picture. They asked what our problem was with that. So, I pulled up the picture and put it on the Promethean board and we talked. And luckily, again, I was in the Level 4, the really high levels of that school, so we were able to speak in German about it. I don't know if I would have done that if I had been in German 1, 2, or even 3. Well, most of the kids are so hung up on that stupid chicken anyway. They think it's so delicious that they couldn't see how that would affect them at all. But they got the point. They think everybody has the right to do what they want and that it also can be closed for church on Sunday. I mean, they did listen and people did talk, because that's part of our curriculum, which is having those kinds of discussions. And if I had been more prepared, I would have made that a Socratic seminar topic. But, I never thought that somebody would just bring it up. You know, those teachable moment kind of things. And I didn't think putting it off a few days was worth it because it was in the moment. The kids really wanted to talk about it. It's always good when the kids can kind of see a little personal side of you and relate to you and see that you're human and you have things that you believe in as well. (Diana – German teacher).*

Similarly to Brian, Diana chose to engage with a potentially controversial topic instead of avoiding, and the discussion took place in the target language. However, as mentioned by Diana, she was unsure of whether the conversation would have taken place in the lower levels due to the inability of the students to produce and understand in the target language. The emphasis on the students' ability to engage with the conversation in the target language is predicated on the students' proficiency, thus, the discourse of proficiency appears in Diana's reflection. Although dominant discourses can potentially limit classroom discussions, Diana instead chose to engage with this topic to allow different forms of knowledge to be present.

While discourse and power/knowledge structure what is permissible in classroom conversations, Diana elected to challenge classroom heteronormativity. In Diana's narrative, heteronormative discourse was prevalent in students' assumptions surrounding those who are not heterosexual. Instead of passively accepting what the students said in regard to the controversy, Diana disrupted her normal teaching practice to discuss a topic related to sexual identities. Although the discussions might not have challenged all normative assumptions surrounding sexual identities, they provided a space to engage critically with an issue that fulfilled the curriculum requirements and was relevant to the students' lives.

*Are You Cool with Reading About This?*

In this final excerpt, Carmen, a Spanish teacher for three years who utilizes TPRS, reflects upon the reactions of students regarding the Day of Silence, which is a day in April to spread awareness of LGBTQIA harassment and bullying and what occurred within the classroom discourse:

> *In some of the stories that we do, there might be two characters that go out. I'll introduce the character and then say, "Oh, they have a date. With whom?" And so then, they might come up with a character of the same gender. And I'm like, "Okay, so he's going out with him. All right, what is his name?" I just go with it. Sometimes, there could be some laughter and kids would have to explain the story to each other. Actually, there was a story I did where a kid had two fathers because I remember the kids negotiating that. Most of them picked it up right away. I heard a couple of kids explaining, "No, he has two fathers… you know, two fathers… like two gay fathers." So, they were able to help each other figure that out. Sometimes, there's some giggling about it and also some kids are really used to it. Then, there are some that get a little confused, but then go with it. But, on the Day of Silence, we did a reading about it in class, and I had a student read aloud. And I just checked in with him. I said, "Are you cool with reading about this?" And he was like, "Oh, absolutely." So he kind of led the reading. And it was just in novice language talking about what the Day of Silence was about and why it existed. And so I didn't make a big deal about it. I just said here's our reading for today. Let's do the reading and it just happened to be about LGBTQ issues and the Day of Silence. That was our warm up reading for the day. (Carmen – Spanish teacher)*

In Carmen's classroom, heteronormativity is again apparent, but in subtle ways. Carmen describes the "giggling" of students surrounding the introduction of two same-sex characters, which can possibly serve as a way of mitigating the uncomfortable feelings that the students have in regard to the story. In this instance, the normalization of homosexuality, which can be beneficial to disrupting the norm of heterosexuality, can also be problematic. Since homosexuality is placed upon the wrong side of the binary, then, what are the possibilities that Carmen could have enacted in order to help students deconstruct their own normative assumptions? Applying the approach of deconstruction from queer theory/pedagogy can serve to question the dichotomous opposition of heterosexuality/homosexuality and reveal

how these terms and subsequent identities came to be, thus invoking critical reflection on students' identities.

The Day of Silence reading, while providing knowledge on marginalized sexual identities, also could have been used to question how heterosexuality has been positioned as "normal." With such a document, a queer approach might ask how all sexual identities are constructed. Although two gay male characters were utilized in this story and could be considered transgressive, a queer theory/pedagogical approach might also question what images or stories are included and excluded. Recognizing how heterosexuality is privileged as the norm through discourse and power/knowledge and changing one's questioning techniques, like Curran (2006), are two potential ways to allow for other forms of knowledge that may not have existed in Carmen's classroom practice. Thus, Carmen's use of gay characters, as well as the reading of the Day of Silence, provided a space for LGBTQIA students to see and hear themselves in the curriculum, thereby disrupting the exclusion often experienced by LGBTQIA students. Furthermore, Carmen's use of the target language to discuss the Day of Silence provides an example of how WLE can indeed engage with topics of sexual identities using novice language.

**Why Challenge Heteronormativity? Creating a Space for All Students**

In the three excerpts, heteronormativity was present in the teachers' reflections of their classroom experiences, with each choosing to forego standard WL practice related to proficiency in order to challenge heteronormativity. During the interviews, all three teachers emphasized the precarious situations they faced in confronting topics related to gender and sexual identities in the classroom as they could potentially "out" themselves. Thus, the examples provided by these teachers are some of the moments when their identities and heteronormativity intersected, with each choosing to challenge the norm. While some teachers, such as Diana and Carmen, were able to engage with the topics in the target language, Brian chose to invoke a discussion in English.

Whereas the teachers' narratives do not present information related to daily practice, the narratives can provide a different way of thinking about the role of identities as related to classroom practice. As WL educators, we work to produce students who are linguistically and culturally competent in the target language, but we must also remember our implicit bias, since our own identities are inherently produced in and through discourse (Foucault, 1978/1990). As Nelson (2009) suggested, "there is a need to consider how classroom practices encourage or discourage certain aspects of domains of identity" (p. 13). Consistent reflection on our practice and the roles of discourse and power in influencing our interpretations of the world can serve to remind us to challenge both our students' implicit bias, as well as our own, as these biases serve to perpetuate inequality for students of non-normative identities. Thus, in the classroom scene with Kelly, challenging my own implicit assumptions surrounding students' identities could have provided a disruption to the heteronormative classroom context.

In reflecting upon classroom practice, we might think about how queer theory and pedagogy can allow for different possibilities in our classrooms. As Meyer (2007) discussed, "liberatory pedagogy and queer pedagogy are mutually reinforcing phi-

losophies that share a radical vision of education as the path to achieving a truly equitable and just society" (p. 25). Since both liberatory and queer pedagogy are tools that can promote social justice, how can we queer our WLE pedagogy? Meyer further elaborates on how bridging liberatory and queer pedagogies enables "educators to explore traditionally silenced discourses and create spaces for students to examine and challenge the hierarchy of binary identities that is created and supported by schools, such as jock-nerd, sciences-arts, male-female, white-black, rich-poor, and gay-straight" (p. 27). Thus, critically reflecting upon how these binaries have come to be normalized and reified within our educational system and pedagogy can serve to disrupt dominant discourses that are privileged within society. Furthermore, as our students learn vocabulary that is saturated with oppositions, taking the time to question students' assumptions, as well as our own, regarding those binaries, can foster WL practice that is focused not only on proficiency, but critical issues as well.

As WLE has the potential to invoke students' critical thinking around issues related to sexual identities, integrating this into our pedagogy necessitates an interrogation of the particular forms of knowledge that influence our thinking and practice. Thus, an examination of our attitudes towards discussions related to sexual identities, homophobia, and LGBTQIA identities needs to be omnipresent. Nelson's (2009) work with sexual identities in TESOL found that "these attitudes include the view that sexual identity has nothing to do with teaching English or with learning it, that ESL students would find discussing gay people unfamiliar and too difficult, and that only gay people can address gay issues" (p. 16). Like TESOL, WLE also has the potential to engage with such topics, from the novice classroom to the advanced. As WL educators, attending to identities in one's practice is important so not to produce exclusion. As Nelson (2009) mentioned, "if questions of identity are overlooked or trivialized in the classroom, then historically inequitable patterns may be reinforced, even inadvertently" (p. 13). Like the examples provided from my classroom scene, as well as the teachers' narratives, introducing topics related to heteronormativity and sexual identities can happen within the minutiae of classroom discussions. Therefore, challenging students' implicit bias in classroom conversations, not labelling the students with the dominant heterosexual identity, and creating classroom activities that encourage discussion related to sexual identities can be ways of challenging the heteronormative order of the classroom.

Queer inquiry, as proposed by Nelson (1999), serves to encourage questioning around the formation of sexual identities within language teaching. As Nelson discussed, "looking at how sexual identities are done or accomplished encourages participants to demystify potentially unfamiliar aspects of the target language and culture, but without reductively constructing the culture as homogeneous or unchanging" (p. 379). Through questioning how sexual identities have come to be assumed within society, WLE has the potential to encourage students to critically reflect on the ways in which dominant discourses have influenced their "truths". When specifically looking at WLE and the heteronormative context regarding questioning practices, Liddicoat (2009) noted how "the language classroom presents a potential conflict for the gay or lesbian student in that it combines a heteronormatively constructed context with questions which makes self-disclosure a relevant activity" (p. 192). Furthermore, Liddicoat described how "the language classroom, through the

construction of the questions it asks, can lead to coming out as gay or lesbian as a possible response to personal-life-directed questioning practices—questions about various relationships, activities, and ideals" (p. 192). Through an examination of questioning practices in WLE discourse, Liddicoat found that the techniques employed by WL educators invoked the following four strategies in relation to gay and lesbian students' identities: passing, covering, being implicitly out, and affirming identity. While we might not assume that we position our students as either heterosexual or homosexual, our questioning techniques may lead to the four trajectories discussed by Liddicoat. Therefore, recognizing the heteronormative context prevalent in our classrooms and using questioning techniques that do not assume a specific sexual identity can serve to encourage the proliferation of a classroom space that values all identities.

## Conclusion

Through recognizing the role and production of heteronormativity, attending to our questioning techniques and classroom practices, revisiting our lessons, and using spontaneous moments related to norms, we can help create spaces for all students. As WLE introduces students to other languages and cultures, it is necessary to reflect constantly upon how dominant discourses structure our interactions and pedagogy. Thus, Kubota and Miller's (2017) assertion regarding criticality in language studies suggests how "deeper analysis of power, inequalities, domination, and resistance is necessary. Furthermore, this analysis should incorporate praxis with hyper self-reflexivity and result-oriented action" (p. 20). Through critical awareness of the way in which power/knowledge function in the classroom, we can create space for all students' identities, including those traditionally excluded from the school environment. Furthermore, queering our pedagogy and challenging the various dominant discourses and dichotomous oppositions producing our thinking and influencing our practice can be a way of fostering a more democratic and socially just environment for our students. If we refuse to be reflective of the relations of power/knowledge in the classroom, we run the risk of possibly reifying norms that constrain us, as well as our students. Although queering the pedagogy of our world language classrooms may not always produce linguistic competence in the case of beginning students, it can allow for proliferating different ways of thinking and being, challenging traditional power/knowledge relations, and fostering a more equitable space for all.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**Interview Protocol**

1. What is your overall experience with language teaching?
2. How are LGBTQ teachers perceived in your school and district?
3. When, if at all, has your sexual orientation played a part in your role as a World Language Educator?
4. Have you ever felt that you needed or wanted to hide your sexuality?
5. What approaches to language teaching have informed your practice?
6. Describe how you teach aspects of grammar.
7. Describe how you teach vocabulary.
8. Describe how you teach culture.
9. When, if at all, have discussions regarding sexuality arisen in your classroom?
10. When, if at all, have discussions regarding gender arisen in your classroom?