A QUEER DIVERSITY:

TEACHING DIFFERENCE AS INTERRUPTING INTERSECTIONS

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Teaching diversity and education brings some queer challenges. This paper describes a postgraduate course that investigated intersecting differences around gender, sexualities, culture, and disabilities in education, framed by poststructural and queer theoretical questions. As course coordinator, I reflect on its strategies, strengths, and ongoing problems in its first two years. Students in the course were mostly experienced teachers, community educators, special education advisers, or administrators doing further study. The course was framed in a local context for Aotearoa New Zealand, but set within wider international debates around rights issues.

I begin with brief comments on the origins of the course, including initial controversy regarding its title, *Difference and Diversity in Education: Frameworks*. This is followed by brief discussion of the frameworks used to explore intersections among the diverse issues and their implications both for understanding discrimination and oppression and for hearing and appreciating differences. In order to give fair hearing to competing claims between categories of difference, the course focused on unsettling a range of dualisms, making links between political strategies in different arenas. I also reflect here on pedagogical practices that worked well within the curriculum framed. Comments from a small sample of student responses to an electronic mail questionnaire about the course are also included. Finally, I question whether

the frameworks may have unintentionally reified certain differences, limiting an expansion of queerly creative multiplicity.

Framing a Course with Queer Diversity

The framework for the course owed a considerable debt to several New Zealand queer writers. Annamarie Jagose (1996) describes a queer turn towards poststructural questioning of firmly boundaried sexual identity positions within a larger context of shifts in feminist and post-colonial theory and practice. Her work provided a crucial introduction to notions of heterosexuality as normative, particularly from the perspective of Foucault's (1980a) emphasis on power/knowledge and Butler's (1993) work on performativity in language. The course also emphasized subjectivities formed by particular intersections of social positioning and experiences of privilege and oppression. This was considered in the local context by focusing on activist work in schools, especially noting work of Kathleen Quinlivan and Shane Town (e.g. 1999). Our education programme also built upon an undergraduate women's studies course titled, *Queer Sexualities, Histories and Politics* (cf. Laurie, 2001).

The *Difference and Diversity* course was grounded in a specific national context, from the viewpoint of a small Pacific country with its own historical and cultural location in the terrain of late twentieth-century contestations around race, ethnicities, and indigenous rights. The course acknowledged the prime political importance of the rights of indigenous Maori in the struggle for greater acknowledgement of their loss of land, language, and space to express their unique cultural worldview since the (highly contested) nation-creating Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Just as Patricia Hill Collins (e.g. 2000) argued that experiences of African American women be put at the centre of understanding of oppression in North America, indigenous writers such as Johnson and Pihama (1995) have asked what would it mean to make the experience of Maori women central to our views of the world. Johnson and Pihama

argue that Maori women are always other to the dominant eurocentric and androcentric norms, carrying the brunt of colonization as invisible workers or sexualized exotics. They challenged the essentializing of race, favouring instead an emphasis on diverse intersections of culture, class, gender, and sexualities.

African American feminist writers provided crucial theoretical grounding for the course. Maori women in classes have expressed feelings of solidarity with writers such as bell hooks (e.g. 1990, 1994). Razack's (1998) work was particularly helpful in taking Walkerdine's (e.g. 1985) writings on classed, gendered subjectivities further by considering the logocentric gaze that produces stock narratives for a woman's life based on her gender, sexuality, race, class, and disability. I did not see my job as course coordinator as one of presenting some internationally normative view of received wisdom on particular theoretical issues, but rather as one of attempting to create, with students, a locally grounded framework that acknowledged influential international writing while foregrounding historically situated, local indigenous perspectives.

Coverage of many intersecting differences in one course was innovative, since most textbooks present separate identity groups sequentially (e.g. Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997; Corson, 1998). The addition of both disability and sexuality perspectives within education also had few precedents, judging from recent comments about the uneasy addition of disability perspectives to feminist work on difference (e.g. Linton, 1998).

While I could see the benefit of treating each area of difference separately, with the full attention its literature and politics deserved, there is the potential danger that such a fragmented approach would leave little room for the development of the complex interactions and commonalities that might open new spaces for the diverse range of students to claim and address their own located experiences of privilege and oppression. Further, the order of topics addressed could reinforce the idea of hierarchies of oppression, for example by reiterating the

focus on indigenous politics – with a consequent silencing of, for example, feminist, gay, lesbian, and disabled perspectives within indigenous communities. Indeed, students often expressed to me their view that some issues were more worthy of attention than others. My solution was to draw on that often-made point of 1980s debates about racism and heterosexism in the feminist movement: to put the intertwining of gender/culture/sexuality together at the centre of the course from the start, along with disability perspectives.

In order to juxtapose various differences, the course curriculum was designed around the unsettling of several dualisms. The centring on intersections seemed to offer increased opportunities for "transversal dialogue" (Yuval-Davis, 1997), the possibility of being firmly grounded in one's own place in culture and community while being able to empathize and to engage in dialogue with those from different groups that have had similar experiences. The choice of course title was an initial attempt to signal these concerns in a difficult political climate.

What's in a Title? From Queer to Diversity

The problematic theoretical questions that the course raised were first signalled by the difficulties encountered in choosing its title. A pragmatic concern was to find a name that would be accepted by academic staff as appropriate for one of the array of compulsory courses within the Master of Education degree. Initially, the course emerged through the combination of two previously separate elective courses: a *Gender and Education* course and a *Queer Pedagogies* course. The first question faced by the four course planners was whether to include the word queer in the title or to opt for an alternative to make the course more likely to get approval.

A strategic move was made to emphasize the word *diversity* in the course title to give the course wider appeal at a difficult time in the internal politics at our university. The term

diversity has a chequered history. In education, it has tended to refer to diversity of people or people differing on an identity dimension either expressed by the people themselves or commonly used in social categorization by others. There are also links with the literature on diversity developed in business and management since the 1970s, where discussions about diversity tend to be framed rather problematically in terms of "managing" or "dealing with diversity" (to quote two popular book titles) as ways to decrease conflict and increase workplace productivity (see Brown, Snedeker, & Sykes, 1997).

Some staff favoured the word *difference* to present more clearly a focus on rupture rather than similarity and to make connections with identity politics. The term difference can claim many genealogical lines. The course content acknowledged historical debates about the creation, maintenance and policing of difference in the critical work of scholars in the key areas of difference of interest, from special education (see Armstrong, 2003), international approaches to multicultural education (e.g. Banks & Banks, 2001), anti-racist feminist theory (e.g. Collins, 2000), and sexuality in education (e.g. Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Final consensus was reached by including both words in the title, smoothing the course's path to acceptance, despite a conservative political context that saw the *Queer Pedagogies* course coordinator lose his job in a wider restructuring process.

In hindsight, there were a number of downsides to the strategy of using the word diversity in the title. Though the course was greeted with enthusiasm by education staff seldom before known for concurring views, it seemed later that each staff member had a different understanding of the term diversity, lessening the political import of the title. Perhaps an educational opportunity was lost; some staff might have come to a better understanding of the multiple, fluid aspects of queerness and of the tricky issue of what differences count (cf. Burbules & Rice, 1991; see also Johnson & Pihama, 1995) had there been more discussion about retaining the word queer.

Given political realities regarding viable course enrolments, it was important to position the course as complementing rather than competing directly with courses in indigenous Maori or Pasifika (immigrant Pacific Islands) education. There had earlier been discussion about the need for a course in indigenous women's issues, since our cultural courses seldom encompassed Maori or Pasifika feminist concerns. This perceived gap in our course offerings provided a space for the *Difference and Diversity* course. However, given the importance of titles in students' choices, the polymorphous malleability of the word diversity in the title meant that students entered the course with a huge range of expectations about its content that could not be fulfilled. This fluidity or vagueness in the title of the course had ongoing implications for the framing of its curriculum.

<center>Investigating Marked Dualisms as Sites of Power</center>

The intersecting differences were viewed as dualisms (e.g. black/white, male/female) with inherent power contrasts. Each member of a dual pairing can be viewed as recreating a dominant/minority hierarchy that privileges the former through complex, pervasive social practices (see Cixous & Clement, 1986). Links were made to linguistic marking, where the culturally dominant position is usually unmarked by further qualifiers (e.g. "the man went shopping"), with the un-usualness of the minority group marked by additional adjectives (e.g. "the Maori man went shopping")[1].

Key dualisms from each focal area of difference were used to point to common operations of power, within a socio-historical and political context. For example, Simone de Beauvoir's (1953) critique of gender structures - that allow space for woman only as marginalised other to man - was juxtaposed with Frantz Fanon's (1968) parallel exposure of the abjection of Black peoples in a world order premised on the superiority of whiteness. The

work of these writers, from a half-century earlier, led clearly into discussion of the

importance of the civil rights movements of the 1960s. By examining some of the historical

political work of various groups towards identifying and challenging discrimination and

lobbying for equal rights, it was possible to find common links between the struggles of

women, lesbians and gays, indigenous Maori, and those claiming an identity as disabled.

<div align="center">Justifying which Differences Count</div>

One interesting effect of having a title incorporating the word diversity is that there

can be quite a range of students - all with strongly held views and particular identity politics -

who might assume that such a course is their home. This can be both pleasure and danger. In

both years that the course was run, many students entered the course expecting that we would

focus most on cultural issues, given the important of these issues in other established

programs. Most students in class (and in the questionnaires discussed below) considered

culture/ethnicity to be the most important diversity issue, followed by the issue of disability.

To widen our analysis, I concentrated on anomalies such as the omission of gender from

abstracted discussions about racist practices or to less well known feminist critiques in

disability studies. It was, however, more difficult to portray issues of sexual orientation as

just as valid for consideration as the issues of racism, sexism, or disability.

To give a justification for the focus on particular issues of difference in the course, I

relied on New Zealand's 1993 Human Rights Act as a foundational document. This act

outlaws discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual preference, ethnicity and disability, as well

as age, marital status, and religion. This reference to legislation gave room for more

openness, while giving legal justification for exclusion of some groups (e.g. men who have

sexual relations with children under 16). However, I was wary of the tentativeness of such

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[1] This approach can be expanded with reference to the work of Derrida, 1978, on the supplement in its position

cultural and historical locatedness for this justification. It could leave open the argument that inclusion of sexuality as a rights issue is only a recent historical change, suggesting the possibility that some categories considered abject today might be acceptable in future. This view was in fact voiced in one class, leading to a reassertion of a majority perspective in the class (against the sexual exploitation of children). There was a dominant view in each class that concurred with contemporary legislation.

The issue of "what differences count" is a central one for courses such as this (cf. Johnson & Pihama, 1995). Openness to multiple perspectives is for me a crucial part of a queer ethic in the collaborative construction of knowledge. Making the legal justification transparent and alluding reflexively to the historical context for the delineation of difference helped to keep the foundations for the course open to discussion and challenge. Students sometimes used this openness to address additional issues of difference in assignments. For example, Samoan women have used the opportunity to write about the importance of virginity and spirituality in Christian fa'aSamoa (current Samoan culture and its historical traditions). Men from eastern Asian countries have spent time exploring issues for transgendered people in education.

This use of our human rights legislation as an arbiter of struggles that count did provide a liberal, social justice standpoint (cf. Harding, 1993) for the course at odds with the more fluid, contingent poststructurally queer perspective that was offered through the theoretical readings. I tried to acknowledge this tension in class by acknowledging the historical changes in views of difference and oppression while suggesting that education has legal obligations. There was also my authority as course coordinator and assessor that gave me space to push students to consider sexuality issues, albeit from a variety of cultural viewpoints. My goal was not to indoctrinate students to a particular viewpoint, but to get

as less than the centre or origin, while holding inevitable resonances of its other.

students to engage with sexuality and education issues as one of the topics of the course that they might consider from a range of differing perspectives depending on their own social locations.

Despite the openness of much of our discussion, a group of students in each course was avoidant if not hostile to the discussion of sexualities in the course. The focus on intersections was used from the start to deal with this issue. Gender was introduced from the beginning as part of a "sex/gender couple" (see Wittig, 1992). The linking of gender and gay/straight dualisms helped to introduce the key concept of heteronormativity (e.g. Warner, 1993), the taken for granted idea that the norm of human relating, family creation, and sexual expression is a heterosexual pairing of two halves: feminine women and masculine men. This also made it easier to introduce Foucault's (1980b) perspectives on sexuality as normative social construction and to downplay tendencies to view sexuality as a biological given.

There were still a number of students who avoided any mention of sexuality in their assignments, even when the requirements stated that all four major issues were to be discussed, however briefly. After reading the first assignments from one group, I felt quite upset about this omission and decided to discuss it with students. I framed the issue in terms of my personal viewpoint rather than the assessment criteria and students' loss of a few marks for their omission. In class, I spoke of my surprise at the gaps in some assignments and made an unplanned disclosure that the omissions had made me feel like "some kind of crackpot going on about an issue other people don't think is important". This led to some comments from students about the importance of sexuality issues as a source of dominant oppression. What was very interesting for me was to find later that several "sexuality-avoidant" students decided to focus much more explicitly on these issues (including non-normative heterosexuality) in the final large assignment, a self-chosen research project. It was as though some felt they had been given permission to tackle an issue in which they were

interested but hesitant to explore. Though it could be argued that these students were simply trying to please the teacher, there was, in my view, a depth of feeling and disclosure that went far beyond the course requirements.

Identity or Difference? Questioning Essentialism

The issue of identity politics is a fraught one, and many students who enrolled in these classes had a strong identification with a singular focus minority group. In order to create a course that looked in some complexity at a range of differences, and hence of possible political identities, materials used in the course downplayed identity politics associated with particular groups (i.e., men, lesbians, deaf). This was introduced with early discussion of the difficulties involved in identity essentialism (e.g. Fuss, 1989). This was quite a tricky move, and one about which some students, particularly those with strong ethnic identifications, expressed strong scepticism.

A theoretical move that helped to allow more fluidity across potentially divisive categories of firmly demarcated difference was Hill's (2000, p. 228) reference to a "matrix of domination" as the "social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop and are contained". This move grounds particular intersections of difference in their historical and political specificity. It does, however, rely firmly on socially constructed categories of identity, in contrast to the more fluid and contingent identity positionings given attention in this course.

The main controversy that emerged in our discussions of essentialism was that any critique undercuts the authority of the newly speaking subject from a minority group. Poststructural critique is viewed as leaving no room for the expression of strongly felt, embodied oppression. Students were directed to debates from a range of feminist, lesbian, Maori, and disability critics in the literature on this issue. I tried to downplay single issue

identity politics in the context of the course, but without taking the position of the teacher

deconstructing the voice of marginalised people who had just discovered theirs. A clear space

was made in the course for the contingent validity of taking an essential position when

making a strategic move in particular socio-political contexts (cf. Fuss's, 1998, discussion of

"strategic essentialism"). At the same time, I signalled that in this course the certainties of

any clearly stated position would be open to scrutiny from different perspectives in the group.

The framing of the course around intersections rather than categories of difference eased the

tensions between identity groups and opened spaces for a range of exclusions to be voiced.

Intersections that Unsettle Dualisms

The course focused on intersections and anomalies that unsettle the normative

dominant /marginal positions in dualisms such as black/white, girl/boy, gay/straight,

abled/disabled. Converging theoretical issues across areas of difference were emphasised,

with reading lists to allow interested students to follow up particular passions in more detail,

in the context of retaining an awareness of intersecting differences.

To create a device that would allow each category of difference to be discussed in

similar ways, despite differing political and philosophical content, I used Bronwyn Davies'

(1989; see also Moi, 1985) interpretation of Julia Kristeva's sequence of historical changes in

women's emancipatory struggles. This trajectory can be applied to various groups. The

sequence begins with the change from valuing the dominant (e.g. traditional masculine) term

of the dualism to a counter-valuing of the minority term (e.g. woman-centred views) to a

deconstruction of the dualism with the creation of a third term that suggests possibilities

beyond these (e.g. questioning gendered constructions of scientific knowledges). The very

complexity of identity categories is thus used to trouble certainties around the prioritizing of

particular claims.

It was important to point to the many intersections between groups in the historical trajectories of their struggles for expanded rights. During the 1970s and 1980s, the women's movement in Aotearoa fielded strong challenges from Maori women and lesbians about the whiteness and assumed heterosexuality of feminist issues. At the same time, the work towards indigenous rights by Maori was given significant impetus from Maori feminists (e.g. Awatere, 1984). The struggle for indigenous rights could also be seen in the context of international work on anti-racism and post-colonial critiques of eurocentrism (e.g. Said, 1978).

On the other hand, disability politics probably followed a somewhat different path, given the huge range of issues covered. Deaf people do not necessarily share the same disability perspective as those with HIV positive status, for example, though there have been moves towards a common political identification as disabled (see Linton, 1998). While feminist politics began to include disability perspectives in the 1970s, feminist analyses from within disability studies were voiced somewhat later (e.g. Hillyer, 1993; Lloyd, 1995). Similar diversity could be found in the moves towards homosexual law reform in New Zealand; lesbians and gays did not necessarily agree on a shared identity in the struggle for rights. There are more recent voices in Aotearoa of people who question gendered binaries, especially those who identify as intersexual or as expressing their own gender in non-normative ways (e.g. transgendered). Despite the intra-group complexities, there were clear parallels in moves towards lobbying for greater recognition and removal of discrimination that spanned all these groups. Some examples of intersecting issues are given below to illustrate ways that these intersecting differences were discussed in the course.

Unsettling the Dominant through Interruptions and Anomalies

To illustrate the complexity of group intersections for students, I used point-of-view reading exercises to unsettle various dualisms. Students were given written vignettes describing individual characters to encourage them to imagine being in various subject-positionings while reading a particular text or viewing a short video clip. In a class of thirty, there might be a dozen different positionings being used by students at any one time; this allowed students to live for a moment as other kinds of subjects. I found that the exercise worked best when introduced gently midway through the course. It was quite challenging for some students to imagine themselves in certain minority positions. Evidence that this exercise was quite a powerful and de-centring experience was in the comments from several at the end of the course. They said that for a time they tended to see everything they watched in the media from the point of view of the subject-position they had been given in the first exercise[2].

Of course, hypothetical stories can be open to stereotyping, and the purpose was not to reinforce a narrow set of understandings of oppression[3]. In our discussions, stereotypes were brought into play as part of the analysis, rather than as errant phrases to be avoided at all cost (surely an impossible task). Some examples of these reading exercises are given below in illustration.

In one case, some students were asked to take the subject-position of Toma, a married Maori man with diabetes who has emigrated to Sydney, Australia. This subject-position can open discussion about many issues, including the meaning of the word *New Zealander* as something beyond a location in a specific country, linking New Zealanders of all ethnicities with an international diaspora. This helps to unsettle an essentialist Maori/non-Maori binary and open conversation to multiple positionings in relation to indigenous cultural

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[2] This has sometimes been called the "Rashomon" effect (Ber & Alroy, 2001).

lineage. Though diabetes is notably prevalent in Maori communities, the experience of the

illness can affect people of all ethnicities, while ethnicity is related to life-chances (for

example, indigenous people in rural or poor urban areas are less likely have access to

education and health resources). In addition, Toma may or may not perceive diabetes as

disabling. Social class issues can be added to discussions about exclusion, for example, if

Toma is described as having kaumatua (respected elder) status in his home tribal area, which

might be discordant with his pay and status as a cleaner in an office block in the city. His life

may also include positive benefits that married status confers in many social arenas. Here

students might contrast Toma's life with Ngahuia Te Awekotuku's (1996) experiences of

growing up Maori and lesbian. The particular trajectories followed can expand into quite

complex discussions about social power and opportunity that interweave ideas students' own

experiences with worlds encountered in their course readings.

The course also considered the sometimes opposing cultural concerns of

indigenous Maori, Pasifika (immigrants from Pacific Islands to New Zealand) and additional

minority cultural groups, especially if students claimed such membership. Students who

could identify with more than one ethnic group were living in complex and difficult cultural

intersections. A reading example that enhanced the exploration of various differences

concerned a single, able-bodied heterosexual woman who has both Maori and pakeha

parents, who "looks pakeha [white]", but who identifies as Maori. In discussions based on

these readings, there have been many students who have spoken of their difficulty in claiming

a particular identity position important to them (e.g. as Maori), for example, if they were not

addressed by others as Maori despite living almost completely in a Maori context with their

Maori children. The complex subject positions suggested by the fictional reading exercises

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[3] I used the term *oppression* in its Freieran sense, as social structures or forces that exploit, interfere with, or otherwise express violence towards particular people

allowed room for a variety of students to discuss various intersections of ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and ability/disabilities.

Other hypothetical examples emphasised additional aspects of difference. Intersecting sexuality issues were foregrounded more clearly with another example, of a Maori takatapui (lesbian) woman who has not been able to come out to her whanau (extended family) about her lifelong partner or in the Kura Kaupapa Maori (elementary school with indigenous cultural focus) where she teaches. In another example, a gay, pakeha man, large and athletic, wonders about his job as sports coach if he were to reveal to colleagues at school that his partner is a man.

A greater focus on disability issues, intersecting with gender/sexuality, comes with possible subject-positions involving, for example, a young pakeha woman with cerebral palsy who wonders whether she will have an enjoyable time if she goes to her high school final-year dance. In this latter example, students were encouraged to queer the issue of disabilities by considering the movable definitions of impairment, disability and illness, depending on what aspects of behaviour or appearance are considered normative in a society.

More complex intersections also emerged in classes. The 2003 class was held at the time of escalating war in Iraq, with increasing distrust expressed in popular media and sometimes in class towards the U.S. and Israel. Comment about Israeli politics as military and masculinist could be a way to cloak anti-semitism, while expression of disgust regarding Taleban patriarchs of Afghanistan might similarly hide anti-Muslim racism. To challenge coterminous views of colonizing Israelis and terrorist Muslims, we considered subjectivities that trouble such stereotypical identities. I discussed the project of a former class member, a Muslim feminist, who asked one class to draw pictures of a Muslim woman, before leading a discussion on stereotypical portrayals as a way to address racist fears of veiled women and to point to varieties of veiling fashions in different Islamic cultures. I also discussed the work of

Jewish feminist anti-zionists (Erica Burman, p.c. 1998; see also Butler, 2004) to emphasize the diversity of feminist engagement within the complexities of Jewish cultures.

Discussion sometimes veered into multiple intersections outside the main issues covered in class and allowed students to explore subject-positions more or less different to their own. In one particular class, a moving discussion was held between two members of same cultural group who were of different ages and who had sat apart throughout the course. Towards the end of the course, they discussed their very different positions of power in their culture as, respectively, young person and elder. It seemed to me that this space allowed them to hear each other in new ways, since in cultural terms they would not have been able to talk to each other as equals.

The multi-faceted approach to diversity allowed for much open-ended discussion of numerous intersecting issues of oppression, including those not of especial focus in course readings. For example, the issue of students whose first language is not English was a concern raised by several teachers in both courses. Though issues of social class do not fall into clear categories in New Zealand, the issue of labelling of schools by the decile ranking of their socioeconomic level, which is set by the Ministry of Education and determines every school's funding, was a grassroots class issue clearly tied to ethnic minority status. By the end of our discussions of subject positions, a huge number of issues had been canvassed. The exercise worked well to unsettle the certainties of our dualistic categories and to open up multiple rather than binary possibilities in imagining the paths of people's lives.

Diversity and Staffing

A final question I consider here is the way that a single staff member running a queer diversity course can "walk the talk" in challenging such a variety of experiences and oppressions. It was not necessarily easy for me to unsettle the view of education from the

dominant perspectives, given my appearance as an anglo-phone pakeha. Of particular

concern in the current economic climate was my privilege as a fully employed academic, at a

time of student protests over huge increases in student fees, with subsequent increases in

student financial debt as students were given greater access to study-loans. I acknowledged

this difference in showing support for student fee protests; however, open discussion of these

differences can be painful, augmenting the student-teacher power differences. My disclosures

in class depended on a number of factors, including personal feelings of safety in the context

of institutional and national politics of the time. I discussed my own changing positionings in

terms of nationality, sexual orientation, and impairment, and more stable positioning as a

woman and within the culturally dominant Anglo-Saxon ethnicity.

Another important aspect of the course pedagogy was the inclusion of guest speakers

to expand the variety of views already present in readings and in the composition of the class.

Eyre (1997) has cast doubt on this practice, suggesting that speakers can be simply a tokenist

addition to a normative curriculum. However, the possibilities are enhanced if the guest is

integrated into the entire course through anticipatory comments and readings, followed by

further discussion in class. We were fortunate to have a respected member of the public

health profession who was also fafafine (a Samoan man who has from childhood lived "as a

woman") visit each course to hold discussion with students about a range of social and

educational issues. This was salient for disrupting the dominant heteronormativity of most of

the university curriculum. Visitors from various communities provided further contributions

to the course, even if briefly within part of a session[4].

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[4] There are always difficult issues regarding payment, given the low level of funding for the course; but there can be numerous ways to show respect for the work of visitors through barter, exchange, and other practices.

Students' Views and Future Improvements

In addition to my own journal reflections and open-ended class evaluation responses, I sent an electronic mail questionnaire to all former students for whom I had an email address (approximately half the students), though it was unknown how many of those questionnaires were actually received. Detailed responses were received from eight former students (approximately 16% of total students), so the responses are not considered to be a representative sample, but rather an indication of particular students' engagements with the material. The questionnaire aimed "to provide a reflection on the teaching of diversity issues in education at tertiary level" in order to add to the international literature about tertiary courses on diversity and education, particularly from teachers and students in New Zealand.

At a final class for one of the courses, several students expressed their appreciation for seeing inclusion work in practice, referring to the diverse voices in our discussions. I tried to create a setting in which students could speak freely about troubling issues of difference or oppression about which they felt uncertain. Though we had discussed ground rules that included listening rather than criticizing others, sometimes more politically active students challenged the more conservative. One event involved a teacher who described hearing but not intervening when earlier in the day a boy from a minority ethnic group made a sexist remark to a girl of his own cultural group. Some in class argued that the teacher should have criticized the boy directly or discussed the issue of sexism immediately in the classroom. My teaching strategy in this situation would be to try to keep the conversation open for a time so that various views of what might have happened could be aired. This allows a wider consideration of discourses that might operate to constrain what it is possible for the teacher (and students) to do in that situation. Often in these cases the "right action" might not appear quite as simple as the first telling of the story might indicate. The teacher in this case expressed complex reasons for staying silent at that moment, while discussion made room for

another aspect of the boy's remark to be aired by a class member identifying with the boy's

culture. One student's questionnaire response referred to such discussion in a positive way.

> I have gained a greater understanding of my own attitudes towards issues of difference
>
> and diversity as a result of the course. While aware of the issues, discussing practices
>
> and the theory behind the issues has allowed me to gain insight and develop new ways
>
> of looking at issues. The opportunity to work along side of a a [sic] diverse range of
>
> educational practitioners, all prepared to 'bare their soul' in an uncritical and confiding
>
> atmosphere gives one the ability to learn not just about your own attitudes but to learn
>
> how others cope with these important issues.

This comment was volunteered from a student at least a year after finishing the graduate

programme. I think the use of many accounts by educators with a strong personal voice (e.g.

Jackson, 1995; Misson, 1996) also helped to model self-reflective writing with a great deal of

sensitivity and complexity.

Over many years of teaching feminist issues in education, I have found it important to

keep a forward push towards positive approaches to change over the course rather than to

dwell too long on the negative aspects of oppression, since this can depress students and

create hopelessness about possibilities for transformation. This resonates with Srivastava's

(1997) concern about how to appreciate difference and acknowledge cultural plurality while

still acknowledging racist, sexist, homophobic, and ableist oppressions. This was also

signalled in a questionnaire response.

> How to accept and acknowledge peoples differences with empathy and respect? How
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> education can bring everyone together rather than separate us so we can bring our
>
> differences together for the good of all. …I also feel education deals with diversity
>
> from a victim point of view- how to fix what is wrong rather than creating a
>
> culture/idea of success.

This response shows an ongoing personal engagement with the challenges of this area, rather than a smooth, settled conclusion. The intersection approach helped students to see the commonalities between positions and to think about our difficulties in finding positive strategies applied in one area that might be useful in another.

At the end of the course, two particular approaches have been helpful in providing students with some closure on some of the difficult issues raised, while providing a positive impetus for future work of their own towards educational change. The first is Pallotta-Chiarolli's (1996) view of "rainbow" possibilities for change suggests that education moves across essential categories, creating bonds and alliances across our differences to ensure that people who have been marginalised are seen by their teachers and peers as active agents of their own destinies. This requires self-reflectiveness for all of us, looking out for tendencies to essentialize gender, culture and sexuality, and to question the standards used as grounds for acceptance of difference.

The spiritual dimension is often excluded from traditional euro-western teaching, though it has acknowledged importance to indigenous and Pasifika students. The course readings end with Alex Wilson's (1996) reflection on "two-spirit" being in traditional indigenous American understanding, a term that affirms the parallel importance of sexuality with culture and community. The idea opens the possibility that all our possible subject-positions across gender/sexuality/culture/the body may be interconnected.

The *Difference and Diversity* course has been an energizing and transformative experience for me as a teacher, as well as for students, judging from many of their comments. There are still issues that trouble me about the curriculum, notably its central focus on issues of difference. Johnson and Pihama (1995) warned about the dangers of focusing on dualisms of difference, arguing that there is a tendency for deficit perspectives to re-emerge, essentializing difference. At present, I am considering ways that differences can be presented

from the beginning as messy, multiple, complex, and contradictory, without going too far outside students' comfort zones regarding clear structures of knowledge and their own imagined life paths. Like everything in education, this is an ongoing task.

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