On marginalized voices:
LGBTQ+ Perspectives & Literature (continued)

Reflecting on yesterday's class & blog entries

Our class yesterday and the class blog contributions prompted me to do a great deal of reflection on notions of inclusion, 'equality,' when opposing ideas arise in the classroom, and allyship. A few questions that I want to bring forward today include:

- ❖ In what ways is teaching a political act?
- ❖ How might we invite activism into our literacy learning? How does activism connected with critical literacy learning? What does it afford us?
- ❖ What are some strategies we might use to shift from defending to dialoguing?
- ❖ How might we challenge students when their views impacts vulnerable peers?
- ❖ How might we teach students to act as allies and accomplices?
- ❖ How might we move past 'passive allyship' to act as allies and accomplices?
- ❖ How do we contend with resistance to SOGI issues in school?

Reflecting on yesterday's class & blog entries

I find that whenever I reflect on my pedagogy, and consider difficult questions with regards to teaching, I end up turning to the scholar **bell hooks**. As such, I wanted to share some of her wisdom regarding teaching as a starting off point today, and recommend that everyone read her work.

Teaching to
Transgress

Education as the
Practice of Freedom
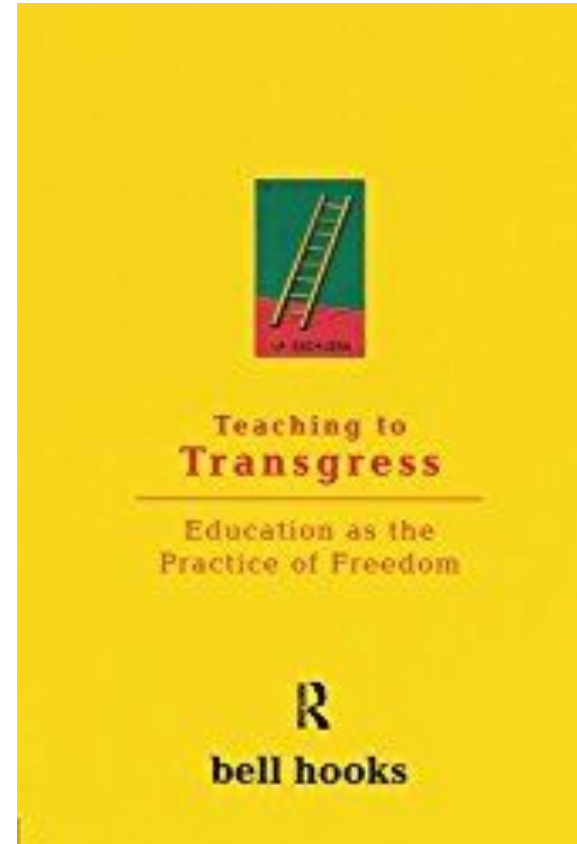
bell hooks

A few bell hooks quotes to start our learning today:

"We deliberately choose to teach in ways that that further the interests of democracy, of justice" (hooks, 2010, p. 27)

A few bell hooks quotes to start our learning today:

"We must pursue all opportunities to decolonize our minds and the minds of our students" (hooks, 2010, p. 28).

A few bell hooks quotes to start our learning today:

"When we teach our students that there is safety in learning to cope with conflict, with differences of thought and opinion, we prepare their minds for radical openness" (hooks, 2010, p. 88).

A few bell hooks quotes to start our learning today:

"We are not all equals in a classroom. Teachers have more power than students. And... it is easy for teachers to misuse that power" (hooks, 2010, p. 114).

A few bell hooks quotes to start our learning today:

"Stories help students to think critically" (hooks, 2010, p. 51).

A few bell hooks quotes to start our learning today:

"Story, especially personal story, is one of those powerful ways to educate, to create community in a classroom" (hooks, 2010, p. 56).

Clip from "Nanette" by Hannah Gadsby

*Read from Vox article

*40:37 - 44 min

On telling important stories, personal stories, homophobia, trauma, and LGBTQ+ children's experiences.

A few of Hannah Gadsby's ideas worth a second look:

❖ "The closet, for me, was no easy thing to come out of"

❖ "70% of the people… I trusted believed that homosexuality was a sin… and by the time that I identified as being gay, it was too late. I was already homophobic. And you do not get to just flick a switch…"

❖ "I sat soaking in shame in the closet for ten years… the closet can only stop you from being seen. It is not shame-proof. **[If] you soak a child in shame, you cannot develop the neurological pathways that carry thought… of self worth**"

❖ "[self hate] can become a weed so thick and so fast that **the child doesn't know any different**"

❖ "I need to tell my story because **I paid dearly for a lesson that no one seemed to want to learn**"

❖ "You learn from the part of the story you focus on"

My takeaways from Hannah's words:

When we witness "seeds of hate" being planted by students, we need to do the difficult work of interrupting that and, with care, helping students so what bell hooks advocates for - "decolonize the mind." Such seeds can emerge in the literature classroom and the response work it demands is inherently political. We can do this work through story, as both hooks and Hannah advocate, and we can also do this more explicitly by being strong allies and accomplices, as well as arming students to be allies for and with one another.
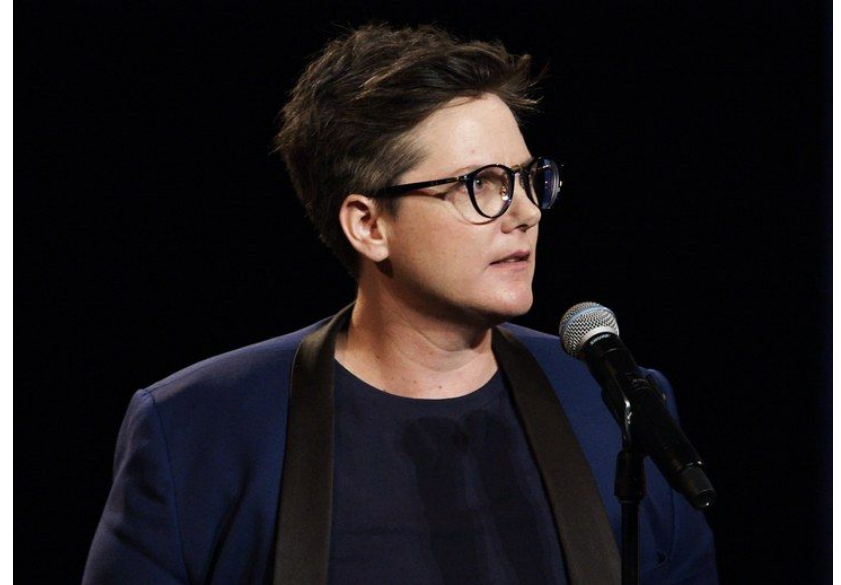
Ally communication

Based on our generative class discussion yesterday, likely many of us would agree that teaching is certainly **political work**. Every text that we choose to share with students is political, our silences are political, and the critical literacy learning that we design for our students is political. As such, part of the work we can do is to help support students to act as allies and accomplices for and with one another. I'd like to offer some explicit strategies for doing this in the classroom for and with students.

An ALLY is not an noun.
It isn't an identity, a label, or something to claim.
Being an ally is taking action, making a stand doing something to make a difference by standing up against oppression and marginalization.
You are an ally when someone else recognizes you as an ally

On ally communication (Sara deTurk, 2011)

Ally—a person who has relative social power or privilege in society who takes a stand against injustice directed at people who do not (e.g., male feminists, white people working against racism, or Christians working to stop hate crimes against Muslims or Jews).

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

1. Political action
   - Donating money/fundraising
   - Lobbying; participating in petitions, meetings, marches

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

2. Concrete support
   - Driving to doctor
   - Offering use of technology & material resources
   - Sharing information, advice, referrals

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

3. Comforting targets
   - "Are you okay?"
   - "You know I disagree with what he said"

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

4. Advocacy
   - Explaining groups and their cultural assumptions to each other
   - Recommending or directing attention to members of marginalized groups
   - Demonstrating affiliation with or support for members of marginalized groups

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

5. Public rhetoric
   - Introducing symbolic resolutions within areas of institutional authority
   - Being visible as an ally by attending diversity- and social justice-related events
   - Teaching, creating, and participating in educational programs
   - Teaching others to be allies
   - Voicing social justice views
   - "I believe women should get equal pay for equal work."
   - "I consider myself a feminist."

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

6. Use of authority
   - Invoke personal policies ("Please don't ever use that word in my presence.")
   - Invoke institutional authority/policies ("That kind of language will not be tolerated, especially not in this office.")
   - Threaten ("If this doesn't stop, I'll report it.")

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

7. Initiation of dialogue
   - Initiating/encouraging conversation about important issues in daily life (mentioning at church that it's diversity month at school)
   - Sharing information ("I learned today that most beneficiaries of affirmative action are [W]hite women.")
   - Explaining own perspective ("What you said is offensive to me, and here's why ….")
   - Gently questioning & challenging assumptions
     - "Why do you feel that way?"
     - "Why would you say that?"
     - "What do you understand that to mean?"
     - "How did you come to believe that?"
     - "How would that make them feel?"
     - "Have you thought about/did you know that …."
     - "Did you choose to be heterosexual?"
   - Encouraging thoughtfulness about speech ("When you say 'that's so gay,' what do you mean by that?")
   - Responding in the moment ("Let's talk about that.")
   - Making it personal ("My husband is Latino.")

Examples of ally communication (deTurk, 2011)

- Establishing common ground ("I can relate.")
- Validating ("It's okay to feel that way.")
- Developing rapport (e.g., through humor, use of students' language)
- Establishing long-term conversations (as a part of socializing one's own children)
- Looking for openings/waiting for less confrontational moment.

A few takeaways to help bridge us to thinking about designing literacy learning with LGBTQ+ perspectives in mind:

❖ ›Mere inclusion is not the answer; just having a gay character present is not enough. Learners must be given opportunities to discuss and explore LGBTQ+ themes, or else we are just continuing to reinforce the norm as heterosexual.

❖ ›We need to be careful that the literature we choose to use that has LGBTQ+ characters does not reinforce stereotyping. Similarly, we can't assume that just because a text has a LGBTQ+ character, that our LGBTQ+ students will connect with them.

❖ ›Consider a variety of texts with LGBTQ+ themes to bring into your classroom such as poetry, art, music, film, plays, etc

❖ ›It's not just 'hormones.' We can't be dismissive, and we have to be ready to have those in depth conversations with students willing to trust us.

Before engaging with LGBTQ+ perspectives (or any marginalized perspectives), address compassion & social justice

Try an activity like this:

Source:

Wood, K. Kissel, B. & Miller, E. (2016). Safe zones: Supporting LGBTQ youth through literature. *Voices from the Middle, 23*(4), 46-54.

| Before Reading			After Reading		
Agree	**Disagree**	**Statement**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Justify Your Answer**
x		1. Everybody has secrets that are hard to share.	x		
x		2. There are times when everyone feels left out or different.	x		
x		3. Coming out is difficult anytime, but especially in middle school	x		
	x	4. Everyone feels safe when they are at school.		x	
x		5 Name-calling can destroy lives.	x		
x		6. Being who you really are isn't a choice.	x		
	x	7. Being honest is always the best policy.	x		
x		8. Once you learn to be prejudiced, you can never change.		x	

Figure 2. Extended reaction guide for thematic unit on social justice: Conversations about compassion

Reflecting on "Teaching in the cracks" (Page, 2016)

To what extent do you think the following approaches outlined by Page are valuable?

- ❖ **Partial visibility:** Choice reading as a strategy
- ❖ **Constrained visibility:** Literature circles and book clubs as a strategy
- ❖ **Visible with partial integration:**
  - ➢ Strategy 1: skills/standards-based approach with LGBTQ+ characters as focus
  - ➢ Strategy 2: focusing on censorship and academic freedom
- ❖ **Visible with partial integration:** 'queering the classics' as a strategy
- ❖ **Full visibility and integration:** Employing queer theory and pedagogy

"Teachers who queer the curriculum engage in alchemy, turning business as usual into gold" (683).
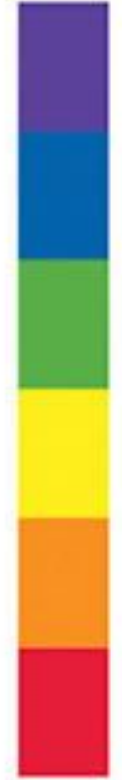
TAKE ACTION!

1. Evaluate your community climate: How open is your school and community? Are your perceptions based on concrete incidents of inclusion or exclusion, or are they assumptions?

2. Gather your allies: Who in your community would support you in your endeavors? Are there other teachers with whom you are in contact in your region or online? What organizations can help you?

3. Review your school's policies on text challenges. If the policies are inappropriate or nonexistent, gather your allies to assist in creating or changing them.

4. Create rationales for the texts you want to use. Don't self-censor and assume a challenge that might not come, but be prepared if it should occur.

5. Start collecting books for your classroom or school library. Think about how queer texts connect to genre studies or various themes, such as family, overcoming challenges, friendship, romance, and civil rights.

On engaging in queer readings of literature with students: A few ?s to get you started:

What does this text say about the following:

❖ What is a man? What is a woman? What is gender?

❖ What does it mean to be heterosexual? LGBTQ+? Do stereotypes of these sexual orientations exist? Are they reinforced or combatted?

❖ How is masculinity/femininity portrayed? Are gender representations fluid or rigid?

❖ How is love portrayed? Is it productive or reductive? In what ways?

❖ Who or what in society sanctions or does not sanction various kinds of love?

❖ Does heteronormativity exist here? In what ways? Is it ever interrupted?

❖ Does homophobia and hate exist here? Is it troubled? By whom? What are the consequences and rewards of this troubling?

Adapted from: Bressler (2007)

On addressing gender and sexuality binaries in texts:

Source:

Herman-Wilmarth, J. M. & Ryan, C. L. (2015). Doing what you can: Considering ways to address LGBT topics in Language Arts curricula. *Language Arts, 92*(6), 436-443.

- Is the story shaped by the character's refusal to conform to social norms? How?

- Does the way the character looks to others match the way the character understands him/herself?

- How and to what extent are the characters able to resist others' definitions in defining themselves?

- Does the author rely on stereotypes of what makes a boy and what makes a girl?

- Are there situations where one characteristic (e.g., maleness) is expected to accompany another (e.g., never crying)? What happens to characters when those characteristics don't come in expected sets?

- What happens if characters want something forbidden?

- How might this story be different if the male character were female or vice versa?

On inviting text-to-self connections regarding SOGI issues:

Source:

Herman-Wilmarth, J. M. & Ryan, C. L. (2015). Doing what you can: Considering ways to address LGBT topics in Language Arts curricula. *Language Arts, 92*(6), 436-443.

- How do you label yourself? Why? What characteristics are often associated with those labels? What happens when the characteristics of those labels don't apply to you?
- Do those characteristics have to be like that for everyone? What if some people are different?
- Who decides what those labels mean?
- What happens to people who don't fit in?
- What relationships do people make fun of and why?
- What are "rules" about how we are supposed to act even if they aren't written down?

On microaggressions in the classroom

What microaggressions have you experienced/ witnessed in the classroom?

Resources:

There is *so* much out there. Here are three great spots to check out:

NCTE National Council of Teachers of English

Teacher Education For All!
TEFA
Safer • Included • Empowered

#PulseOrlandoSyllabus

Links:
- http://www2.ncte.org/blog/2016/06/resources-teaching-times/
- http://teach.educ.ubc.ca/teacher-education-for-all/
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1f8-gISMgvKq8XokbmcEp9H3f8jEAfcbQcjhxShhDLeM/mobilebasic?pli=1#heading=h.gv89czqacthg

YA Text Presentation sign-up

❖ Take some time to find your groups of 4

❖ Once in your group of 4, sign up for a day to present

❖ Take a bit of time to discuss text possibilities

1. Text Presentations 30% - Ongoing

Working in groups of four, you will be responsible for introducing a **new** YA text.

- "New" means a text you have never read and taught before, preferably a text that has been published recently. Perhaps try a different genre that you have been wanting to try to teach?
- Each group/individual will present on a different text.

Prepare a presentation of your text of no more than 15 minutes where:

a. In the first five minutes, you provide the following information:

- *Briefly* review the plot.
- State the age (grade range) for which the book might be appropriate.
- Outline the dominant (top 3 or 4) themes/issues of the book.
- Discuss the merits and/or challenges of the book for teaching (top 3 or 4 each).

b. Outline or take the class through a short or condensed version of an activity you might implement in your classroom with your chosen text. This should consist of the majority of your presentation, which should be about 8 minutes. Depending on your planning, it may work to combine some of the items above with the activity. The activity should clearly connect to the text.

c. Provide about 2-3 minutes at the end for questions, quick discussion, feedback, etc.

d. Post any resources, etc. to the class blog by the next day.

** With the number of students and classes, please be cognizant of the time you have to present so that everyone has an equal opportunity.

The presentation will be assessed on:

- Addressing the required elements.
- All group members lead an equal part of the presentation.
- A clear, coherent, thoughtful, engaging presentation that covers the outlined areas in the time allotted.

Please note: If you need resources to check out to help you decide on a text, be sure to take a peak at the "Recommended Resources" section of Thursday, July 19th. I have a few good links to lists of interesting YA texts.