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THE PRESENCE OF HOMOPHOBIA IN FIELDWORK: PREPARING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TO CHALLENGE HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA

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Abstract:
A teacher-educator examines the challenges of preparing pre-service teachers to engage in anti-homophobic pedagogies when field-based experiences occur in heterosexist, homophobic settings. She reports the experiences of a graduate student-teacher whose role as a "guest" in a classroom caused her to be silenced as an ally for a victimized student. She makes the claim that framing student teachers as "guests" often prompts pre-service teachers to become silent conspirators, sustaining homophobic environments in schools. The lessons learned in such settings stand in conflict with the values espoused by many diversity-oriented teacher education programs and are particularly troublesome because most pre-service teachers report having few or no models of classroom teachers engaged in anti-homophobic, anti-heterosexist practices. By engaging in study of her own university teaching and by studying her students' reports of field experiences, she identifies tentative recommendations for improving the quality of teacher-education programs' anti-homophobia integration into fieldwork.

As a teacher-educator preparing early and middle-childhood teachers to teach in urban, culturally diverse settings, I constantly struggle with how I can best foster the dispositions that will help my students become critical, empowered, empathetic, and democratic teachers. In my classes, students and I study the work of other social-justice-oriented educators (e.g., Allen, 1999; Ayers & Ford, 1996; Chilcoat & Ligon, 1994; Christensen, 2000; Cohen & Chasnoff, 1997; Edelsky, 1999, 2006), explore what it means to educate citizens for critical democracy (Goodman, 1989), and examine how issues of race, class, gender, language, sexual-orientation, and ableness—among others—affect the lives of youth and our work as teachers. My commitment to engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) prompts me to take narratives of my own insights, dilemmas, and new understandings to students and to begin working through them with students.

In this article, I will discuss how my students (and in particular, Stacey Geiger) helped me recognize a significant university campus-fieldwork mismatch and begin taking action to align the anti-homophobia/anti-heterosexism goals of my university classroom teaching with the lessons pre-service teachers learn in fieldwork. I (Jeane) identify Stacey as a co-author in order to honor the value of her contributions to my thinking about this topic and to thank her for sharing the narrative of her field-based dilemmas around homophobia. In this piece, I share my narratives *and* hers, but I will use first-person voice as I frame these tales of how homophobia's presence in fieldwork has nudged too many of my students into a complicit silence that fails to support and protect youth, fails to challenge heterosexism, and fails to provide an acceptable model for classroom practice.

One of the ways I take my narratives-of-dilemma to my students is to tell the stories of my now teenage daughter's educational experiences and to invite students to help me learn from them. Recently, my daughter came home pondering possible topics for a "persuasive speech" she could deliver for a class. After identifying several topics she had been considering, she noted that her close friends advised her that if she chose "gay rights" (one of the topics she generated) that her "life would be over" until the end of high school because she would be harassed by her peers; they would think *she* was gay. The friends were adamant, trying to protect her from the certain social consequences of expressing her views openly with others and challenging heteronormativity. I was devastated that her social justice dispositions were so easily squelched—and that her response so clearly conveyed her understandings of the "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1986, p.23) of school.

The shadow of teachers'—and certainty of peers'—homophobia worries her. Because she has not witnessed her teachers challenge heterosexism, she assumes their homophobia and reverts to silence—a condition reinforcing homophobia and the "closet" into which many young people experience school climates forcing them (Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2000/2001). Now that I have shared this story with my students, I have learned that many (not all—but many) of them have felt similarly silenced around issues of homophobia and heterosexism. They confirmed my daughter's and her friends' fears that local schools are unsafe places to express sentiments that challenge homophobia. My students then began pouring forth stories from their own field placements, explaining how one building's teachers would never acknowledge the presence of a group of lesbian girls in one urban school (even though one girl had become suicidal), how another cooperating teacher in a rural school gave the persuasive essay prompt "Why Gay Marriage Shouldn't be Legal" and explained that one of the supporting points could be "because of AIDS," how a district-level librarian had made the "gay" library books off-limits, and how few models they had ever seen of anyone *doing* the kinds of things we *talk* about on campus.

It is clearly time for teacher-educators and pre-service teachers to acknowledge the harm that can result from homophobic field placements and generate ways to better recognize and resist heterosexism and homophobia in schools. In this piece, I will explore how my understandings of my responsibility as a teacher-educator have developed the last two years and begin framing arguments about what I believe can or should happen to better support pre-service teachers and, therefore, youth in schools.

Homophobia and Teacher Education

As a teacher educator committed to engaging in anti-heterosexist pedagogy, I have become accustomed to teachers' varied knowledge of, and comfort with, an anti-heterosexist, social justice agenda. Like other teacher-educators engaged in this work (e.g., Eyre, 1993; Ferfolja, & Robinson, 2004; Koerner & Hulsebosch, 1993; Kumashiro, 2004; Robinson, 2005 Schniedewind & Cathers, 2003; Sykes & Goldstein, 2004), I realize that demonstrating this perspective on socially just education is often considered "controversial" by teacher education students, including those students who possess a personal commitment to anti-homophobia education. Even prompting college students to critically examine the ways popular artifacts of childhood reinforce normative gender expressions can elicit anger and resistance (Damico & Quay, 2006); drawing upon queer theory to expose the sexualities present in schooling (Sumara & Davis, 1999)—and particularly how pedagogy is "explicitly heterosexualized" (p. 192)—is, in my experience, threatening to many students who have never consciously attended to the (hetero)sexualities taught implicitly and explicitly in schools, or what Mellor and Epstein (2006) call the "heterosexual economy" (p. 381) embedded in schools' cultures.

Ferfolja and Robinson (2004) define anti-homophobia education "as pedagogical approaches that attempt to counteract the inequities and damaging impact of homophobia and heterosexism" (p. 11). In their study of teacher educators in Australia, they found that although nearly all of their respondents considered themselves as inclusive of social justice perspectives in their teaching, nearly one-fifth of those respondents reported not including gay or lesbian equity issues or anti-homophobic perspectives in their teacher education coursework. This finding is even more striking considering that the 40 respondents were among 100 teacher-educators originally solicited for participation in the research. Others (e.g., Taylor, 1999) report the silence of teacher education faculty around issues of homophobia when heterosexism is discussed.

The stories of my efforts to engage, in university courses, in anti-heterosexist pedagogy are as rocky as others' tales. I enter my courses intending to motivate students to embrace the moral obligations of inclusive pedagogy; I meet with at least some (in every class) degree of student resistance (Eyre, 1993; Kumashiro, 2004; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001; Williams, 2002); and I periodically find pro-justice dispositions developing in some percentage of my students, particularly those who plan careers in urban settings. As a woman identified as a heterosexual, and therefore benefiting from heteronormativity, I am, as Eyre (1993) explains, both "in a contradictory position" and subject to the limitations of "my own heterosexist myopia" (p. 281).

Perhaps these limitations influenced the ways in which I had, until recently, overlooked the relationships between our field-based practical experiences for pre-service teachers and the on-campus coursework I taught—at least when it came to issues of heterosexism. As Robinson (2005) points out, students in student-teaching experiences are rarely *required* to demonstrate that they are teaching inclusively. My experience, across several institutions, has been that fieldwork evaluations have never included an evaluation of the degree to which anti-heterosexist pedagogies were evident in a student's teaching, although student teachers demonstrating racism, discrimination against children with disabilities, or gender-bias, for instance, would be identified and likely counseled out of the profession.

Challenging (or Not?) Homophobia in Fieldwork

What significance do the relationships between university coursework and fieldwork hold for those of us mentoring pre-service teachers in anti-heterosexist pedagogy? Where does our work as teacher educators end and begin? If teacher-educators intend to foster social justice, these are questions worthy of our consideration. Students in Athanases and Martin's (2006) research noted that ongoing feedback about equity pedagogies, from supportive mentors in the field, and strong modeling from master teachers, were essential to their developing sensitivities and skills as advocates for justice.

As I have begun to consider these questions, I have realized the importance of focusing attention on the teachers who serve as the on-site teachers of our pre-service teacher education students. With whom are we cooperating when pre-service teachers enter fieldwork? They are, of course, teachers like my daughter's. According to a number of researchers (e.g., Robinson, 2005; Robinson & Ferfojla, 2001; Koerner & Hulsebosch, 1993), practicing teachers often report seeing issues of heterosexism as outside of their charge. That is, they often do not give homophobia the same kinds of credibility or legitimacy as other equity issues (Robinson & Ferfojla, 2001), may perceive anti-heterosexist pedagogy as risky (Robinson, 2005), may perceive it as unnecessary because of the absence of visible gay or lesbian students (Robinson & Ferfojla, 2001), may report fear of administrator retaliation, or may believe that they do not have enough time to focus on anti-heterosexism (Schniedewind & Cathers, 2003).

The significance of practicing teachers' unwillingness to challenge heterosexism and homophobia first came to my consciousness when, a few terms ago, I read a paper in which a pre-service university student, Stacey, recalled a hurtful student-teaching experience. Her story reinforced to me the significance of teacher educators explicitly examining issues of homophobia at the university campus and finding ways to extend those conversations to teachers currently teaching in schools.

Stacey's Story: Encountering Homophobia in Student Teaching

Stacey, at the time a graduate student of mine, submitted a final course paper in which she discussed an earlier experience of working with a child she called "Nick" [a pseudonym] in a classroom student teaching field experience organized by the university. During her time in the placement, Stacey became increasingly concerned about Nick, a middle-school student attending her class. In her paper, she recalled a critical experience with him.

> *The kids began filtering into the room, preparing for social studies class. Nick, hesitant to make eye contact with me, handed me a letter just before the bell rang. I gave him a smile, but he did not move. "Promise you'll read it," he began shyly. "Of course," I replied, and then reassuringly patted his back. As Nick took his seat, I began by opening our class with a discussion about discrimination and segregation, as we were investigating these issues during our integrated unit. When the bell rang signaling the end of the school day, I finally took Nick's letter out of my pocket. I could only imagine the thoughts that had been running though Nick's mind during our discussion of discrimination as I read his letter. In the letter, he expressed feelings of inadequacy and depression. "Everyone hates me. I'm sick of being called a faggot. I'm not gay."*

> *Not knowing exactly what to do, I shared the letter with the cooperating teacher. Her response was disheartening. She described Nick as "needy and manipulative" and as someone who tends to exaggerate situations. Furthermore, she told me that Nick would have to learn to deal with being called gay because, "he possesses* those *tendencies."*

Stacey, chilled at the response of her cooperating teacher, felt helpless. Stacey reported that the teacher's eventual response to Nick was to take him aside and tell him to "not worry about what other people think." My heart broke for Nick and Stacey as I read the rest of the story.

> *I was appalled by her response, but I felt helpless because I was not the teacher. . . . How can she expect him to continue learning in an environment in which he does not feel safe and accepted? Why should he have to get used to being called a faggot and queer just because of the way he acts? I found the situation with Nick hard to ignore; it wasn't something I could put away in my mind at night. I found myself worrying about him and wondering if and how to address the issue. In the end,* ***I didn't address the issue because I did not feel comfortable. I was a guest in the classroom****, not the teacher, and I did not want to create tension. Being a student teacher is an awkward position. I feel like I missed an opportunity to teach students about homophobia.* [Emphasis mine]

Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) report the pressure pre-service teachers feel in school settings and conclude "the culture of schools may discourage pre-service teachers from pro-actively seeking to address sexuality discrimination or social justice inequities generally" (p. 128). In fact, they explain, the construction of harassment as a natural consequence of being "sexual 'others'" (p.128) forms a common discourse of many pre-service teachers. In Stacey's case, however, the student teacher did not believe that harassment was a natural outcome of Nick's "otherness" in the eyes of his peers and teacher. This was her mentor's stance. Despite her strong personal convictions, she felt unable to intervene on Nick's behalf. Other student teachers (e.g., Taylor, 1999) also have reported how difficult it can be to work against the culture of the school. In Stacey's case, contacting Nick's family did not seem a secondary option; he had complained of harassment by family members, too.

In our on-campus university classes, my colleagues and I attempt to educate our pre-service *and* in-service teachers to recognize and fight homophobia in schools and communities, and we attempt to arm them with skills and strategies for doing so. In my classes, we read articles, share documentaries, and review inclusive children's literature. It is no easy task to develop these sensitivities and commitments, for heteronormativity pervades society, much like the "smog" of racism Beverly Tatum (1997) references, making difficult the task of creating environments in which dominant discourses are challenged. Graduate

students recognize that the liberties of the university classroom may not extend to their "real" classrooms, much as children recognize the liberties of their classrooms are not necessarily the liberties of society (Boldt, 1996). Because few of my students experienced schooling environments, as youth, where teachers challenged homophobia, I know they need extra support to imagine and enact inclusive practices. It was clear from Stacey's experience that one strategy I advocate for students in who are unsure how to respond—to seek the assistance of a more experienced mentor—had not been helpful for her. In fact, the cooperating teacher's actions evidenced her own homophobia, reinforced normative gender expressions, and further marginalized Nick.

Stacey came to the university with a history of sensitivity to issues of discrimination against perceived homosexuals. She, too, had personally been victimized by harassers during her youth and could empathize with Nick. However, most students do not join our teacher education programs as sensitive to issues of heterosexism and homophobia as Stacey was. In fact, many pre-service teachers I know who were victimized as youth often tap a discourse that normalizes harassment as a part of growing up (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001). At *least* half of my pre-service students resist (either openly or in more veiled ways) studying scholarship on homosexuality. Resistance is even more pronounced in courses taken by practicing teachers, with whom I more frequently encounter the influence of Christian fundamentalist commitments opposing any effort to make schools safe places for LGBT youth or to engage in what they perceive as "promoting" immoral lifestyles (see Griffin & Oullett, 2003, p. 110).

Teacher education field experiences, then, might subvert faculty goals from on-campus coursework. If we are preparing pre-service teachers to invite writing from the heart, to create literate and supportive communities with their students, to foster social justice, and to really *know* their students, I have realized that we must attend to what occurs when we send these future teachers out to the field. Our students' cooperating teachers—their mentors, role-models, and future colleagues—have not necessarily been prepared to support students who hold commitments to combating homophobia. In addition, we risk the further reification of normative gender expression expectations and heteronormativity when resistant students are prepared in settings where homophobia is permitted to flourish.

What risks do we take (and do we impose on the students who share their experiences with our pre-service teachers) when we place students like Stacey with teachers like Nick's? Stacey's willingness to share her experiences offers teacher-educators an opportunity to rethink our assumptions about how appropriately teacher education programs arm our future graduates.

Failing to Challenge Heterosexist Norms: Pre-service Teachers' Lack of Response to Cooperating Teachers' Homophobia

Recently, I began inviting our graduate students to explore these issues with me. Not long ago, for instance, I asked students in one of my graduate literacy classes to recall examples of how cooperating teachers explicitly addressed homophobia and heterosexism in school. We had been discussing considering how teachers define situations by the language they use to respond to students (Johnston, 2004), and as part of exploring these subtle messages were wondering how teachers could problematize normative expectations. No student, in a class of nearly twenty and who had spent, by that time, more than five quarters of their college experiences in field placements could recall even a single example of a teacher in fieldwork challenging homophobic behavior. In fact, they instead recalled teachers who refused to quiet or even question youngsters who used the word, "fag," or the phrase, "That's so gay." Several students recalled cooperating teachers who would correct racist language but fail to address homophobic comments. What surprised me was not that this discrepancy existed (see, e.g., Kosciw, 2004, who reports the differences youth observe between teachers' responses to racist and homophobic remarks made in schools); what surprised me was how carefully students had been *observing* these discrepancies. The pre-service teachers recalled many episodes in some detail. Missing from every account, however, was any action or question from the pre-service teacher to the cooperating teacher. "Guest" status was somehow understood as preventing any response on behalf of the child.

Pre-service teachers, when framed as guests in schools, feel (and possess) little power. This lack of power creates problems for them when they are placed in situations where their values run up against the values of the school or the cooperating teacher. So *much* of teacher education occurs on-site, in the field, but on the equity issues for which students probably need the *most* sensitive, strong role-models (Athanases & Martin, 2006), programs often do not evaluate the cooperating teachers' levels of skill and preparation.

Rethinking Fieldwork and Anti-Homophobic Pedagogies

I am not generalizing, of course, Stacey's cooperating teacher's reaction to the responses of other teachers. After reading about her experience, hearing about the field experiences of other students, and critically examining my work with practicing teachers over the years, though, it seems a number of questions could be useful for teacher-educators' use in determining the strength of a pre-service teacher's education field placement.

First, it makes sense to actually ask about prospective cooperating teachers' commitments to combating homophobia. This action step presumes that faculty members are directly involved in pre-service teacher education programs, which is not uniformly the case in research universities' programs (see, e.g., Zeichner, 2005). If implemented, these discussions are likely to be eye-openers for teacher education faculty members, but they will only yield helpful results in forging positive placements for students if we *act* upon what we learn. Therefore, secondly, faculty members should determine how to use this information in placing (or not) students. For some prospective cooperating teachers, our willingness to even *discuss* issues of homophobia and heterosexism will convey an agenda they wish to avoid, and they may self-select out of cooperating with us. Teachers should know, upfront, however, that our students' obligations to engage in social justice pedagogies will result in lessons, management styles, and conversations that challenge assumptions that uncritically privilege whiteness, middle-classness, heterosexuality, ableness, and normative gender expressions. Third, and likely most importantly, teacher education faculty can learn alongside cooperating teachers willing to accompany us on this journey. Practicing teachers—as collaborators, co-researchers, and informants—can help university faculty better understand the realities and opportunities of mentoring our students in the field, analyze critical events, document innovative practices and structures for challenging homophobia and heteronormativity, and provide "real world" evidence to our pre-service teachers that the values conveyed in university classrooms *can*, and must, be implemented in communities like Nick's.

As a student-teacher many years ago, I remember my advisor's counsel that part of student teaching involves meeting and working with teachers whose values you do *not* share and that these non-example experiences help pre-service teachers better understand their own philosophies and values as teachers. I cannot continue to accept this argument, although I hear it from a minority of my students today (e.g., "Now I know exactly what I *don't* want to do!"). Do we place students in order for them to stand idly by when a teacher overlooks harassment, or—worse—chooses to justify the harassment? What about when the teacher herself is the harasser?

Given what we know about students' self-silencing and censoring in homophobic environments (see, e.g., Eyre, 1993; Sharkey, 2004; Williams, 2002), it should not be surprising that student-teachers defer to cooperating teachers' or classmates' definitions of situations and honor the "moral demand" (Goffman, 1959, p. 13) that is exerted on them to participate in the situations in ways their cooperating teachers see fit. Stacey's resistance to creating "tension" reflects the complexities of situations where cooperating teachers are framed as the experts and whose cultural landscape provides the "stage" for a student teacher's performance and evaluation. Further, situations like Stacey's (and those of my other students who report hearing homophobic comments with no teacher reaction/response) position pre-service teachers as complicit in the reinforcement of homophobic environments and the oppression of students.

The overwhelming presence of veiled heterosexism (e.g., the *absence* of visible anti-homophobic pedagogy my daughter "reads" in her school environment; the absence of acknowledgement of the lesbian middle-schoolers) challenges our program's social justice values. Moreover, the presence of overt homophobia—enacted by youth and even by cooperating teachers—presents even more profound issues for student (youth in school *and* pre-service teacher) safety. Discussing these issues with teachers, taking some action based on our commitments, and enlisting cooperating teachers as co-researchers of these processes are just first steps toward taking on the practical challenges of achieving an ideal, "universal anti-heterosexist practice" (Mellor & Epstein, 2006, p. 387).

In addition to rethinking how we select cooperating teachers for our students, making our commitments explicit, and inviting practicing teachers to join forces with us, teacher-educators must reconsider our traditional preparation of student teachers as "guests" in buildings. Our students walk a very fine line as learners—whose clarity on a teacher's pedagogical rationale might not be clear, initially, and who genuinely *need* to learn from their cooperating teachers and suspend some degree of judgment—and as individuals committed to the safety, security, and nurturance of the children they serve. These are the children who are helping to educate them to become teachers. The fact that none of my students can recall an instance of challenging a teacher who overlooked homophobia—or challenging a teacher who enacted homophobia in word or deed—tells me that on-campus preparations are not enough to develop the courage and conviction to confront homophobia. Stronger fieldwork ties may help ensure our student teachers aren't *un*learning what they encounter on the university campus, a challenge not limited to homophobia (see, e.g, Marx, 2006).

As I was beginning to write this manuscript, I received another note from Stacey. She reported new questions from another student-teaching placement—questions about how to handle student responses to another student's narrative that included a gay character and how to approach the note-on-the-back teasing ritual of children when one of the derogatory comments is "gay." Her questions opened a new and important conversation for me and one that she hopes other teacher-educators might consider—that even those teachers whose judgment we most trust (and I know and deeply respect the cooperating teacher with whom she worked at the time of this later note) may not have been educated to "see" what's happening in their own classrooms. Teachers are not necessarily willfully ignorant. In fact, many teachers who elect to teach in urban environments do so because of a commitment to overcoming social reproduction, discrimination, and the challenges of economic poverty. Stacey's final words stay with me:

> *In the university setting, my peers and I discussed and grappled with some unfortunate realities of teaching; we truly explored what it means to be a teacher grounded in social justice theory. However, the disconnect between what I learned in a university setting and what I encountered in the field was disheartening. In my university classes, we discussed our responsibility as teachers to combat homophobia. One strategy, looking to the cooperating teacher for advice, was not helpful for me. . . .* ***I do wish that I would've had a model during the program of how to address homophobia in schools—a real, live model****. The articles and documentaries we are assigned are wonderful, but they're not from this geographic region. I think it's time to address homophobia in teacher education and field placements. I'm convinced that my experiences are far from unique; I think other student teachers and teachers just aren't speaking out about their experiences.* [Emphasis mine]

As a consequence of my discussions with my students, and Stacey in particular, I have been making adjustments to my own university classroom practices. These are tentative, in-the-midst-of-reform attempts to develop an atmosphere where students can identify and learn how to reject homophobia and heterosexism. I find it most important that we engage in this inquiry work together.

In addition to the kinds of readings and discussions my students and I have always shared, I now ask students to explicitly identify the means by which heterosexism and homophobia have become apparent in fieldwork—and I'm keeping track of what they see so that I can help our program make better choices about future field placements. I also use their narratives and my own as critical incidents we can replay and rethink as tools for imagining the range of ways situations could have been approached differently (and the likely consequences of the choices we have or have not made). The benefits of sharing our narratives together and learning side-by-side are potentially immense (hooks, 1994). I have assumed responsibility for supervising their field experiences—regardless of whether such supervision has been built into my workload. If I can get into these classrooms, I have a better chance to work with pre-service teachers (and cooperating teachers) at the time of critical incidents, rather than later. Finally, I have invited students into research with me. I want them to become empowered so that the understandings they generate can benefit others—students who will follow them in the program, other teacher-educators who read my work—and consequently, we hope, youth in schools. I talk to them about the research I'm conducting on my own practice and how I want to help improve field-based experiences for them. My students explore their own, related, curiosities in more field-based settings than they did before I began inviting collaborative work. For example, students interview, in inquiry projects, teachers and parents about their attitudes toward heterosexism using children's literature (e.g., deHaan & Nijland, 2002) as prompts for conversations. Certainly, not every student will share the passion for challenging homophobia that is demonstrated by some, but looking closely at the places were heterosexism resides (and hearing the homophobia of some teachers) appears to be prompting my students to advocacy roles. We will continue to conduct joint inquiries and develop recommendations for improving both field-based experiences and teacher-educators' classroom practices.

Final Thoughts

The lessons I'm learning from Stacey and her peers convey to me the significance of looking beyond our university classrooms as we teach about issues of diversity and homophobia in particular. We *must* open up conversations we've not been accustomed to holding with our field-based partners, and rather than envisioning our students as "guests" who must respect the culture of the school, we might prepare them to *challenge* the culture—to, in fact, nurture their cooperating teachers' professional development—when it is appropriate. A number of classroom teachers—who serve as our university students' mentors—harbor the same questions Stacey poses, but they have not been encouraged to engage in dialogue and development that could make it easier to engage in socially just teaching. Stacey's appeal for real-life role models echoes that of Cochran-Smith's (2000) students looking for mentors and cooperating teachers who would help them better engage in anti-racist teaching. Just as White privilege has been the source of many White teachers' failure to "see" discrimination (Marx, 2006), heterosexism has allowed too many of in our profession to explain away what *we* have observed among children as "kids being kids" or to quietly overlook the ways our students' cooperating teachers reinforce values and practices counter to our university teachings. Stacey's comments attest to the importance of students seeing how *local* teachers in our *local* contexts handle these issues—so that they might believe that teachers who challenge heterosexism and homophobia *really* exist and imagine their own employment of these strategies. Stacey is right; course discussions, readings, and films like *It's Elementary* (Cohen & Chasnoff, 1997—an outstanding documentary about teachers and young people challenging homophobia in schools) are good, but they are not enough.

I write with far more questions than answers, but part of solving a problem is naming the problem and pledging to find workable solutions. If teacher educators, practicing teachers, and pre-service teachers pool our resources and knowledge, we can strengthen the preparation of the future teachers in our communities, and—therefore—the lives of the children in their

classrooms, by disrupting the reproduction of heterosexism. I like to imagine my daughter in an environment where heterosexism no longer limits her expression of values and no longer makes her a participant in the reinforcement of an environment of silence. I want Nick's next teacher to understand the support, protection, and validation he deserves and to know how to create environments where he is *not* an outsider or a victim. Most of all, I want my students to become agents for change. I encourage others—teacher educators, practicing teachers, and pre-service teachers—to join us in this work.

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