

# SEXUAL DIVERSITY AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATORS: REFLECTIONS ON A SOUTH AFRICAN TEACHER EDUCATION MODULE

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## ABSTRACT

This article is a reflection on a 5-credit, 50 hour stand-alone module titled 'Sexual Diversity and the Role of Educators' for final-year pre-service education students at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. Module development was in collaboration with 147 final-year students in 2014. This article chronicles the participatory inquiry into what pre-service educators need to be able to align their teaching practice with Section 9 of the South African constitution. Class discussions, assignments and evaluations were used to compile this reflection. As a number of visitors to class were filmed, including Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Cape Town's openly gay Imam, Muhsin Hendricks, young people from Cape Town's Triangle Project and gender activist Mmapaseka Steve Letsike, students gave written permission for each aspect of their participation in the course to be shared via film and written articles. By the end of the module, students concluded that: 1) space should be provided within teacher education programmes that allow students safe and critical self-reflection on their attitudes, beliefs and norms related to sexual diversity matters; 2) that un-learning is a crucial component of learning; 3) that for many, such a personal journey requires healing spaces be created; 4) that labelling of difference used to divide people is problematic no matter what the differences may be; 5) current 'LGBTI' labels should never be used to limit people's expression of who they are; 6) while teachers need not embrace homosexuality, teachers must defend the right of learners and colleagues to be, and to practice, whoever they are in the wide range of sexual difference and otherwise.

**Keywords:** teacher education, LGBTI, sexual diversity, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

A *Sunday Times* article of March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, titled: *Department tackles hellish bullying of gay kids at school*, captures the treatment many LGBTI learners face from teachers and their peers while at school. In a related 2012 booklet titled *Education sector responses to homophobic bullying*, UNESCO speaks of such bullying as 'a violation of learners' and teachers' rights', that it 'impedes our collective ability to achieve quality Education for all,' and that 'until now,

little attention has been paid to addressing its causes and effects' (UNESCO 2012, 7). While the South African Department of Basic Education has released a manual, *Challenging homophobic bullying in schools*, the author believes it is incumbent upon South African teacher education institutions to consider their role and the place of LGBTI matters in pre-service teacher development programmes.

This article is a reflection on the participatory development and delivery of a new course offered to final year pre-service education students in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, in partnership with the University's HIV & AIDS Programme. The new course, *Sexual diversity and the role of educators*, follows a previous one-semester course, *HIV, sexuality education and good teaching*, lessons from which were important to the success of *Sexual diversity and the role of educators*.

The impetus for creating the new course came from the author's students at the end of the first semester of 2014. During their teaching practice in schools, the students noted a high degree of bullying related to those who do not fit strict gender norms and of learners seeking guidance of how to navigate their own questions about their sexualities. The UWC students requested the 7-week stand-alone module, stating the 'did not feel confident' they would be able to address these matters when they become teachers the following year.

The article ends by making preliminary remarks about what was learned from the experience and advocates for the strengthening of pre-service education programme responses that develop future teachers' abilities to respond with empathy and compassion to all learners, no matter their sameness or difference.

## **METHODOLOGY**

*Sexual diversity and the role of educators* was developed using a participatory framework akin to Freire (1976) and Rahman (1990) with 147 final year pre-service education students at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. Pedagogical theories of Freire that a particular knowledge is held in the experiences of oppressed groups informed the organisation and teaching of the course and spoke to the necessity of bringing LGBT voices to the lecture hall. Rahman's theoretical work in learning, development and change centres around the notion of a collective journey of self-discovery. This notion informed the necessity of an underlying current of self-investigation and both personal and group discovery related to sexuality and self. Both Freire and Rahman contradict older notions of students and being blank slates for a lecturer to fill. Together, they provide a transformative methodology of teaching and learning.

The reflections contained in this article are those of the lecturer/author and the

participating students. Permission to include the content of class discussions, written assignments and student evaluations was granted under a general consent form that included filming of visitors to the class sessions.

## **TEACHER EDUCATION AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

As part of a global response to the HIV epidemic, school-based sexuality education in South and Southern Africa has received increased attention during the past decade. This is evident in UNAID's and UNESCO's East and Southern Africa (ESA) commitment that saw education ministers and representatives from 20 East and Southern African nations signing a declaration in Cape Town in December of 2013 supporting comprehensive sexuality education in their respective nations. South Africa's Department of Basic Education has worked extensively with USAID and PEPFAR over the past six years on work to develop and pilot sexuality education lesson plans for grades 7 through 9, relying extensively on the work of the late Dr. Douglas Kirby (2005). And South Africa's provincial departments of education are driving their own initiatives to develop and implement sexuality education in schools. Meanwhile, multiple international and local organisations carry on with their own initiatives to fund and deliver aspects of sexuality education in South African schools. While such attention to sexuality education is sorely needed and welcomed, an easy critique can be made about the disjointed and non-collaborative nature of these many efforts and the need for a clear vision of sexuality education for the nation. But such is not the purpose of this article.

In a 2010 article, Dennis Francis argues that 'The stakes for sexuality education in South Africa are high. It has to address very real threats – HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, sexual exploitation – without becoming doom-laden or overly technical' (2010, 318). Thankfully, a move away from the doom-laden, technical construction of sexuality education Francis cautions against that has been reported by the International Centre for Reproductive Health after holding an international conference on adolescent sexual and reproductive in Ghent in December of 2014. A paper by K. Michelsen et. al. (2016) synthesising the conference notes that adolescent sexual and reproductive health 'are broadening on different levels: from risk to well-being, from targeted and individual to comprehensive and structural, from knowledge transfer to innovative tools'.

On the front-line of sexuality education in South African schools, it has been well-documented that some teachers simply ignore the lesson plans they are meant to teach because of their own religious and cultural beliefs or discomfort with the subject, particularly when homosexuality becomes part of curriculum content (Francis 2012). Others show photographs

of sexual organs ravaged by disease in hopes that such terrible images will frighten pupils from having sex, forgetting that education theory has for many years understood that fear undermines learning. Unpublished work by Lees and Vergnani (2006) at the University of the Western Cape captures the tension between teachers lack of comfort and confidence at leading classroom lessons on sexuality that leads to their own silence and pupils stated desires to have teachers speak openly with them about sexuality, relationships, the pressures they feel to be sexually active and the ‘desperation for love’ among girls which boys say makes them easy ‘targets’ for sex. In a global review of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), UNESCO (2015, 8) finds that:

Delivering high-quality CSE requires adequate training and capacity. Teacher training remains limited in scope and, if provided at all, is usually delivered through in-service training. Consequently, teachers often feel uncomfortable and avoid discussing sensitive issues like sexual behaviour, sexuality and how students can access contraception and obtain referrals for SRH services. They also do not consistently use participatory methodologies to engage pupils fully in health and life skills education.

The above UNESCO finding strengthens an argument for the strengthening of sexuality education work within pre-service teacher education and begs the question of how we organise sexuality education as part of teacher education. Importantly, Francis (2010, 318) refers to a ‘failure to engage with the position of youth as “knowers” as opposed to innocent and seeing them as legitimate sexual subjects who can give input into what is taught’. It is precisely this understanding of young people as ‘legitimate sexual subjects’ that formed the foundation for the participatory development of *Sexual diversity and the role of educators*.

## **THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

The University of the Western Cape (UWC) outside Cape Town, South Africa, has long been associated with the nation’s move away from the repressive apartheid government toward a constitutional democracy. At significant risk, under the leadership of Professor Jakes Gerwel, UWC ‘openly defied the apartheid university policies by declaring itself as an intellectual home for the democratic left that openly sided with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited masses’ (University of the Western Cape 2016).

Under the leadership of Professor Brian O’Connell, UWC was increasingly committed to engaging in the lives and struggle for well-being of surrounding communities. It is within this context of listening and engagement that the author and his colleagues investigated teachers’ resistance to addressing HIV and sexuality-related matters in their classrooms. By 2006, we had moved beyond the belief that culture alone was the foundation for teachers’ silence in these

areas. We understood from both pre- and in-service teachers that their own traumas around HIV and sex feed their uncomfortable silence. It is against this backdrop that we have advocated for, and constructed, healing spaces within teacher education so that existing and soon-to-be teachers can process their own sexual and HIV-related traumas. Our experience is that such spaces allow for teachers to find their voices in relation to the subjects and are able to speak with learners where once they could not.

### **Sexual diversity and the role of educators background**

It is against a backdrop of creating *humanising* educational practices (akin to the work of Parker Palmer (2004, 2007) and Jerry Rosiek (2006)) and the importance of what the author calls ‘teacher kindnesses’ that the module *HIV, sexuality education and good teaching* was revised in 2014 to include a 2-hour session devoted to LGBTI matters and what this might mean for teachers and teaching. LGBTI ‘matters’ vs. ‘issues’ is an intentional use of language, seeking to avoid problematizing and pathologising LGBTI lives that the word ‘issues’ can invoke. While the module regularly challenged hetero-normativity, the revision allowed more time to unpack the charged feelings many of the students have about homosexuality. The session generated strong and varied reactions from the 300 students attending, some supportive and others bordering on disturbing. The session tried to make a comparison between attitudes toward LGBTI learners and colleagues with how racial difference has been met historically in South Africa, encouraging students to reflect on how judgement of those who are different has been used historically to justify oppression and violence. It was immediately clear that many of the students attending had never challenged their own beliefs and attitudes about homosexuality nor considered where they learned them or to what end those lessons were meant. It was at this point that the notion of ‘un-learning’ as a valuable part of learning was introduced to the students. It was at this point that the students requested a stand-alone module addressing their role in relationship to LGBTI matters. Because of their lobbying and the immediate and enthusiastic support of UWC’s then Vice Chancellor and the Dean of Education, *Sexual diversity and the role of educators* was approved as a module by university structures and rolled out as a 5-credit module in the final term of their 2014 studies.

### **Sexual diversity and the role of educators**

Francis’ call to understand students as sexual subjects was key to the participatory development of the *Sexual diversity and the role of educators* module. Parker Palmer book, *The Courage to teach*, (2007) is a plea to knowing one’s students and taking their lives as the starting point for

teaching. The author/lecturer knew that some of the students were in same-sex relationships, some openly and some not. But he had underestimated the depth of the negative charge some of the students' had around homosexuality and was surprised by its open expression. However, as part of pedagogical practice and belief, he never doubted the students' ability to reflect on their own attitudes, interrogate their origins, unlearn what they might have learned and make choices thereafter based on humanising principles and standards. He believed in their ability to learn and to transform and regularly said so. Not a single student proved him wrong.

The focus of the course was *not* to teach students about LGBTI facts and lives. It was to discover what teachers need in order to respond appropriately in and outside the curriculum to the needs and situations related to LGBTI learners and colleagues and of all learners in relationship to their emerging sexual identities. By 'in and outside the curriculum' it is implied what the author/lecturer has long believed, that a small percentage of the work of guiding young people's sexual development is curriculum based, while the majority of the work requires the commitment of all players in a schools and the development of particular school and classroom environments. The author/lecturer believes that it matters how a teacher response to a learner bullying another learners because of assumptions about his or her sexuality in the hallway; that teachers do not make disparaging comments about LGBTI individuals or about homosexuality in general; that teachers are not quiet bystanders to bullying, abuse and injustice. Seen in this light, sexuality education, including responses to LGBTI matters, is the task and responsibility of all teachers, not simply Life Orientation teachers, and should not only rest in the domain of curriculum developers.

Section Nine of the South African constitution made the work of the module simple, protecting the rights of all people in South Africa regardless of sexual orientation. As employees and representatives of the state, teachers in South Africa are charged with manifesting the constitution in their teaching content and through their behaviour expressed throughout the day while they are at school. Any teacher who stands up in school and states that homosexuality is wrong and disparages LGBTI individuals contradicts the nation's constitution. Do some teachers speak out against homosexuality and disparage LGBTI learners and colleagues at school? Yes. The author/lecture saw that part of the task of the module was to counter these biases and prejudices in teachers.

*Sexual diversity and the role of educators* began by unpacking the history, meaning and definitions of LGBTI. LGBTI meant that students first needed to understand the difference between one's 'sex' and one's 'gender' and to better understand the notion of 'social constructions'. On the first day of the module, intense anger was expressed by several men

when a photograph of two African women in romantic partnership with each other was projected on the screen. A previous picture of two white women in wedding dresses kissing each other garnered little response other than 'that's fine' from most of the students. But in this following picture, one woman had long hair and a dress while the second wore pants, a strap T-shirt and sported short hair and tattoos. 'I don't care if she wants to be a lesbian,' said one of the male students. 'But why does she have to look like a man?' Others agreed. Rather than condemning the student's statement, the author/lecturer praised him for his openness and stated that it is only when people are willing to share their experiences and beliefs that learning can begin. In this case, the student's statement made in anger was used as an example of what the module would try to unpack and understand. The author/lecturer did not make him or those who agreed with him feel wrong, wanting them to return to subsequent class sessions and knowing that unlearning deeply entrenched attitudes is a long journey. The class spoke of the importance of challenging what we have learned, questioning the source and purpose of our learnings. It was clear to the students that, like *HIV, sexuality education and good teaching, Sexual diversity and the role of educators* would be a challenging personal and not simply intellectual journey for everyone involved.

It is an important finding that gender non-conformity angered some of the students more than homosexuality itself. 'Women should look like women,' some said, making a critical understanding of how gender is socially constructed all the more relevant for the course. Some of the students defined homosexual men as women, with one male student articulating that, 'If he is a she, than I cannot be a man when she is around me when I am with other men because it is against our male code to have a woman present when we are being men together. Her being there does not allow me to be a man.' Consequently, the student affirmed, a homosexual man must be rejected to preserve the maleness of the student and his male friends. And while many of the students said they see lesbian women as male, this assigned male gender does not afford those women access to the rights, privileges and conversations of men that homosexual men defined as women are also denied access to.

With the expression of such strong discomfort and even disgust of gay men and lesbian women coming on the first day of module, the author/lecturer felt the need to open a discussion about the extreme level of violence that has been perpetrated on homosexuals in South Africa and abroad and challenge some of the students' attitudes as being at the root of violence. In a tense session, photos were shown of a white man and a black woman kissing. 'Does this make you uncomfortable?' the students were asked. 'Not at all,' was the general reply. 'But would it make your parents or grandparents uncomfortable?' 'Definitely yes.' The student responses

indicated their parents and grandparents would have even greater discomfort with a black man seen kissing a white woman. 'It was against their rules and the laws,' the students said. 'And they still feel that way.' One woman indicated the bias still exists as she has a boyfriend who is 'only slightly darker' than she is. He is not allowed in her parent's home because of his colour.

Referring to the work of Hudak and Kihn (2014) on labelling and how labels are used to divide people and consolidate power in particular hands, the students were asked to 'play out' their discomfort around racial difference to see where it would lead. 'What do people do with their discomfort?' At that point, students were shown historic images of the lynching and burning of black men and women from South Africa and the United States. 'And now let's turn to South Africa and people who dare to love someone of their same sex. How far will you take your discomfort?' the students were asked. Slides of men and women who had been violently attacked because of their sexual orientation accompanied the question. The photos stopped at the mother of Noxolo Nogwaza's sitting by her daughter's grave. In 2011, Noxolo's body was found in a drainage ditch in the Kwa Thema township near Johannesburg. She had been raped; her body had been mutilated; her eyes were pulled from their sockets; her brain was split open; and her teeth had been scattered around her body. 'Will you take your discomfort this far?' the students were asked. 'Because some people do. The belief that they have the right to kill someone because of their difference, in this case because of who they loved, is learned. We are not born with these beliefs. They come from somewhere. Do you have the courage to explore and challenge your own beliefs and attitudes and the strength to change them?'

Importantly for the module, the students spoke of witnessing attitudes that justify brutality toward sexual difference and gender non-conformity going unchallenged by teachers and being held by teachers in schools. Slowly, the matter of gender non-conformity and same-sex love was becoming personal. The students began to see Palmer's point, that *who* one is as a teacher is as important as *what* one knows, and that they would have to decide if they will be part of allowing these kinds of attitudes that result with people being killed because of who they love to persist.

The works of Paulo Freire (1976) helped to challenge the students further. 'Freire tells us about oppression and what we do with it,' said the author/lecturer. 'It is a choice he brings directly to you. South Africa has a brutal and violent past of oppression. It touched every one of you and continues to echo in how you think about yourselves and the choices you make. But Freire wants to know what you have learned from oppression. Will you simply fill the oppressors shoes when you become powerful, or will you stand for every person's humanness and stand against all forms of violence, brutality, discrimination and oppression? Who will you



be in your classrooms and schools when you take on the powerful label of “teacher”? Will you stand up for difference or will you make jokes about someone who makes you uncomfortable? Will you explore your own discomfort and try to understand it, or will you simply shoot arrows or emotional bullets or maybe even real bullets at the person or the people who offend you? This is about who you are going to be as a teacher and as a person.’

While this was a powerful moment of collective self-reflection in our classroom, the discussion illustrated the gap between the students’ ability to *define* ‘critical self-reflection skills’ and their ability to be critically self-reflective – again, a mark of a good teacher. While the students know they are meant to develop self-reflective and critical thinking skills in their learners, it is one thing to talk about the skills and another to embody them as part of how we approach our world. It is the irony of the ideas of Paulo Freire being taught using the banking method of education.

### **SAFE SPACES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Being critically self-reflective in a public classroom requires that a lecturer and students have together created a safe space. It is a mark of the safety students felt in the *Sexual diversity and the role of educators* classroom, both with each other and with the lecturer, that they were able to express their own feelings and attitudes, no matter how negative, discriminatory, risky or disturbing they might be. The success of *Sexual diversity and the role of educators* was in part predicated on non-judgemental practices of the lecturer and the relationships of trust and openness built earlier during the *HIV, sexuality education and good teaching* module. The students’ already knew the importance of truly open discussions being part of collectively figuring something out. In the case of both courses, students were told on the first day that they are not going to be told what to do as teachers in relationship to HIV, human sexuality, sexual violence or homosexuality. Rather, they were given the collective responsibility for understanding all these matters and creating ways forward for themselves as individuals and as future teachers. As such, they were challenged to be educational innovators. One role of the lecturer, then, was to praise students for bringing difficult matters into the open because only then could we truly understand our subject and begin our learning. For many students, and indeed for the lecturer, it meant stepping beyond being offended by a comment or attitude so that together we could create avenues for unlearning what many of us have been taught that divides us. Repeatedly, we discovered unlearning as the misunderstood and unrecognised partner of learning. President Nelson Mandela shows how he understood unlearning understood in this often-quoted passage:

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its' opposite. (1995)

The class agreed that President Mandela would now include 'sexual orientation' in his statement.

### **SELF-REFLECTION FOLLOW-UP**

To reinforce the self-reflection started in the class session described above, students were assigned a short reflective essay of three questions: 1. Please explore your early memories of when you first learned about the existence of LGBTI individuals. How old were you? Who told you? What was the emotional charge of the people you learned about LGBTI from? What did you think and feel at the time? Tell this as you would a story about your life. 2. In this same vein, think about the first time you might have used the word 'gay' or other similar ways in a negative way toward someone else. How did you respond to people you knew were LGBTI? You might not have responded negatively, but if you have, take a chance to explore it. Again tell this as a story. And, 3. What do you feel now about how you learned about LGBTI's existence and about how you acted toward LGBTI people in the past? Would you change anything about how you learned or about how you acted?

The short essay assignment succeeded in getting students to do the personal exploration of their own attitudes toward LGBTI and question themselves if they wanted to continue with homophobic or discriminatory beliefs and actions. In a follow-up class discussion, the lecturer stated that if one is to continue to discriminate against LGBTI individuals, then one needed to be honest and forthright that they had made the conscious choice to hate, a choice that is contrary to what both Archbishop Makgoba (2014) and Imam Hendricks (2014) would be sharing with the class about their own spiritual beliefs and perspectives. The difficulty of the road of unlearning students' were being asked to travel is brilliantly captured by Prof. Dennis Franz of the University of the Free State (2015) about the origin of our attitudes being from the people we love. To challenge those learned attitudes means to, at least indirectly, challenge those we have loved, looked to and relied upon for so long, often from birth.

### **RELIGION**

Some of the predominantly Christian students raised the belief that homosexuality is a sin, referring to Leviticus in the Christian Old Testament and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah found in both Christian and Muslim texts. While the matter of religion would be taken up directly in the following class sessions, during the very challenging session described above,

the lecturer showed a close-up photo of two African men in a passionate kiss. Shouts and groans came from throughout the lecture hall. 'Let me ask you one question,' the lecturer interrupted. 'Many of you believe deeply in Jesus. So tell me this. If Jesus saw two men doing this (referring to the slide on the screen), would he do this to them?', the lecturer advancing to the following slide which showed the sutured face of a young African man who had been severely cut with a knife because of his sexual orientation. 'You have to decide,' the lecturer said. 'Where do you stand?' It was a risky move for a lecturer. The question was clear and bold. Would Jesus cut a man's face with a knife for being homosexual? It prompted deep and very critical self-reflection on the part of some of the students who had used what they had heard in church to condemn homosexuals. What would Jesus do? The class decided he would respond only with love. The reflection brought the lesson home, while leaving many students with conflicting inner emotions toward those they had learned these attitudes from, emotions they would have to resolve in the coming weeks.

The subjects of HIV and sexuality education cannot be responsibly taught without reference to religion. And they cannot be taught without engaging and being responsible to the emotions of students involved. The same is true for sexual diversity. While the students distanced themselves from violence in those first two class sessions, some of the students continued to grapple with the question of homosexuality being a sin. In the third week, students were delighted with the visit by the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town and Southern Africa, Reverend Thabo Makgoba. The Archbishop has been a leader in challenging the South African government to condemn the harsh violence perpetrated on gay and lesbian individuals in Uganda and the attempt of that state to create legislation that would imprison homosexuals (one draft of the proposed legislation advocated death for homosexuals). The Archbishop spent nearly three hours with the students, exchanging ideas, beliefs and experiences, fielding tough questions about homosexuality and sin.

'For me, the gospel of Jesus Christ is about love,' the Archbishop stated. 'Jesus commanded us to love. But,' the Archbishop emphasised in the subtly dramatic and somewhat reprimanding manner of Archbishops when they want you to pay closer attention, 'He never said to stop using your brains.' The Archbishop would not give a categorical answer about sin. He refused to make it easy for the lay-preachers among the students who wanted a direct answer. Rather, the Archbishop spoke about how he understood Christian values, cautioning students against literal interpretations of a 2000 year old text, understanding texts outside of their historical context and not considering the world as it is today.

Asked about violence against LGBTI individuals, the Archbishop reinforced discussions

from the previous two class sessions:

Our past in South Africa taught us horrible things. It has taught too many of us to divide and hate. It has taught us that violence against someone who is different is acceptable. These are the attitudes that you as teachers have the duty to heal in your learners and in yourselves. Don't misunderstand me. I am not blaming you for attitudes you may have toward people of a different skin colour or a different sexual orientation. I am saying clearly that these attitudes were taught. None of us fully escaped these lessons. As teachers, our task is to first critically challenge those old beliefs and attitudes within ourselves. We should understand Section 9 of the constitution and the vision of the South African state and understand that it grew out of a rejection of persecution and condemnation of people because of their difference. And we must try to understand, as I have understood, that this vision of the state really is about learning to love each other better, regardless of any of our differences.

The Archbishop concluding that his understanding of the Gospel is similar. That we must love.

### **A CHOICE?**

While the lecturer were attempting to redefine 'choice' related to sexuality as only about the choice to accept or condemn, to love or to hate, the students had varied opinions on whether one is 'born gay' or if 'being gay is a choice'. Reference was made back to earlier gender spectrum discussions and the possible fluidity of sexuality throughout one's lifetime. Again the students confronted defined categories that, while no longer binary, fail to capture the many-storied lives of human beings in relation to who they love and with whom they make love.

The Youtube films of Laci Green proved very helpful in helping the class understand sexuality and sexual diversity. Students could relate easily to Green, a young, articulate activist who is not afraid to speak with humour on uncomfortable subjects. In several films, Green repeatedly makes the point that homosexuality is not a choice and that bodily attraction cannot be determined by will. Green asks why someone would willingly decide to be a target of name-calling, rejection and violence.

Settling the issue of choice vs. intrinsic nature helped students who tended toward discriminatory attitudes to reframe their own constructions of LGBTI individuals. They reported that their own re-construction resulted in feeling a greater confidence that they would be able to respond more appropriately to LGBT learners and colleagues than they might have in the past.

### **STUDENTS FINDING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

The internet is an exciting resource for self-learning and students who were in the class continued to share links they found meaningful. One such link is to the Scottish film on

Youtube, *SHH! Silence helps homophobia*. The 7-minute film takes place in a high school with pupils, a teachers and a gay child's father ignoring homophobic comments made to the young man. The film replays showing how we all can make a difference by finding our voices and standing up for each other, against discrimination as it happens. The films ends with the father saying, 'Son, you don't have to deal with it [an offensive SMS message] yourself, let me help you,' and together they speak with the teacher.

Another film that was shared was *Love is all you need?*, a piece that imagines a world where heterosexuality is the exception and plays out the reaction to a school girl who is accused of liking boys. Flipping the classroom in this way allowed students to watch films during the week and use the class time to discuss their feelings and what they learned. One man reported that after watching *SHH! Silence helps homophobia*, he confronted his friends he was out with on a Saturday night who were speaking unkindly to a gay man. To his surprise, intervening in his friends' discriminatory conversation was successful. Similar films were discovered by students and shared, including an interview with former South African Justice Minister, Jeff Radebe, talking about LGBTI rights; Wentworth Miller on his coming out at a Human Rights Campaign event; A Full Frontal Freedom's #LOVEDANCE; and, a number of films of individuals telling their coming out stories.

Education theorists have long understood the necessity of engaging both intellect and emotion for teaching to be effective (Rosiek 2006). The uses of films within the course strengthened the affective component of learning and unlearning, with the stories of coming out, discrimination and violence told by various individuals who experienced them on film and in person made the subject and the lives of LGBTI individuals real and more difficult to ignore or discriminate against. Students were able to walk in the shoes of LGBTI individuals, if only through the stories they told, and further develop their empathic abilities important to teaching.

## **BULLYING, ACTIVE LEARNING MAKING IT REAL**

By encouraging active learning throughout the course, the students were challenged to engage in higher-order thinking tasks, problem solve and think about what they would be doing in their future classrooms. A visit to class by teenage learners from Cape Town's Triangle Project (2014) surprised most of us when we learned from the lesbian and bi-sexual young women that the major source of bullying in schools against them is not from fellow learners but from teachers. One lesbian learner spoke of being taken into an empty classroom by two teachers and told to lock the door and strip off her clothes. When she asked why, the teachers said they 'wanted to see what is inside those pants she wears and if they have her gender properly

identified on their school registers.’

*Sexual diversity and the role of educators* grew in part out of an identified need by pre-service education students to learn how to respond to bullying they saw in their practice schools. Addressing teachers as bullies required the route of collective critical self-reflection referred to above and that was part of students’ experience in *HIV, sexuality education and good teaching*. Figuring out how they would respond to learners who bully other learners because of a perceived difference in sexual orientation or because a learners simply steps outside rigid gender norms allowed students to consider how they were being taught to handle ‘discipline’ in their future classrooms.

Psychiatrist Karin Clark (2011) writes of the predominance of punishment as a form of behaviour control. As we explored in class the experience of students with how their behaviours were regulated in their schooling careers, students spoke of their teachers’ use of threats of violence and violence to achieve the behaviours among learners they wanted. Significantly, many of the students were hit by teachers in their earlier years of schooling. Many said that they preferred to be physically hit than subjected to the humiliation and shaming that replaced hitting as a form of behavioural control. Responding to further enquiry, several of the students agreed with one woman’s statement that, ‘In the days when teachers could hit you, you go hit, it hurt, it felt better in an hour or a day and that was it. Once teachers were no longer allowed to hit, they humiliated us in front of others. And those hurts,’ the woman explained, ‘are still with us.’ The students’ remark made us remember the quote of Maya Angelou used to guide teacher development in the first semester: ‘They will forget what you said and they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel’. The quote and the discussion were very relevant to questions about how teachers make young people questioning their own sexuality feel about themselves. Teachers, the students said said, can leave long-lasting scars in their learners that can lead to lifetime resentments or they can build confidence and self-esteem in their learners that will help them navigate a world that can treat difference harshly. Clark writes that punishment rarely achieves its desired outcome and declares it is a ‘completely ineffective way to change anyone’s behaviour’. More effective, she believes, are strategies of *shaping* behaviour by rewarding hints of the desired behaviour and *positive reinforcement*.

On the first day of *Sexual diversity and the role of educators*, students were given a scenario of the bullying of two boys who did not conform to masculine gender norms in the fifth grade. The students were told that the situation had come to the attention of the deputy principal and that he was now asking for a one-page written plan to resolve the situation. In class, the students wrote their plans. In the following six weeks, their plans served as marker

posts for the learning that was taking place in our classroom.

Most of the students proposed that harsh punishment should be meted out against the offending bullies. Several disagreed, believing that humiliating the bullies in front of their peers will only feed their bullying and drive it underground. Bullies, they said, can hold grudges for years and wait for moments when they can continue with their reign of terror inside and outside the school. As a form of punishment, it would not change the attitudes or consciousness of the bully but simply teach the bully to avoid getting caught. Nor would it support a dynamic where the bullying parties would understand more about their own need to bully and about the impact of their behaviour. Several students proposed a longer and more difficult route of transforming the bullying students into allies of the two targeted boys. They noted that the existence of bullying says something about the climate and culture of the classroom and school and the culture and climate of the home and society. The discussion continued to consider bullying in school as a grab for power by those who feel powerless and how the dynamic of bullying can be experienced throughout a school and society. From this discussion we began to create a list of tips for good teaching, the first being: *Never make anyone feel small*, and the second, *Never let anyone make you feel small*.

Bullying in South African schools is a complex subject and worthy of deeper thought and research. While *Sexual diversity and the role of educators* did not have time to respond to the students' worries that they will have too many learners, too many pressures as teachers, and too little time to address their learners' lives. Such is the dynamic of South African schools in the age of CAPS and increased testing, a dynamic in itself that needs more critical examination. The students' did note, however, that the dynamic will probably leave them with few options for behavioural guidance than punishment, and that the developmental aspect of their practice will most certainly get lost. Nonetheless, they understood the ultimate goal of alliance-building across all differences, not simply with LGBTI learners and colleagues, and the necessity of finding one's voice as a teacher to be able to speak up when witnessing wrongs against anyone.

## **REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

A one-term course within a teacher education programme should have clear and concise objectives. While there are many relevant avenues important to explore, the course should hopefully inspire students to do further exploration and learning on their own. Matters such as the histories of sexualities, gender inequalities, sexuality and politics and social movements are important to understand but could only be briefly referred to in this course. The intent of UWC's course was to prepare pre-service educators to respond appropriately to LGBTI learners and

colleagues and as an important component within sexuality education. By rooting the course in Section 9 of the South African constitution versus technical and public health approaches, negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals could be explored, understood and in some cases unlearned. The challenge of the course as identified by the participating students was to guide pre-service educators through a very emotional and personal process of collective and critical self-reflection that would move them beyond the negative attitudes and discriminatory actions some of them held and enacted.

In this age where knowledge is readily available through Smart phones and learning communities are emerging around various subjects, it was a goal of the course that some of the students would continue to share and learn together. Each year, UWC's education students create a facebook account where they share their experiences in their respective classrooms once they begin teaching. It is hoped that this course will assist and expand the dialogue within that on-going conversation.

Part of the success of this course was a result of the relationships of trust and the creation of a safe environment in the first semester's *HIV, sexuality education and good teaching* course. When done well, both courses can add value to an overall teacher education curriculum by building on good teaching practice, helping pre-service educators unpack their own attitudes and experiences related to sexuality and expand the conversation of how teachers at this particular juncture in South Africa's history can be role models of how we meet difference; stand up for the rights and well-being of all people; and, stand against violence in any form. Both courses encouraged the enrolment of students from various subject areas and see the responsibilities for sexuality education, HIV prevention, sexual violence prevention and the creation of safe spaces for LGBTI learners and teachers to be every teacher's responsibility and a matter of the environment created in a whole school.

What made this course experience extraordinary for the lecturer was when the final year education students stated that they were not attending class every week simply for their own edification and learning. They were not there only for themselves. They were there for their future learners, wanting to serve them better, to protect them and respond to who they are. These are the qualities of good teachers, willing to challenge their own attitudes and beliefs so that they can be there for their learners. This is the beauty and strength that lie at the core of the profession and results in the human and humanising kindnesses of teachers and a next generation of young people who respond to sexual and all other difference with understanding, openness, kindness and care.

As a final conclusion, the lecturer/author believe that preparing pre-service education



students to teach sexuality education in schools requires a vision of sexuality education that itself is aligned with a vision of education as a humanising project. It is within our sexual and intimate relationships that we can learn and develop the best parts of ourselves as human beings, or express the worst of who we can be. Rather than sexuality education in schools being geared toward the reduction of sexual activity through the construction of sexuality as harm, danger and risk, the author suggests that sexuality education grounded in a humanising vision could help young people alter their relationships to each other and to themselves and in so doing change the nature of their own sexual expression in positive ways.

## STUDENT EVALUATIONS

At the conclusion of the module, students were asked to evaluate their experience qualitatively and quantitatively. The evaluations showed a self-reported increased in confidence that they will be able to respond to learners questioning their sexualities and that they will be able to intervene when fellow teachers speak inappropriately about homosexuality or LGBTI individuals. A common theme in the evaluations was students experiencing themselves as less judgemental because of the module and more apt to be compassionate toward all difference. Key to the intended outcomes, one student wrote that he/she now understands that you don't have to agree with someone's life in order to support them and love them.

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