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Imagining and Moving Towards Nurturing Queer Identities in Alberta Schools: A Narrative Inquiry

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Imagining and Moving Towards Nurturing Queer Identities in Alberta Schools: A Narrative

Inquiry

by

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Abstract

Alberta Education states that they operate within a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students. Despite this statement, recent evidence shows that within Alberta schools, queer identities are excluded, homogenized, or simply tolerated within educational institutions. The discrepancy across the province of treatment and commitment to queer education impacts if and how topics surrounding queer identities are taught. Given that Albertan educational institutions are not equally committed to teaching queerness, the present study asks the question: how can schools move towards nurturance of queer identities? Using the language in the Riddle Scale (1994), this study employs narrative inquiry and queer theory to interrogate, trouble, and queer educational institutions to ask how various educational actors can embody the core of nurturance, where queer people are seen as indispensable in society. Data collected from two primary data sets— publicly sourced information on queer educational programming, and semi-structured interviews with queer educational specialists—revealed various dynamics that contribute to lack of nurturing queer educational programs in Alberta schools. From data analysis, two resonant threads (themes) emerged: (1) the unique context of queer identities in Alberta; and, (2) misconceptions surrounding age, sex, and the subsequent complications of teaching queerness. While nurturance cannot be defined in one particular way, this thesis seeks to queer what education could be, and with the narratives of queer educational providers, imagines a future in which queer identities are nurtured across the province.

Keywords: Queer; education; nurturance; Alberta; Alberta education; narrative inquiry; queer theory.

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Ch.1 Introduction

Who am I?: Before I dive in, I first would like to introduce myself. I am Emilie (she/her), a queer, cisgender, White woman. I am conducting this research in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. I was born in Northern Alberta, in Fort McMurray. Known for its oil sands and transient community, people are surprised to hear that someone my age was actually born and raised there. There is a strange point of pride and sadness within me whenever I share that I am from Fort McMurray. Growing up there, I had access to the outdoors, and would spend Sunday mornings in the winter learning how to cross-country ski and in the summer, would run through the same trails to read in my favourite hiding spot in the woods. However, this land that I grew up on was not mine. As a White settler I economically and socially benefit from colonial land-based violence that takes place in the traditional territories of the Treaty 8 peoples where I grew up, and on Treaty 7 territory where I live today. I conduct this study with the awareness of my positionality – I am someone who perpetuates violence and experiences violence. I want to establish that every story, whether it be about a particular time, person, or place, is complicated and unique. Being a human in the world is to be a walking contradiction because we all embody and live in the world in such complex ways. Yes, I grew up in conservative Fort McMurray. Yes, I am queer and political and loud and opinionated. Yes, I benefit from White supremacy and yes, I also try to work towards being anti-racist every day. Yes, I am an educator and, yes, I still have so much to learn.

Matrilineally, I am the fourth generation educator in my family. I tried to escape my fate by studying other fields, but soon realized that my passion and talent lies in education. Despite not being a professionally certified teacher, I began to understand at a young age that learning spaces can be created wherever there are people who want to learn. Growing up in isolated,

northern Alberta I did not have access any queer education and, because of this, I am passionate about uplifting my queer community and challenging heteronormativity in society.

Thesis question: My thesis asks; **how can schools move towards nurturance of queer identities?** Emerging out of my lived experiences, my desire for socially just education, and the concern and love I have for my queer community, I seek to examine the intersecting and complex ways queer identities are excluded, homogenized, or tolerated within educational institutions. Using the Riddle Scale (1994) as a guide for defining levels of classification and providing language, I used two primary data sets to demonstrate the various dynamics that contribute to lack of appreciative or nurturing queer educational programs in the school system. One data set is publicly available information regarding queer educational programs in Alberta sourced from online searches. Another set is interviews with participants who work at the Qmmunity Centre [1](pseudonym) in Calgary, Alberta. In my research, I interrogate, trouble, and queer educational institutions in order to ask how schools and school curriculum can embody the concept of nurturance, where queer people are seen as indispensable in society

Coffee shops, elections, and ongoing violence: On the evening of the 2019 Alberta Provincial Election, my phone did not stop buzzing. My friends were calling and texting me the minute the results were announced. That night, scattered across the province, from large cities to small towns, we stayed up together. My friends are educators, activists, community organizers and leaders, and most of us identify as queer. This election weighed heavy on our shoulders and, for months leading up to the election, we pushed back our fears of what would happen if the United Conservative Party was elected. On election night our fear and anxiety came to the surface. We all asked each other, "What is going to happen to queer people now?" This question

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[1] The organization I researched within asked to be anonymized. I chose Qmmunity Centre as a pseudonym. Qmmunity Centre is not a real organization name within Calgary.

of what will happen to queer people is constantly on my mind. The election contributed to a heightened fear but, overall, the work that I do both in my personal and academic life is centred on the continued uncertain future for queer people.

Flash forward to December 2019. I was sitting working on this thesis in a local coffee shop. Working alongside some friends, the music to which I was listening stopped, and the conversations happening around the café floated into my consciousness. A man who was speaking loudly while waving his arms around caught my attention. He talked about how free speech was being threatened by the queer community. I was angry but, because I live in Alberta, this is unfortunately a conversation that I hear daily. He did not stop there though, and loudly escalated his hatred. He announced that he supported the murder of queer people, and that Hitler and Stalin had the right ideas of annihilating a population of people. Instead of writing my thesis, spending time with friends, and enjoying a good cup of coffee, I spent the afternoon documenting and filing a hate crime. Hateful vitriol, violence and the threat of death is not anything new, but to sit there, well, I cannot describe how terrifying it is to sit next to someone who openly wants you dead.

I actually wrote most of my thesis in coffee shops and, nine out of ten times while working, I would hear homophobic and transphobic conversations from the people around me. It got to the point that, if I was working alone without friends, I would hide my queer theory textbooks and dress less visibly queer. This did not prevent people from talking and engaging with me, though. Typically, people would ask what I was working on, and being optimistic (or naïve), I never shied away from telling them about my thesis. Once they heard I studied queer education, I would receive a mix of reactions. While some were positive and supportive, the

majority were bigoted, violent, or ignorant. I have been told by people that conversion therapy[2] is

important, that queerness should not be taught in schools, that I was wasting my time, or most

commonly, that they were going to pray for me. I have always been cautious as a queer person,

but this year I have seen and heard an escalation of openly homophobic and transphobic

comments. Instead of being a safe working space, coffee shops actually ended up being an

uncertain space where, every day, I could either be supported or receive death threats.

I do not know if there is a correlation with a new government, or with the state of the

world, but my experiences writing this thesis reinforced and demonstrated how necessary and

important it is that schools are: (a) places that are nurturing for queer students, (b) places that

teach queer education, and (c) places that teach queer pedagogy and ways of knowing. It makes

me wonder if heteronormativity was constantly challenged through comprehensive and inclusive

education, would we have people like Jason Kenney[3] in the world? Would we have angry,

hateful men yelling in coffee shops that they think it is a good idea to murder queer people?

Would people come up to me to share their homophobic and transphobic beliefs every time I

wanted to work? In many ways, Alberta is a participant in this thesis. From the beginning, my

work has been influenced and shaped by Alberta. While the questions I am asking are broad, the

discussions in this thesis are very Alberta specific. I would like to believe that through not only

teaching queer education, but actively queering educational institutions, we could begin creating

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[2] Conversion therapy is a discredited, harmful practice that attempts to use psychological "or spiritual intervention to change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression" (Hudes, 2020). In Alberta, conversion therapy is still being practiced, particularly by faith organizations. In Calgary alone, there are at least ten evangelical churches still performing conversion therapy programs (Hudes, 2020). Queer activist and professor Kristopher Wells based in Edmonton, Alberta states that "'conversion therapy' is somewhat of a misnomer. It's actually better understood as torture" (Hudes, 2020).

[3] Jason Kenney is a Canadian politician, currently serving as the Premier of Alberta under the United Conservative party since 2019. He has a long history of anti-queer activism. In 2000, he even bragged about "overturning a spousal law in San Fransico that allowed gay men to visit their dying partners in the hospital during the AIDS epidemic" (Lourenco, 2018).

a world in which homophobia and transphobia do not exist. We would be teaching that homophobia is layered and complex, and that any form of homophobic attitudes or behaviours are unacceptable. We would be creating a world that was safer for queer people to live in. I argue that, if nurturance is taught from a young age, we would feel the ripple effects throughout all areas of society.

Queerness requires more than acceptance: During the time I wrote this thesis, Alberta had two elections[4] which impacted both my life and research, particularly because the new provincial government quickly honed in on the educational system. I strongly believe that the personal is political, and both personal politics and public politics have deeply impacted how I think and act in the world. I am not approaching this research with an apolitical stance, because I am embedded in this research as a queer person, as an educator, and as a person who grew up in isolated, northern Alberta. I am highly invested in education that challenges systemic injustice and institutionalized oppression. As I was first thinking about what I was going to research for my master's thesis, I decided that I wanted to create more inclusive, queer curriculum. When I thought through how that might be articulated, I realized that there already exist educational programs and resources run primarily by not-for-profits or government-funded organizations. I realized that, instead of creating more resources, I wanted to dig more deeply into why schools are still failing queer students—despite Canada decriminalizing homosexuality in 1969 (CBC, 2012); prohibiting discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation in 1980 (CBC, 2012); legalizing queer marriage in 2005 (CBC, 2012); and passing Bill C-16 in 2017, which updated the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to include the terms 'gender identity'

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[4] The first election was the 2019 Alberta general election, held on April 16, 2019. The Jason Kenny-led United Conservative Party won the vote, and 63 seats. The second election was the Canadian federal election, held on October 21, 2019, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party won 157 seats to form a minority government.

and 'gender expression' thereby making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity or expression (Queer Events, n.d.). Despite Alberta Education (2019) stating that "Alberta's education system is built on a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all children and students. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students" (p. 29), the research, alongside my own personal experiences, actually shows that queer identities are not universally accepted, included, or taught.

One of the many instigators of my research was my interactions with teachers when I would mention queer education or queer identities. Teachers would immediately tell me how much they accepted their queer students. They would share how they support their queer students and that they saw all their students as equally valuable. They would go on to state that their students' genders and sexualities did not matter to them and that their students would be treated the same regardless of how they identified. While I understood the point they were trying to make about caring for their students equally, they unfortunately missed the mark entirely. By homogenizing their students, the teachers failed to recognize that queer students *are* going to have different experiences in school and society than their non-queer peers. Queer students will have a unique school experience because queer people around the world have different histories and lived experiences than non-queer people. Queer history and identities should not have to assimilate into educational institutions that continue to marginalize queerness. I seek to investigate how schools can move towards recognizing queerness and queer identities as indispensable. My research does not centralize on particular queer students' experiences, rather more broadly on queer identities. The goal of my research is to investigate what nurturance could look like within educational institutions, rather than focusing in on specific scenarios. The goal is

to understand how educational institutions reproduce power structures, like heteronormativity, which makes it difficult to teach and introduce queer topics.

I noticed a desperate need for a radical shift for queer education that is more than meager tolerance or acceptance when I co-designed a pilot social justice leadership program for students in grades four to six. The yearlong program covered a variety of topics, including colonization, war and peace, and mental health issues, but there was a notable resistance to incorporating any queer topics. I wondered why, given the strides Canada has taken in queer rights, Canadian educational institutions are still hesitant to dig more deeply into queer education. In the next section, I contextualize this thesis within Alberta's educational system, in order to understand both the history of education and to establish why Canadian educational institutions continue to fail queer people.

Being queer in school: Admittedly, I am tired of opening up a paper about queer people and being bombarded with stories of our struggles. I would say that a significant number of the papers I read in writing this thesis began by sharing some kind of highly depressing statistic about queer youth experiences. As a queer person, it is difficult to find the words to describe how hard it is to sift through the literature about queer youth experiences in school, dig into what is happening in my province, and articulate the disconnect between performative actions and reality. Reflecting upon my own experiences, I chose not to share that I was queer with my peers when I was in school. I did not have any examples of queer people who were happy, successful, and surrounded by friends and loved ones and, because of this, I pushed my identity aside so I could have a chance at a happy life. I would walk down the same grey hallways day after day not realizing how much that every moment I was not living in my truth and sharing it with others, I was slowly harming myself. It was not as if there were no other queer students in my school,

most of them were my friends, but the school environment was overwhelmingly not welcoming or safe for me to come out.

Presently though, I have a lot of joy in my life, and have never been this comfortable with myself, which is why it is challenging to open up my thesis only discussing my negative experiences. Queerness is joyful and wonderful, but is rarely framed as such. Even in this thesis, I have fallen into the same depressing narrative outline by highlighting how educational systems, governmental policies, and school boards have, in some way, failed queer people. Throughout this thesis, I outline the various ways in which queerness is still debated, challenged, and erased. If we are to move towards nurturance, where queer people are indispensable in society, it feels uncomfortable to start by listing all the ways in which we currently are not, because I see us as indispensable *already*. It is up to straight, cisgender people to meet us on that level. While I recognize these stories need to be shared, I also do not think there is enough balance; queer people can exist in multitudes, not always linked to pain or trauma.

In a brilliant letter, Eve Tuck (2009) calls on communities, researchers, and educators to consider the long-term impact of this kind of damage centred research—"research that intends to document peoples' pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression" (p. 409). Tuck urges us to re-vision research, not only to document the effects of oppression, but also to consider the long-term repercussions of "thinking of ourselves as broken" (p.409). Damage-centred research reinforces a one-dimensional notion of people's experiences, which I think might be why I am so tired and cautious of opening another study with statistics about the harm queer people experience. I am tired of being represented as only broken or needing to be saved. Queer people do not need to be saved. We need ongoing commitment to dismantling systemic injustice through self-reflective and conscious action, not pity or rescuing. Tuck's

(2009) letter was written particularly from an Indigenous perspective with Indigenous communities in mind, contextualizing her work on how research about Indigenous communities has been historically damage-centred, where Indigenous peoples are portrayed as "defeated and broken" (p. 412). I do not mean to appropriate or correlate queer experiences with Indigenous experiences (though of course there are queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous people who experience this correlation), but I do find Tuck's writing to be powerful for examining how marginalized peoples' identities and experiences are shared, especially as I struggle through this section of my thesis. In her letter, Tuck also highlights how Indigenous communities, poor communities, communities of color, and disenfranchised communities "tolerate this kind of data gathering because there is an implicit and sometimes explicit assurance that stories of damage pay off in material, sovereign, and political wins" (p. 414). I imagine most of the studies I have read pertaining to the experiences of queer people in schools have this goal in mind. I am sure I feel the requirement to include it because of a deeply ingrained belief that this thesis will only be taken seriously if I first share how damaging educational institutions are. Tuck (2009) shares that she is concerned with research that only invites oppressed people to speak from a space of pain. For her, a damage-centred framework centres pain and loss as a way to obtain particular political gains. In my research, I know that it is important to contextualize how queer identities are marginalized within educational institutions because it is what makes educational or governmental actors take notice of issues, but why is it the dominant lens that is shared? Testifying to damage so that persecutors will be forced to be accountable is so popular in social science research that people might think that is what social science is all about (Tuck, 2009). This is particularly true in educational research, where "it's not difficult to recall scores of studies that portray schools and communities primarily as broken, emptied, or flattened" (p. 414). Her

letter troubles the common narrative that research is exclusively about sharing the stories of the "broken and conquered" (p. 416), and highlights that "damage can no longer be the only way, or even the main way, that we talk about ourselves" (p. 422).

Below, I begrudgingly, and maybe hypocritically, share the research and statistics about the experiences of queer students in schools. These statistics are only a small representation of queer students' experiences, and are more nuanced and complex than what numbers can convey. In reality, as Tuck (2009) suggests, even when communities do experience harm "they are so much more than that—so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression" (p. 416). These statistics do not accurately reflect the experiences of queer youth, as they are (a) all contingent on students feeling safe enough to report or share their experiences, and (b) only a part of our stories and experiences. From this data, I also imagine that if all instances of homophobia, harassment, discrimination, and violence were reported, the numbers would be a lot different. I also caution that if we continue to only think of queer students experiences as being shaped through discrimination and harassment, we ignore the subtle and complex ways "in which schools themselves are complicit in sustaining these social processes beginning in the early years of schooling" (Payne & Smith, 2013, p. 8). These experiences are valid and terrifying representations of the kinds of violence queer students face, but keep in mind that they are all happening within educational institutions which have enabled and encouraged this violence.

Queer students disproportionately are at risk for developing social, emotional and academic problems due to harassment and bullying experienced at school and longstanding homophobia and transphobia embedded within society (Fisher et al., 2008). Queer students, due to the heteronormativity embedded within society and educational institutions, are viewed as different by their peers and teachers, which provides the basis for harassment and victimization

(which includes verbal and physical assaults) (Fisher et al., 2008). Additionally, queer students with intersecting marginalized identities face higher rates of discrimination, which includes racism, sexism, and Islamophobia. While examining all of these layers is out of the scope of this particular research, this is something to keep in mind when discussing queer youths' experiences. When schools are at their best, queer students would be treated with respect, support, and nurturance. If schools continue with the status quo, queer youth will continue to suffer. There has been increasing research into the challenges that queer youth face in school. These challenges include discrimination, harassment, and bullying. Homophobic harassment is defined as "unwelcome behaviours that can include physical, verbal, and non-verbal conduct that denigrate people who are, or are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer" (Meyer, 2008, p. 557). Queer people have always been targets of homophobic and transphobic attacks. Queer youth cannot escape having to grow up in a society that, for the most part, condones homophobia and transphobia, and they cannot escape growing up in a school system in which heteronormativity is embedded. Homophobia is a type of structural oppression (Little, 2001) which often is exacerbated within the educational system. Only a small number of queer youth attend schools that actively support them (Little, 2001). A survey conducted by Alberta Human Services reports that 53% of queer youth feel unsafe at school, compared with only 3% of heterosexual youth (2017). Queer students are often verbally and physically harassed. Slurs like 'fag', 'dyke', 'sissy', or phrases like 'that's so gay', are still used (DeWitt, 2018; Kosciw, et al., 2018) to harass queer youth. Many victims of homophobic and transphobic harassment are targeted for their gender expression, and for not conforming to heteronormative standards of gender and sexuality (Meyer 2008). Developmental researchers have suggested that the practices of educational

actors, such as teachers, administrators, or curriculum designers, influence the ways in which people come to understand their gender and sexual identities (Preston, 2016).

In a Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) study (Kosciw et al., 2018), researchers found that 60.4% of students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing to help the student or told the student to ignore it. The study also found that over 87.3% of queer students experienced harassment or assault based on their personal characteristics, including gender expression and orientation and their sexual orientation. 70.1% of queer students experienced verbal harassment at school based on sexual orientation, 59.1% on gender expression, and 53.2% based on gender (Kosciw et al., 2018). Looking more specifically, Two-Spirit youth report feeling unsafe in change rooms, washrooms, hallways, classrooms and school yards. They frequently experience homophobia, bullying, sexual harassment, verbal harassment, physical assault, exclusion and rejection, as well as discrimination due to race and physical appearance. The lack of understanding surrounding Two-Spirit people has been a major challenge in addressing these issues (Genovese et al., 2011).

Transgender youth also often face different levels of discrimination. 95% of transgender students feel unsafe in schools, and 90% reported being verbally harassed because of their gender variance (Travers, 2018), reporting that "their teachers and other adults in positions of authority failed to intervene when anti-queer or trans-oppressive comments were made" (Travers, 2018, p. 15). In the *Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey* (Wells et al., 2017) which focused specifically on transgender youth living in in Alberta, 67% of transgender youth in Alberta between the ages of 14 and 18 have considered suicide at some point in their lives. 35% of younger transgender youth reported that they had been physically threatened or injured in the past year, and most youth in the survey reported experiencing discrimination because of their

sex, their gender identity and expression, and their sexual orientation. Trans students'
experiences are heavily influenced by "educator authority, a hidden curriculum, and peer culture
and tend to crystallize around bathroom and locker-room access and sex-segregated and sex
differentiated sporting practices" (Travers, 2018, p. 50). Because of the pressure on students and
kids to act in 'gender appropriate' ways, gendered spaces, sex-segregated spaces and sex-
differentiated activities are "often the first place of crisis for trans kids: where they are allowed to
go, and who they are allowed to be when in those spaces, is typically restricted by the binary sex
marker on their identity documents" (Travers, 2018, p. 50). Transgender students experience
more social anxiety and social difficulties because of the sex-segregation and gender binary that
is reinforced in schools. The majority of transgender kids are invisible, and this invisibility
masks the harm that a "binary and heteronormative school culture causes in school settings"
(Travers, 2018, p. 56). When it comes to transgender students' experiences,

> we need to keep the most precarious trans kids in mind in our social change efforts.
>
> What are the forces and structures that are currently disempowering these kids?
>
> How do forces of oppression relating to racism, poverty, colonialism, and sexism,
>
> for example, combine with imposed gender systems to place some transgender
>
> kids in particular at terrible risk. (Travers, 2018, p. 199)

While my thesis does not dive into particular queer identities in detail, it is important to
recognize that identities that deviate 'furthest' from heteronormativity, or are marginalized in
other ways (racially, culturally, religiously, etc.), are more affected by harassment,
discrimination, and erasure throughout educational institutions.

Discrimination and harassment also effect queer students' school attendance and
education. Queer students do not attend class because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable (Case &

Meier, 2014; Craig & Smith, 2011; Fredman et al., 2015). They have "higher levels of unexcused absences and dropout rates, less of a sense of school belongingness, more academic difficulties, and fewer plans to attend college than their non-LGBT peers due to harassment" (Case & Meier, 2014, p. 63). Queer students who have experienced some form of homophobia or transphobia are three times as likely to have missed school (Kosciw, et al., 2018). The dropout rate for queer students is twenty-eight percent compared to the national Canadian average of nine percent (Little, 2001). Speaking from personal experience, when I was in high school one of my friends missed weeks of school before and after they came out because of the mental toll it took on them. They were afraid that they would be harassed and not supported or protected by teachers. These alarming statistics and daily lived experiences for queer students point to the crucial need for queer education that supports queer youth and provides guidance for teachers to create nurturing classrooms, where exploration of gender and sexuality is normalized. Each time a queer student is harassed, "it communicates the message that a central element of the student's identity is deficient, shameful, and worthy of ridicule" (Payne & Smith, 2013, p. 23). Queer youth deserve support, love, and nurturance. Queer youth deserve to feel not only safe in school, but to feel like they are truly indispensable.

As I will discuss later in my thesis, despite all the legislations, best practices, guidelines, and laws, research and stories shared from lived experiences, queer students are still not receiving education that is nurturing or caring. Despite all the fancy wording and legal jargon, queer students feel as though they are being failed by the school system. We clearly see the large gap between "equity policy statements and the realities of school classrooms and hallways" (Rayside, 2014, p. 192). This situation is a "…'policy paradox' that both queer teachers and students face in education. Posters, banners, and policies may claim school is a safe place for all,

but for queer youth and educators their experience is quite different" (Bellini, 2012, p. 384). Research shows "LGBTQ students often experience schools where the official curriculum celebrates diversity and promotes pride in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but the curriculum of the hallways tells them and their heterosexual peers that LGBT people are objects of contempt to whom human rights do not apply" (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 116).

It seems as though, despite the 'protections', there is not any accountability or standard to which the educational system and its actors are held, resulting in an extreme disconnect between paper and reality. Canadian public-school systems and "…individual schools have done less to recognize the sexual diversity of students, educators, and parents than we would predict from other realms of policy and practice, and less than they should" (Rayside, 2014, p. 215). In one striking quote, Bellini (2012) states, "according to the Alberta Teachers Association, 'the Surrey Teachers Association describes Canadian Schools as one of the last bastions of tolerated hatred towards LGBTQ people" (p. 382). How can we move towards nurturance if Canadian schools are the last bastions of hate? Is it possible to believe that nurturance is a possibility in Canadian or Albertan schools if "…most LGBTQ students face a hostile school climate and experience their schools as doing little to improve the situation" (Taylor et al., p. 116)? How can we move towards nurturance if no one is moving anywhere in the first place?

I felt uncomfortable and upset when writing this section, because I am tired of seeing queer identities framed within what Tuck (2009) describes as a damage-centred research pedagogy. While I know it is important to contextualize the experiences of queer people in educational institutions in order to investigate my thesis question, I do not want this to be the only way that we see queer people. Instead, I hope that my thesis can serve as an "antidote" (Tuck, 2009, p. 416) to damage-centred research, enacting a desire-based pedagogy. Desire

accounts for pain, but is "also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities…desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future. It is integral to our humanness" (Tuck, 2009, p. 417).

Conclusion

While my research originally emerged from a desire to change the narrative and experiences for queer youth so that they will one day know a more certain future, over the time of writing, it shifted to a desire to radically queer educational institutions. At a basic level, I do not want future generations to have to call their queer friends out of fear of what might come as a result of a provincial election and, at a deeper level, I do not want queerness to be debated or threatened again.

My hope is that this research will challenge educational actors and institutions to first engage in critical self-reflection, and then to actively commit to the act of queering throughout their educational and personal practice. Moving towards nurturance is not prescriptive. This thesis is not a one-size-fits-all approach to challenging heteronormativity in schools. There are immense challenges to actualizing nurturance within schools. There are institutional, political, social, and cultural forces that reproduce heteronormativity and traditional norms and narratives, and reinforce caution among educators, even for those who want to make changes (Rayside, 2014). In Alberta, the challenge is exacerbated by conservative values and politics. Rather, my thesis seeks to investigate the challenges and barriers that currently exist in educational institutions, while gaining the perspective of queer educators into the ways in which nurturance could potentially be achieved or articulated. As I will discuss, there are no simple black and white answers and, much like gender and sexuality, there are no binaries. Through queer theory,

I am engaging with forms of inquiry that take up the task of challenging hegemonic and normative discourses and structures. This requires critical self-reflection, where I must be conscious of not reproducing damage-centred research, nor advocating for fixed approaches of queering educational practices. I come into my research with anger, with resistance, and with deeply personal and political convictions that reinforce my internal desire, responsibility, and commitment to the queer people that fought before me, and the future generations that will continue to fight after me. Nelson Rodriguez writes that we must acknowledge several things about education: "that it is not a politically neutral space; that pedagogy and politics are always going to be intertwined, that youth are part of a subculture, and queer youth are part of a subculture; and that educating a queer youth must involve a process of critical inquiry" (Rodriguez, 1998, as cited in Bellini, 2012, p. 387). I engage in this thesis knowing that the personal is political, and education is political. I cannot say that I am not scared of what is to come in Alberta as a queer person, as an educator, and as a human who cares about social justice. I am concerned about the future of education, but I am also hopeful that, one day, schools will be able to embody nurturance, and this is why I continue to do the work and research necessary to reach that goal.

In the second chapter I discuss queer theory and the Riddle Scale (1994). In the third chapter, a literature review encompasses the concepts of nurturance, heteronormativity, and queering. Chapter four centralizes around my research method and methodology. Chapter five is dedicated to what I call 'resonant threads', which are the themes that were revealed through data analysis. Chapter six is the concluding chapter, where I discuss how to imagine and move towards nurturance, first through looking at the various educational actors, and finally by hearing from my research participants. Moving forward to chapter two, I will discuss queer theory and

the Riddle Scale (1994) in relation to my research. I have already brought up many concepts -

including heteronormativity, queer, queering—and while these topics will be addressed more in

my literature review (chapter 3), I feel it is important to first outline queer theory and the Riddle

Scale because of their importance in grounding this work. In order to challenge the damage-

centred narratives, and the statistics I shared above, I believe that, through queer theory, we can

reimagine both education and the way in which queer identities are seen, talked about, and

nurtured.

Chapter Two: Queer Theory & The Riddle Scale

In this chapter, I discuss two pieces that are instrumental to my thesis – queer theory and the Riddle Scale (1994). Queer theory is foundational in my research, orienting my thesis question and investigation. This chapter, thus, outlines queer theory and its importance and implications for my research, and how the Riddle Scale provides key language and framework to help answer my thesis question. As I examine and question how Alberta schools can move towards nurturance, I first position myself and the work within queer theory because of its potential to aid in the act of dismantling heteronormativity and the status quo within educational institutions.

How to define queer? First, we must come to an understanding of what queer means within this particular thesis. To me, queerness is wonderful and complicated. I understand and live out my queerness in different ways, recognizing the complexity of what it means to be queer. Browne and Nash (2010) write, "for many academics interested in gendered, embodied and sexualised lives…our fieldwork is located, if not directly in our own personal social and political spaces, then in spaces where we are at least potential 'insiders'" (p. 130). By doing this research, I am both an insider and an outsider, drawing from my lived experiences as a queer student who did not feel safe coming out until university, but also as someone who embodies queerness in a particular way – as an able-bodied, neurotypical, cisgender, White person. My positionality is central in my research, as I could not engage in this research without my life experiences leading me here. I use queer as an umbrella term that acknowledges the vast and culturally constituted ways that people identify outside of cisgender and heterosexual. Queerness is not homogenous, nor a static identity, rather it is a part of the many ways

that people actively resist normative gender and sexuality on an ongoing basis throughout their lives. I use queer to be inclusive for all non-cisgender or heterosexual people, such as those who are lesbian, gay, transgender, intersex, asexual, aromantic, two-spirit, pansexual, non-binary, bisexual and/or genderqueer. I use the word queer throughout this research (though I use an individual's preferred identity wherever possible) knowing it is steeped in a complicated history, and holds a variety of important and complex meanings for people. I know it is hard in academia to not clearly outline a definition, particularly when it comes to one of the foundational parts of a thesis, but queerness is not categorizable or definable; in fact, it is intentionally unclear. Browne and Nash (2010) write,

> keeping queer permanently unclear, unstable, and 'unfit' to represent any
> particular sexual identity is the key to maintaining a non-normative queer
> position. This is not a simple task in an academy that increasingly embraces
> 'queer' contingencies while simultaneously requiring specific rules of rigor,
> clarity and truthfulness... (p. 8).

While I employ queer as an inclusive umbrella term, I also am conscious of the weight this word carries for so many people. In *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, the editors do an incredible job of working through what it is to use the word queer - not just as a sexual, romantic or emotional orientation, but as a way of being and acting, as a political term. They write "what we mean by queer, we argue, is and should remain unclear, fluid and multiple" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 7). I smile at this statement because I know exactly what they mean. Queerness is something that means so much to so many people.

For those who grew up in earlier generations, queer might be a sword in their chest because it was used to oppress them.

> Queer was used in a negative fashion in the way that words like 'd*ke' or
> 'f*gg*t' were, and this became even more popular in the 1950s and beyond.
> Therein, many people who are middle aged or older have some strong negative
> associations with the word, particularly because of bullying and harassment at
> school. (Higgins, 2016)

For others, it may remind them of the activism and scholarship that arose during the AIDS crisis where being queer was literally deadly, but also where queer was "…reclaimed in the midst of the AIDS epidemic and quickly became a symbol of anarchy. Protests would erupt with little warning, flooding the streets with queer punks declaring 'We're here, we're queer, we will not live in fear'" (Hall, 2016). Perhaps for some people, queer

> …functions as a marker representing interpretive work that refuses what Halley
> has called 'the heterosexual bribe' - that is, the cultural rewards afforded those
> whose public performances of self are contained within that narrow band of
> behaviors considered proper to a heterosexual identity. (Sumara & Davis 1999, p.
> 192)

Others, including myself, use the word politically, where "…using 'queer' is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world. It's a way of telling ourselves we don't have to be witty and charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalized" (Hall, 2016). There will always be those who dislike the word or find it to be uncomfortable. I also recognize that, in countries other than Canada, queer may not have been reclaimed in the same way. However,

there is also a new generation of people who are reclaiming queer, like the punks and activists before us, to state that we are here and will not live in fear.

My thesis is a tiny, tiny, part of a long history of fighting for queer people to be fully nurtured in society, and I am indebted to, and grateful for their work. Much of my research, and honestly, who I am, has been influenced by queer theorists and/or queer activists in one way or another. Bellini (2012) writes, "queer theory is about building a community, mobilizing forces, creating group resistance, and fighting oppression" (p. 386). Without this community, *my* community, my thesis would not be possible. I do not want my community to be marginalized on the sidelines of classrooms any longer and that is why looking towards what nurturing education could be is so important.

Engaging in queer theory: I want to first quote bell hooks (1994), who writes, "theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end" (p. 61). I could write about using any number of theories for this thesis but, without intentionally employing the theory to enact social change, it remains just that - a theory. I enter this work with the hope that by applying theory, it can help change education practices. With this in mind, I hope we can understand how queer theory *can* be a revolutionary theory, but only if we make it as such.

Homophobia and/or transphobia are not inherent within people. They are learned and socialized ways of thinking, being, doing, and relating to the world. The idea that there will be homophobic and transphobic people forever in this world is to imagine a future in which we have not disrupted oppressive systems. Queer people should not be seen as something outside of heterosexuality or cisgender identity, but rather that all genders and sexualities exist on a valid spectrum. Queer theory "challenges the normative social ordering of identities and subjectivities

along the heterosexual/homosexual binary as well as the privileging of heterosexuality as 'natural' and homosexuality as its deviant and abhorrent 'other'" (Browne & Nash, p. 5). Similarly, Manning (2015) writes about disruption, for which "queer methodologies are vital. For exposing hegemonic, linear ways of being and thinking that analyze, categorize, and psychiatrize those outside of binary identities" (p. 200). Many "…queer theorists argue, in concert with various feminist, gay, and lesbian scholars that normative understandings of sexuality (and gender) are central, organising principles of society, social relations and social institutions and are designed to preserve this hegemonic ordering" (Browne & Nash, p. 5). This is particularly relevant when discussing the institution of education. The educational system in Alberta is complicit in upholding this hegemonic ordering, and this thesis seeks to imagine a future in which nurturance of queer identities is fulfilled. Perhaps this means that nurturance must include dismantling the normative structures that we currently see within the educational system, and destroying the idea that heterosexuality is the normative way of being. As Britzman (1995) writes, "what if gay and lesbian theories were understood as offering a way to rethink the very groups of knowledge and pedagogy in education?" (p. 151). Engaging in queer theory for this thesis is about 'rethinking' what it means to provide education.

Queer theory also "remains in continuous conversation with innumerable bodies of scholarship" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 4). For example, when looking at other types of research, Callaghan (2018) writes, "anti-oppressive educational research exposes how racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression operate in schools and proposes ways to redress discrimination and domination in school settings" (p. 30). In my thesis, engaging in queer theory means I am engaging with forms of inquiry that take up the task of challenging hegemonic and normative discourses and structures. However, working with queer theory within

a multiplicity of fields, and within constant revision can also create problems. If "as queer thinking argues, subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming, how can we gather 'data' from those tenuous and fleeting subjects using the standard methods of data collection…?" (Browne & Nash, p. 1). In my interviews with participants, I am only able to capture a particular moment and time. The next day, or the next year, the entire context and implications of my work could be completely different. Finally, when engaging in any critical theory, being reflective in the practice is important. Sykes (2014) writes, "queer theory has always had to monitor if, and how, it is producing fixed, exclusionary or domesticated ways of thinking about non-normative sexualities and genders. Like feminist research, queer research has to be critically self-reflexive about how genders and sexualities are formed within local contexts and geopolitical relations of power" (p. 584).

 Critical queer theory: Queer theory engages with a multitude of other theories and methodologies. For example, queer theory engages with critical social theory (CST). Torres writes that "the lessons of Critical Social Theory are clear and need to be remembered: politics and education intersect continually—there is an inherent politicity of education. Power plays a major role in configuring schooling and social reproduction" (Torres, 2012, p. 122). Both queer theory and CST take up a political, change-centric approach, and is reflexive as well as affective. As I have said before, I cannot engage in this work and push my personal feminist and queer convictions aside, nor can I ignore the complexity of dismantling harmful institutions in the work towards socially just education. I appreciate queer theory's connection to CST because it not only asks the tough questions but pushes people to move forward and actually implement change. Looking at education, Leonardo (2004) writes, "CST begins with the premise that criticism targets systematic and institutional arrangements, how people create them, and how educators

may ameliorate their harmful effects on schools" (p. 13). Neither queer theory nor CST seeks to critique for critique's sake, but instead to deliberately interrogate how power operates in society, and how it asks us to consider how we could dismantle them. While CST is often used as a distinct method, I would argue that CST is inherent to queer theory, as "critical social theorists reject the belief that theory and practice are separate forms of human activity, and view both as intrinsically embodied in praxis, in the way humans act out their theoretical versions of the world" (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 9). To ask what nurturing education might entail is for educators to embed ourselves in the work - as we are intrinsically connected to both theory and practice. Adopting an ongoing practice of being critical is at the core of queer theory. Without being critical of our work, research, and lives, we cannot examine how we need to change moving forward. Without being critical of power structures within institutions, we fail to see that there *are* social differences that *will* impact students because of how our society is structured.

Critiques of queer theory: In practicing critical pedagogy and theory, it is important to take the time to acknowledge the failures, violence, ignorance, harm and problems that queer theory continues to cause. Queer theory often ignores or forgets the intersectionality of queer identities, focusing solely on sexuality and forgetting to consider gender, racism, sexism, classism, ableism or ongoing colonialism. As a White settler employing queer theory, I reflect on my actions, and what is included and not included within this study. When I was in the process of delimiting my study, choosing to focus on moving towards nurturance in schools within Alberta, I knew that I would not be able to write about everything I wanted to include. In my participant interviews, my questions were directed at the process of providing queer education, with a general focus on access in rural or isolated areas. I know that I left out so much and, be

that as it may, because I am asking how schools can move towards nurturance, I need to be conscious in my analysis and how I undertake queer theory.

To touch on some of the critiques of queer theory, I want to briefly highlight some of the scholars who have impacted my way of thinking. First is *Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques* by Qwo-Li Driskill (2010). When discussing queer theory, s/he writes "our disappointment lies in the recognition of an old story within 'the new queer studies': Native people, native histories, and ongoing colonial projects happening on our lands are included only marginally, when included at all" (p. 70). S/he goes on to write, about the ways in which Two-Spirit and Indigenous people are erased in queer theory through both White-dominated queer theories, and "queer of color critique's near erasure of Native people and nations" (p. 71). Driskill writes about Two-Spirit critiques and its importance in resisting colonialism, where s/he states, "Two-Spirit critiques point to queer studies' responsibility to examine ongoing colonialism, genocide, survival, and resistance of Native nations and peoples" (p. 86). Driskill's work is important as a reminder that queer theorists and scholars need to be reflective and conscious in their writing.

Secondly, in *AIDS, Men, and Sex: Challenges of a Genderqueer Methodology,* Eli Manning (2015) discusses heteronormativity and homonormativity, writing, "queer theory has centred the conversation on sexuality, with a casual disregard for the deadly implications of contesting and crossing the enforced sex/gender binaries upheld within heteronormativity" (p. 202). Manning (2015) states, queer theory engages both with heteronormativity and homonormativity. Heteronormativity is "a concept that invites examination of the ways in which heterosexuality positions itself as neutral, normative, and dominant" (p. 201). Heteronormativity "fosters systemic disadvantages for gender and sexual minorities because it confers all social and cultural advantages to heterosexuals and gender non-conforming individuals" (Surette, 2019, p.

164). In the context of the education system, schools participate "in the process of normalization, which is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values" (Surette, 2019, p. 164). Further, they contend that "one of the most powerful forms of normalization in Western social systems is heteronormativity" (Surette, 2019, p. 164) and that the classroom is "the most homophobic of all social institutions" (Surette, 2019, p. 165).

Homonormativity is "practices or ideas that affirm the normalcy of some gay and lesbian people within a capitalist and colonialist framework…a way to normalize their existences and to gain rights previously available only to heteronormative couples" (Surette, 2019, p. 201). Both heteronormativity and homonormativity end up marginalizing people who identify and express outside of the gender binary. Therefore, not all queer theory is one that is aimed toward being liberatory or justice focused, as some who engage with it hold onto neoliberal ideals and goals. These neoliberal ideals and goals are not actually beneficial or helpful for the entirety of the queer community, only those who hold privilege in society (e.g., White, cisgender, socio-economically stable or wealthy, queer people). When it comes to my research, I need to be conscious of not engaging in homonormativity.

Third, is Kathleen Quinlivan (2013) who investigates the positive role that queer research "can play in interrogating heteronormativity within schooling contexts…" (p. 58) but also how it can be problematic. Quinlivan (2013) states, "there is a tension between queer theory's acceptance of identity as unstable and inherently incomplete and the dangers of undertaking queer research that can 'hail' queer students into a unitary identity that takes little account of

other discourses of social stratification such as class, race, ethnicity and dis/ability" (p. 58). By this, Quinlivan (2013) troubles that

> idealistic reproductive future-focused notions of social transformation centring on the child can eliminate the marginalization of sexuality and gender expression…[and] 'queer' schooling research runs the risk of becoming a new shorthand for liberal and, in some cases, homonormative notions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusion that privilege white middle-class queer subjectivities. (p. 58)

When I read this, I may have panicked, thinking, oh no, am I causing a problem by doing research on future-focused queer education? Am I homogenizing queer students? Is there a point of looking towards a future if I am just going to cause more harm? If I had just kept reading the article right away, maybe I would have calmed down a little bit sooner. Quinlivan goes on to write how "engaging in sexuality education research, which explores the potential of queer praxis in confounding notions of normalcy, will inevitably produce tensions and conflicts for researchers and schools" (p. 66), and that "engaging queerly in sexuality education research in schools provokes often uncomfortable messy methodological conundrums that can enable researchers to explore the generative potential of knowing the unexpected more fully" (p. 66). I value her insights into the need to lean into the conundrums and complicatedness that queer researching and queer theory requires.

Along the same vein as homonormativity is homonationalism, which has been addressed by a multitude of scholars (Lenon & Dryden 2015; Morgensen 2010; Puar 2007), Homonationalism is "an assemblage of geopolitical and historical forces, neoliberal interests in capitalist accumulation both cultural and material, biopolitical state practices of population

control, and affective investments in discourses of freedom, liberation, and rights" (Puar, 2007,

p. 337). Scott Morgensen expands on Puar's definition, centreing settler colonialism

> as a condition of queer theory, queer politics, and sexual modernity in the
>
> Americas. Settler homonationalism signals the biopolitics of settler colonialism
>
> and its accompanying logic of Indigenous elimination…modern queer subjects
>
> and politics continue to naturalize settlement of the white supremacist (Canadian)
>
> nation-state through desires for and claims to sexual citizenship and belonging.
>
> (Lenon & Dryden, 2015, p. 7)

Whiteness is a construct that affords power and privilege and is intimately tied to colonial violence (Battiste, 2013). Settler colonialism (ongoing colonialism) is often perpetuated through homonormativity. It is important to recognize that gender violence was a primary tool of systematic violence towards Indigenous peoples throughout colonization, targeting those who did not fit within the binary and erasing their existence and value within Indigenous communities (Smith, 2010). Moving towards nurturance requires an awareness of how colonialism continues to operate, even within what is supposed to be a liberatory theory. This also includes the responsibility to take up our own relationships to power and privilege in a reflexive and ongoing way. Nurturance obviously does not just encompass White queer youth, or my experiences as a White queer person, but needs to also recognize the intersectionality of QBIPOC (queer, Black, Indigenous, people of colour) students. These three examples of scholarship exemplify how queer theory and theorists can maintain harmful power structures rather than challenge the normative social ordering of identities within society.

Riddle Scale

History of the Riddle Scale: In this research, within the broader framework of queer theory, I use the language from the Riddle Scale, which was created by Dr. Dorothy Riddle (1994). Dorothy Riddle is a psychologist and part of an "American Psychological Association Task force that effectively lobbied for the removal of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. The Riddle scale of attitudes was developed in the early 1970s when Riddle was based at the City University of New York. The first published version of the scale did not appear until 1994" (Rasmussen, 2013, p. 20). When I was first discussing my thesis with some friends, one of them suggested looking into the Riddle Scale, and I am forever grateful for their suggestion. I did some research and found out that the scale was one of the first contemporary classifications of attitudes towards gay/lesbians. While it is beyond the scope of my thesis to dive deeper into the important studies that have been done on measuring levels of homophobia, it is important to situate the Riddle Scale within historical attempts in order to understand and classify the ways people think about and respond to questions surrounding queerness.

While this thesis is not focused on engaging with the Riddle Scale specifically for its scalar purposes, scales help provide the space to explain the situations or feelings that many people feel on a day-to-day basis. I believe that a lot of people think in binaries in many regards, including how they perceive themselves. By this I mean that I think a lot of people believe that other people (or themselves) are either racist or not, homophobic or not, Islamophobic or not, for example, without actually recognizing the complexity of our behaviours and ways of knowing (conscious or unconscious), in which we are all situated somewhere in between depending on the context and/or our actions. Scalar representations of attitudes help us see all of the shades of grey

and help us engage in self-reflexivity and consciousness of our actions. I suggest that the scale is a method of queer(y)ing the tendency towards binaristic and/or bounded ways of thinking and knowing.

When it comes to scales and measurement of gender and/or sexuality, the name most commonly referred to is Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey developed the heterosexual-homosexual rating scale, which "accounted for research findings that showed people did not fit into exclusive heterosexual categories" (Kinsey Institute, n.d.). There are also more than 200 other scales (Kinsey Institute, n.d.) to encompass other sexual identities and describe other sexual orientations. The Riddle Scale, however, is not about measuring sexual orientation, but instead measuring the attitudes people have towards people who are not heterosexual or cisgender. "Levitt and Klassen developed a 'homophobic' scale as part of their larger study designed to measure attitudes toward homosexuality" (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980, p. 358). Even earlier, in 1971, Smith created a study which was "the first to deal with homophobia as a single unidimensional construct" (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980, p. 358). Later, Lumby (1976) developed "a modified version of Smith's scale and extended the response categories" (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980, p. 358). Authors Hudson and Ricketts (1980) note that they believe one of the most important research contributions before their work was a paper named *A Factor Analytic Conceptualization of Attitudes Toward Male and Female Homosexuals* (1976). Hudson and Ricketts (1980) do critique earlier scales, stating that previous studies have not attempted to "distinguish between homo-negativism as a general set of negative responses and the much more specific concept of homophobia as an affective response to homosexual men and women…[and] is the judgement of the present writers that research and clinical workers still do not have a

dependable means for obtaining good measurements of the degree or magnitude of homophobia" (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980, p. 360).

I also want to quickly mention that there are other scales that measure different levels of oppression or marginalization outside of homophobia. For example, C. Demnowicz created the Racism Scale (2017) "after repeated conversations on social media showed a need for a visual method of explaining the many levels of racism…" (Racism Scale, 2017). In 2009, researchers created The Islamophobia Scale (Lee et al., 2009), a psychometric scale "which measures cognitive and affective-behavioural facets of fear-related attitudes toward the religion of Islam and Muslims" (p. 92). To reiterate, scales – no matter what they are measuring or examining - help us see and understand the complexity of oppressive attitudes and behaviours, and hopefully help us engage in self-reflection and change, which are some of the things the Riddle Scale prompted for me in this research.

What is the Riddle Scale? The Riddle Scale provides a foundational framework and language to help in my understanding of the complexity of queer inclusion and nurturance. Within the scope of this thesis, I immediately knew it would be important in terms of being able to differentiate between the different programs that are out there, and for educators and schools to hopefully place themselves on the scale. The scale has eight levels, divided up into homophobic levels of attitude and positive levels of attitude. I have created a flow chart to more easily understand the various levels:

Figure 1: Levels of the Riddle Scale

1

• **Repulsion**: Homosexuality is seen as a crime against nature. Gays/lesbians are considered sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc. Anything is justified to change them (ie: incarceration, hospitalization, electro-therapy, etc.)

2

• **Pity**: Represents heterosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is considered more mature and certainly to be preferred. It is believed that any possibility of becoming straight should be reinforced, and those who seem to be born that way should be pitied as less fortunate ("the poor dears").

3

Tolerance: Homosexuality is viewed as a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people grow out of. Thus, lesbians/gays are less mature than straights and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with children who are still maturing. It is believed that lesbians/gays should not be given positions of authority because they are still working through their adolescent behavior.

4

• **Acceptance**: Still implies that there is something to accept; the existing climate of discrimination is ignored

5

• **Support**: People at this level may be uncomfortable themselves, but they are aware of the homophobic climate and the irrational unfairness, and work to safeguard the rights of lesbians and gays

6

Admiration: It is acknowledged that being lesbian/gay in our society takes strength. People at this level are willing to truly examine their homophobic attitudes, values, and behaviors.

7

Appreciation: The diversity of people is considered valuable and lesbians/gays are seen as a valid part of that diversity. People on this level are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and others.

8

• **Nurturance**: Assumes that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. People on this level view lesbians/gays with genuine affection and delight and are willing to be their allies and advocates.

Using the Riddle Scale (1994), I was able to create my thesis question, asking: how can schools move towards nurturance of queer identities? This primary research question is at the heart of this thesis. While I am further interested in questions such as - how can schools move to a place that queer identities are seen as indispensable in society? How can we get the people, the actors, within educational institutions to a level where they view queer people with affection and delight? How do we get them to be our allies and advocates? - these are big questions with no easy answers. Throughout this thesis I seek to understand the barriers, actors, and implications of providing/not providing nurturing education in schools.

Employing the Riddle Scale: Originally conceptualized in the 1970s, Dr. Riddle uses the words gay and lesbians, but I believe that within the contemporary context, the Riddle Scale (1994) is applicable to the larger queer community - encompassing all the gender and sexuality variances and spectrums, fitting within what I have earlier defined in the introduction as 'queer'. There have actually been other scholars who have adapted the scale and its language for specific sexual and gender identities, such as *The Riddle Scale Adapted for Transphobia* (Drewlo, 2011). There was also an Australian activist who adapted the scale using slang terms and colloquialisms so that he could connect with his community (Rasmussen, 2013). He included categories like "the frustrated bogan", "the sheep", and "the almost ally" (Rasmussen, 2013, p. 27) as part of explaining the levels of attitude. For the purpose of this thesis, I am adapting the Riddle Scale to fit within my umbrella definition of queer. When I was thinking about the language I could use to explain how schools could become more inclusive to the queer community, I could not find the right words. It is a hard task to articulate both my experiences and my frustrations towards schools and their actions for and/or against their queer students. Words like inclusion, acceptance, or tolerance, did not seem robust enough to encompass what I was trying to get

across. I found a sense of relief to be given language to articulate both my personal experiences with inclusion in the classroom as well as the specificity that I needed to go forward in this research. I also feel as though words like inclusion, support and acceptance are overused when discussing queer education, as well as just too broad, especially when trying to talk to educators. Sadly, these words also became empty over time. I have seen firsthand how people would become adept at learning the language of inclusion, but not actually have action or follow through behind it.

   Narratives of inclusion, acceptance, or tolerance: There is a growing frustration within the queer community around people—most often well meaning 'allies'—who show up for credit or get praised for doing very little. It is easier for people to attend one meeting or protest, post a photo online, call themselves an ally, and be done with their engagement, rather than commit to actively using or examining their privileges every day. We live in a world where individualistic discourses continue to be the norm; people do not see oppression as structural but rather that homophobia exists only in explicit interpersonal forms. The Riddle Scale is part of highlighting the ways in which homophobia is enacted through both the interpersonal but more importantly - structural oppression. As an example, I think about all the people who show up to Pride parades in major cities in Canada because it has become a party rather than a protest. Many teacher organizations and unions participate, showing up for one day with their "love is love" shirts and think they are the ultimate queer ally, when showing up to this event is only just a small piece of the work they need to do. In reality, where are they when queer people really need it, like protesting harmful government legislation, or providing nurturing queer education year-round in schools? Allies are defined by their actions (King, 2018). People cannot just slap the title of ally

on and be done learning, engaging, and participating. Allyship requires constant showing up and *doing.*

In the introduction, I established how educational institutions were created under colonial ideals, and still (re)produce colonialism through curriculum. People, particularly teachers, talk about inclusion in their classrooms. Given that their classrooms are couched within a heteronormative educational institution, we must ask; if we are moving towards nurturance, why would we want to aim for just inclusion? Simply put, inclusion is not enough because it often does not involve any actual meaningful dismantling of oppressive structures – like heteronormativity. Before I even began researching, I noticed and experienced different levels of homophobia in educational settings but I did not have the words explain them. I am immensely frustrated that schools and educators who are engaging with queer issues just end up stopping their commitment to queer issues and students at a certain point and frustrated that I am not allowed to be as frustrated as I am, because at least they are doing *something.* Queer students deserve more than just *something* though, which is why the Riddle Scale (1994) is important to demonstrate how we can all be moving towards something more than mere inclusion or acceptance.

Inclusion's goal of educational equity only measures equity within the already existing educational system, and acceptance "still implies that there is something to accept; the existing climate of discrimination is ignored" (Riddle, 1994). In the research by Payne & Smith (2013), they share

> Acceptance or tolerance is limiting because it does little more than tell LGBTQ
>
> kids-or any marginalized groups - that they have permission to show themselves.
>
> Within these frameworks, someone must always *be tolerated* by the dominant

group, which make it inevitable that objects of tolerance are marked as deviant, marginal, or undesirable by virtue of being tolerated. (p. 19)

Within the framework of acceptance or tolerance, queer identities in schools remain "within a space of exclusion. Schools remain part of the 'heterosexual matrix' (Bulter, 1990) where heterosexuality is the dominant, normalized version of sexuality and is reified within schools" (Gray et al., 2016). Queer students continue to be marginalized, marked as a presence that is 'other' to heteronorms, positioned as being at risk, rather than being celebrated or nurtured (Gray et al., 2016). It is no wonder Dr. Riddle (1994) placed acceptance and tolerance under homophobic levels of attitude, because under the narratives of inclusion, acceptance, or support, heteronormativity still remains. Discourses of safe spaces, acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion end up reproducing a dichotomy of heterosexuality as normal. Suggesting that "allies give, provide, offer, and secure safe space" (Fox, 2013, p. 67) for queer people reinforces heteronormative authority. Fox (2013) writes "while the inclusion model has been an important part of development towards queer studies over the last thirty years, it tends to focus on visibility and countering homophobia and often revolves around how to help LGBT people feel comfortable within existing frameworks, rather than disrupting them" (p. 67). Rather than focusing on only just including queer identities, we need to address structural marginalization within educational institutions. Queer theory suggests that instead of being limited or assimilating into the "system", we can attend to the possibilities outside of normativity (Browne & Nash, 2016).

Before I shared that I was queer with the world, I worked in schools as an educational assistant. I would try and broach conversations around gender and sexuality and would be so excited if the topic ever came up - which it only naturally did once. Gathered around the wood

stained coffee tables in the staffroom, eating celery sticks and day-old cookies, a couple of teachers were sharing that they had to do their sexual health unit. I immediately perked up and said that that was so cool, and how lucky they were that they got to teach such an important topic. They laughed and expressed how they did not actually want to teach it. Taken aback, I said, well, if you have built up trust and respect with your students, shouldn't having this conversation be easy? They did not answer. Looking back at this moment, I realize that these teachers may not have built up the trust and confidence with their students, or within themselves to be able to teach something like sexual health. As I will outline throughout this thesis, there are many factors at play that may have prevented these teachers from being excited about teaching the unit, rather than dreading it. Part of it was that the topics of sexual health are so stigmatized, that they may feel uncomfortable teaching it. Another part was that perhaps they did not feel like they had the knowledge to properly teach it. I should note that the focus of my study was not with these teachers, and I am thinking through what I have learned in life and in the research to propose some possibilities for their expressed hesitations. While queer education is not just sexual health education, the two topic fields are so stigmatized and siloed into one-day conversations, which adds to the anxiety and fear of teaching it.

To connect this story to another example, in this previous scenario, some teachers acknowledged their lack of knowledge. In this next example, the teachers were, let us say, overconfident in their teaching. As I shared earlier, something I have heard over and over again by teachers (when I would eagerly bring up queer topics) is that they accepted their students and the queer community, but they would use their words to mask their inaction. I saw that the language of acceptance was being used by educators to validate their student's experiences and identities but was not necessarily being translated into queer education and support outside of

performative actions. These performative actions would include putting a rainbow sticker on their door, or reading a story with a queer character, but would not be working towards dismantling heteronormativity in their classroom where it could most impact students. Sadowski (2017) describes the proliferation of 'safe space' stickers being used in schools. The stickers, according to True Colors United (2019) "is a simple way to send a message to everyone who enters a space that *all* identities are welcome and supported". However, Sadowski (2017) brings up the important question: "if a certain place in the school is designated as a safe space, what does that say about the rest of the building?" (p. 11). Fox (2013) also talks about the concept of safe spaces as performative, and that if we need to build a safe space, we are also probably creating dangerous spaces simultaneously. Most visible safe spaces are seen as huge wins for schools, which in some ways they are, but actually ends up painting queer students as victims in need of protection, failing to elevate the status of queer people from a "protected class to a valued group in the school community" (Payne & Smith, 2013, p. 16). This is similar to Eve Tuck's (2009) work that I discussed earlier, where marginalized people are typically positioned as damaged and in need of help. If in every aspect schools were 'safe' or nurturing, then queer youth would stop being victims, and actually be indispensable. Nurturing queer education means that *all* spaces are safe. So, much like I have heard teachers saying that they are inclusive, or tolerant, or accepting, of their queer students (some even having safe space stickers) I do not think stickers are enough for queer students. This was a position amplified by the literature, as well as in the interviews with my research participants. I do not think having one classroom as a safe space is enough. I do not think having one teacher in a whole school who engages with queer topics is enough. I definitely do not think that me asking for educational actors to do more than the bare minimum and move past performativity is too much.

I have seen clear and unnerving disconnect within the teachers that I interacted with on a day to day to day basis. On the one hand, they were uncomfortable and/or unconfident in their ability to teach sexual health, and on the other, saw themselves as being allies to the queer community despite not actually moving past performative actions. Later in the thesis I discuss educational actors' roles and barriers in more detail. When I discovered the Riddle Scale (1994), I realized that the scale had the power for me to express to these teachers how in both scenarios they actually had a lot of work to do moving forward. It is hard to describe how homophobia or transphobia is not black or white, or only violent in extreme scenarios, but rather that it is a gradient of experiences that *all* affect queer people. I share my experiences as examples of how language matters and holds meaning. For these teachers, being accepting or tolerant was *enough* for them. They did not see how they actually needed to do a lot of professional and social development to best serve their students. This has all resulted in me becoming increasingly frustrated with teachers because, as I have seen from my lived experiences, they continuously stop their commitment to the queer community at what seems like the same point: where the work moves past performativity and becomes something that requires action.

In the process of writing this thesis, hunched over tables in dimly lit coffee shops, I spent a lot of time reflecting on the moments I have had in educational settings where I was not able express how I felt as a queer person. Reading through the literature, it was both affirming and disheartening to learn the lengths at which teachers continue to fail supporting their queer students. Little (2001) writes, "now that queer rights are gaining momentum, most people would say they have 'nothing against gays' but fail to work proactively against homophobia. Anti-homophobia education shifts the focus from the realm of morality (I am not...) to the realm of political practice (what can I do about it)" (p. 106). Despite having these frustrations towards

people who continuously fail in actively fighting homophobia and transphobia, I am fully committed as a researcher to seeing the ways in which educators can be encouraged and supported, and I am the biggest cheerleader for teachers and educators. I want to encourage and support all educational actors to move towards nurturance, but because I am a queer human, I am also allowed, because throughout history queer people have not been given the space to, to feel the rage and sadness that I have felt in these educational institutions, and throughout writing this thesis.

Critiques of the Riddle Scale: A critique of the Riddle Scale was brought up in an article by Rasmussen (2013). They contend that if people "do not apprehend homophobia as something that is applicable to them, what does this mean for the application of the scale?" (Rasmussen, 2013, p. 38). In other words, how do we move towards nurturance if people do not recognize themselves as having homophobic levels of attitude? For this, Rasmussen argues that the Riddle Scale is ineffective because it doesn't take into account those in denial of their homophobic levels of attitude. What can we do if the language of the Riddle Scale speaks in a different register and cannot be comprehended depending on the 'listeners' position? What are the implications of this when discussing moving towards nurturance? Within their essay, they bring up one researcher's work with evangelical Protestants. Within this faith group, most of the people did not believe that they are homophobic. Rather, they saw queerness as being a sin, and needed to be rejected as morally wrong (Rasmussen, 2013, p. 38). For these people, there was nowhere to move towards, because queerness is to be morally rejected and denounced. This is a valid critique, and also an interesting thought exercise. However, in my adaptation of the Riddle Scale, this critique is not really applicable, because I am using the Riddle Scale for its language, rather than for its scalar application or effectiveness. I am not trying to measure the homophobic levels

of attitudes of each school or educational actor – that is something that each person must do for themselves- rather, I see the definitions within the Riddle Scale highly important for explaining how homophobia and/or transphobia is not binaristic. Many people may believe that they are not homophobic, and as I have experienced, there are just as many people who believe that they are embodying nurturance when they are not. In both cases, people's perceptions are actually not in alignment with reality. The Riddle Scale was never designed as a tool with definitive answers for how to shift people's levels of attitude towards queer people. Rather, the Riddle Scale helps to provide language and visual aids. For my thesis, this is useful because it paints a roadmap of how schools could move towards nurturance and asks educational actors to be reflective of where they are on the scale.

Conclusion

Many people, myself very much included, are sometimes left with the question, where does queer theory fit in with my research question? Or, how can I engage with queer theory within other methodologies and methods? Browne and Nash (2010) write, "many scholars who use queer theorisations can use undefined notions of what they mean by 'queer research' and rarely undertake a sustained consideration of how queer approaches might sit with (particularly social scientific) methodological choices" (p. 1). Browne and Nash (2010) state, "if methodologies are meant to coherently link ontological epistemological positions to our choice of methods, are methodologies automatically queer if queer conceptualizations are used?" (p.2). In other words, by me engaging and writing in this research as a queer person studying queer topics, does that make my methodology automatically queer? My original assumption was that it would make it queer – undoubtably. I held this position because I had not engaged in critical

self-reflection of how it is a deliberate and conscious choice to engage in the act of queering and is not something that just occurs by way of having a certain identity. However, as I have highlighted in the previous section, even if the researcher is queer, and the research is queer – if ongoing critical reflection is absent, then the research can still be harmful and undo the goals of liberation and humanization.

To conclude, throughout this chapter I have discussed two important pieces to this thesis. The first, the theoretical framework in which I am grounding my work, and secondly, the scale which provided the language that allowed me to shape my thesis research question. In this chapter, I have conceptualized queerness in a way that allows us to move through the study, rather than as a concrete and absolute definition. I also discussed the connection of queer theory to other fields of study, such as feminist and/or Indigenous studies. From this, I attempted to highlight some of the various critiques of queer theory and research. Across social research "there is the potential to variously deploy and rework 'queer', as well as to critically engage with and contest theories, concepts and ideas that have developed in the humanities…" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 10). I am aware of the ongoing problems within queer theory, but also recognize that it is a theory that has the potential and power to centre queer voices in a really powerful way - which is how I am hoping to engage with it. A large part of writing this thesis was to interrogate my methods and methodologies and how they align with my personal, political and academic goals, while consciously reflecting upon my positionality. Employing the language found in The Riddle Scale (1994), which was originally created to show various levels of attitudes people have towards gay and lesbian people, I use the Riddle Scale to be inclusive of all queer identities. Though the scale was never intended to be applied within a specific framework or lens, I use the Riddle Scale because it has given me the ability to communicate how

homophobia is not a black or white scenario but rather a more complex gradient of attitudes connected to the commitment to an ongoing and active journey to achieving nurturance.

In the next chapter, I continue onward to the literature review, where I spend time examining in more detail some of the complexity and context that will help us move closer to understanding how schools can move towards nurturance.

Ch. 3: Literature Review

Queer theory challenges us to consider how power relations are constituted and maintained (Browne & Nash, 2016), and through contemporary queer scholarship, I seek to subvert, challenge and critique the taken for granted ways in which educational institutions have been constructed, and how they operate. My literature review, then, includes more in depth-discussions on topics surrounding the access, limitations, and challenges in providing queer education. I do this in order to map the particular context and actors that make up the educational institutions in Alberta in which I am interested in seeing more nurturing of queer identities. Within this chapter, I discuss three main topics: nurturance, heteronormativity, and queering. Within these topics, I expand upon the literature to examine the naturalized and taken for granted ways in which educational institutions perpetuate harm – but maybe more importantly – how they have the potential to change. I have chosen to dive into these topics because they are important in painting the larger picture of the contemporary school climate. We cannot begin to understand how schools can move towards nurturance without understanding where we are today.

Nurturance

Nurturance is a broad concept to understand, conceptualize and apply, especially because it is not one-size-fits all. Using the language provided in the Riddle Scale, I am able to provide people with clearer definitions around what I mean when I talk about '*moving towards*' nurturance. The Riddle Scale allows educational actors to see that it is an ongoing commitment to tend to queer topics and education. Being able to articulate that homophobia is not a black or white is important for people to understand, especially when trying to shift cultural norms,

because it recognizes and acknowledges that there is always room to grow and challenge power structures and individual behaviours that work against queerness.

Dr. Riddle's (1994) definition of nurturance is that a nurturing level of attitude "asssumes that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. People on this level view lesbians/gays with genuine affection and delight, and are willing to be their allies and advocates. Viewing queer identities as indespensible is to see queerness as something that society and culture could literally not function without. This is a radically different view than of how queerness is seen and valued in contemporary society (as noted previously, see for example, the introduction chapter). Riddle's vision for queer identities is one that destabilizes heteronormative and hegemonic power structures. The act of moving towards nurturance that I discuss throughout this thesis is about recognizing the various ways in which queer identities are devalued, criminalized, ostracized, or marginalized, and consciously working to move away from that. Nurturance is about recognizing the complexity of queerness. It is about understanding that queerness is not limited to sexuality, sex, or gender, nor can it be boiled down into one definition.

Nurturance recognizes the spaces in which queer identities are not seen as indespensible and actively works to remedy the situation. While moving towards nurturance requires active engagement and commitment – we need to ask ourselves what active engagement and commitment looks like, and the ways in which they can be engaged with or enacted in education. Because the Riddle Scale was not designed to be applied to a particular topic, when I was conducting research on nurturance in education, there were little to no results. A few examples of texts I did find that I believe embody nurturance, even if they do not specifically identify themselves that way, is work by Kevin Kumashiro (2002), Eve Tuck (2009), Michael Sadowski (2016), bell hooks (1994), and Paulo Friere (2000).

This thesis thus seeks to apply the framework of nurturance to education. While many educators utilize the language of inclusion, acceptance, or tolerance (Bellini, 2012; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Gansen, 2017), I challenge that these often-well-meaning intentions do very little to disrupt oppressive systems that operate and are engrained in educational institutions. Safe spaces, student groups, and teachers engaging with queer topics are important, but do not trouble or queer educational pedagogies that reinforce ideas of heteronormativity. In the next section, I discuss how heteronormativity is built into the foundations of education, and what the implications are for educational actors trying to implement change.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is deeply engrained and built into educational institutions, making it very difficult for schools to move towards nurturance. Heteronormativity is a word that is essentially shorthand for the numerous ways in which heterosexual (straight) privilege is woven into society and everyday life. It "fosters systemic disadvantages for gender and sexual minorities because it confers all social and cultural advantages to heterosexuals and gender non-conforming individuals" (Surette, 2019, p. 164). While it is important to keep in mind that gender and sexuality are two separate concepts, under heteronormativity, cisgender and heterosexual identities are privileged and socialized as normative from the moment children are born. Visually, imagine heteronormativity as a ladder. At the top are heterosexual and cisgender people, and then farther to the bottom are people who conform less and less to the ideas of identity and expression that are portrayed by those at the top rung. Intertwined on this ladder are other social and cultural identifiers that privilege some queer people above others, including race, class, and ability status. Heteronormativity is ultimately a hierarchical structure that

legitimizes some individuals over others (Ng et al., 2019). Heteronormativity is the normative and taken for granted assumptions that exist within societies and are sustained because they appear natural or inevitable (Gunn, 2011; Jackson, 2006). Since these norms are so deeply embedded in daily life it's hard to see a reality or existence outside of them. We can see this embedded normativity in our daily lives - from clothing stores being separated into binary gender sections, to having our passports say male or female. Heteronormativity is not obvious unless you are critically looking at social structures.

  How is heteronormativity perpetuated in education? The institution of education is a place in which heteronormativity is learned, mirroring dominant beliefs and structures of society (Gansen, 2017). Jackson (2006) discusses heteronormativity in relation to childhood development and discovery. He argues that in modern Western societies we attribute things like gender from a moment a child is born (despite gender not actually being physical/biological) which in turn makes gender foundational to the self. One of the first social categories children learn is gender—which forms the ways they locate themselves and start to make sense of the word. Heteronormativity ascribes a binary way of thinking - that there are only boys and girls, and then privileges these constructed social categories. Both gender identity and sexuality is automatically assumed to be cisgender and heterosexual, and children learn these normatives though their social interactions (family, school, play, etc.) (Jackson, 2006). Queer theory, as a critical theory, questions and challenges the binaristic thinking that shapes society. Similarly, the Riddle Scale shows us how multi-dimensional homophobic levels of attitudes are – shifting the assumption that homophobia is a black or white issue. Heteronormativity enforces binaries throughout our ways of thinking, which makes it difficult to engage with and question oppressive systems of power – including the ways in which students are learning and being socialized.

In schools, heteronormativity is taught from the minute children enter the school with heteronormative assumptions ascribed to students immediately, from their gender, to their family dynamics, to how they express themselves and their emotions. Students spend their lives learning about a privileged way of social ordering. Some examples of these embedded teachings include; being segregated into boy and girl groups—for sports, for reading groups, etc.; all stories or lessons featuring heterosexual couples; and being taught sex education that is solely between a biological male and female. Teachers actually spend a lot of time and energy (consciously or unconsciously) in producing children who are "expected to become recognizably male or female" (Gunn, 2011, p. 281). This production occurs through curriculum, school rituals, as well as the interactions youth have with peers, teachers, and school administrators (Gansen, 2017). Schools participate "in the process of normalization, which is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values" (Surette, 2019, p. 164). While educators are gradually having more nuanced and complex investigations about gender, sexuality, and queerness, there is still a gap in recognizing how educational institutions (particularly those in early education) are foundational in constructing and regulating heteronormativity. When schools do not allow for curiosity and exploration of queerness, heteronormativity is further reinforced. One of the most powerful forms of normalization, at least in Western social systems, is heteronormativity (Surette, 2019) because it creates a vicious and ongoing cycle which continuously marginalizes queer identities and perpetuates a narrative that queer lives are not possible. In one striking quote, Surette (2019) writes that schools are "the most homophobic of all social institutions" (p. 165). If we are to

wonder how schools can move towards nurturance, the journey begins in first recognizing and understanding how educational institutions play a large role in (re)creating heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity has also been researched in early childhood education settings. Here I share two studies. The first, Gunn (2011), examines heteronormativity in early childhood education. The study examines heteronormative discourses, where teachers shared accounts of practices where genders, sexualities and family dynamics were both troubled, and troubling (Gunn, 2011). Gunn draws attention to the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in early childhood education. For Gunn, "heteronormativity draws attention to practices that derive from and contribute to understandings and assumptions about one's gender, sexuality, and close interpersonal relationships" (Gunn, 2011, p. 281). In early childhood education, children are produced as gendered and heterosexual, where gender is something that a person has - "an enduring and stable aspect of one's identity, essentially male or female, that emulates the natural world order, balances with its opposite, and which is necessary for the survival of humankind. Here gender conflates with notions of sexuality and reproduction" (Gunn, 2011, p. 282). Heterosexuality is taught to young children through heteronormativity with messages that gender and sexuality are fixed categories rather than an expansive spectrum of possibilities. There is a significant emphasis within early childhood education to promote normal and healthy child development, however, within our heteronormative society, that means encouraging the development into a cisgender heterosexual identity. Beginning with early childhood education, queerness is positioned as abnormal. If nurturance is to imagine queer people as indispensable and crucial in society, we can see just how far we have to go in education to achieve it. Gunn (2011) concludes by stating that it is ultimately in all of our best interests to "raise awareness of how we are authorized or marginalized by heteronormative discourses because it is only by

seeing how we are complicit with or othered by them that we begin to desire and work for something else" (p. 288). By paying attention to and challenging heteronormativity educators *do* have the power to resist reinforcing these dominant discourses.

Secondly, Gansen's (2017) research examines the gendered sexual socialization children receive from interactions with teachers and peers in school. The data was collected within a larger ethnographic study of participant observations in nine preschools. Gansen (2017) found that heteronormativity permeates early childhood education programs, where "teachers construct (and occasionally disrupt) gendered sexuality in a number of different ways, and children reproduce (and sometimes resist) these identities and norms in their daily play" (p. 256). Gansen also suggests that heteronormativity ultimately influences teaching practices and suggests that heteronormativity and gendered ideas of power begin to "shape teachers' delineations of behaviors as appropriate, or in need of discipline or intervention, as early as preschool" (p. 257). Interestingly, Gansen did not find that teachers' approaches to gendered sexual socialization varied little based on children's race or social class, though I am curious to understand how this information came to light, as intersectionality is a critical shaping force in how we respond to others, and how our identities shape our experiences. The power structures that reinforce heteronormativity are also the same structures that marginalize and oppress other identities so, I find it hard to believe that teachers' approaches to gender were not influenced by race or social class. As I discussed earlier, educational institutions were shaped and created through colonial pursuits therefore examining heteronormativity also requires examining colonialism. Finley (2011) writes, "heteronormativity should be interpreted as logics of colonialism" (p. 33) where gender and sexuality are inherently tied to ideas such as race and class. We cannot engage in discourses of heteronormativity without recognizing how heteronormativity continues to play a

part in perpetuating things like racism, classism, ableism, and islamophobia through ongoing colonial projects. Queer theory, working with a model of intersectional identity construction, highlights how normative structures in schools are created and maintained. Through intersectionality, categories are not bounded or discrete (Haggis & Mulholland, 2014). By this, I mean that being White and queer entails a different relationship to hegemonic power than an Indigenous or Black and queer person. Queer intersectionality therefore "questions the binaries of difference by bringing the normal in to complicate categories of otherness" (Haggis & Mulholland, 2014, p. 59) in order to decentre heteronormativity.

Gansen (2017) also discusses how teachers reproduce heteronormativity through four different approaches: facilitative, restrictive, disruptive, and passive. Facilitative is when teachers actively promote or encourage heterosexuality. Restrictive is when teachers sanction children's engagement in sexual discourses and practices. A disruptive approach consists of teachers' acknowledgment or acceptance of counterhegemonic performances that disrupt heteronormativity, and a passive approach is when teachers ignore heteronormative behaviours. These approaches are interesting when considering the variety of ways that heteronormativity is reproduced in classrooms. I believe that these approaches can be applied when looking at any age group. Returning to consider the Riddle Scale, I wonder at what level each of these approaches would occur within. Ultimately, Gansen (2017) concludes that early childhood educators' heteronormative "understandings, practices, and gendered expectations imbue children's social context of heteronormativity and gender power at early ages, before children enter elementary school" (p. 267).

Educational institutions were created with heteronormativity at their core. In order to move towards nurturance in schools, the entire educational system, and all of its actors need to

be conscious of the ways in which heteronormativity is (re)produced. From early childhood education through to university, students are learning in an environment that perpetuates a particular narrative—one that is not inclusive of queer identities. As a result, schools are increasingly unsafe environments for queer students. We can see in the research that the educators who are trying to challenge heteronormativity have a major impact on their queer students, making them feel supported and seen in their classrooms. Moving forward, I investigate what it could mean and look like if we challenged heteronormativity in all of its forms – including gender and sexuality binaries, and normative ideas surrounding race, culture, class, and ability. This requires not just imagining a queerer educational system, but a strong commitment to the act of ongoing queering. Simply discussing how education needs to be queer and nurturing is not the goal – this just gives us a way out of doing the difficult work of undoing the problematic structures. Rainbow stickers on classroom doors do not fix systemic injustice, but the ongoing act of queering heteronormative institutions could.

Queering

I do not think many people encounter the word 'queering' very often. I had never read the word until I was in my first-year university women's studies classes. I previously assumed that queer is most commonly used as a derogatory slur, or as a reclaimed identity marker, and not as a verb or adjective. As I discuss in my methods and methodology chapter, queer can be engaged in a multitude of ways. By utilizing queer theory, researchers are able to make anything queer, which is a large reason for why I chose to use queer theory in my research. Queering frameworks extend understandings of how heteronormativity is engrained in society by allowing for identities that transcend strict binary definition. Queering approaches allow for the presence of queer

identities in environments that have traditionally only accepted and given space to people with heteronormative identities (Toomey et al., 2012). Queering is therefore important to utilize when examining how schools can move towards nurturance, because it requires examining educational institutions that have traditionally reinforced heteronormativity. In an article by Glickman (2012), he describes queering as an act of transformation, both within ourselves, and in relation to the world. He shares that he likes the word queer as a verb "because it becomes something we can choose to do" (Glickman, 2012, p. 1). Queering is an action and a choice, rather than just a noun or adjective. He continues, stating that queering is "a practice, rather than a goal or finished product" (Glickman, 2012, p. 1).

I first read Deborah P. Britzman's essay, *Is there A Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight* in an independent study class, and it has stuck with me ever since. In the opening paragraph, Britzman (1995) asks, "can gay and lesbian theories become relevant not just for those who identify as gay or lesbian but for those who do not? What sort of difference would it make for everyone in a classroom if gay and lesbian writing were set loose from conformations of homophobia, the afterthoughts of inclusion, or the special event?" (p. 151). I had not been able to articulate how I felt about the ways in which queer topics are sidelined or excluded in schools, or able to articulate how I internalized how I was sidelined in school. Britzman helped to articulate some of the things I was so deeply infuriated about, one being that I am infuriated that queer topics remain on the sidelines, demarcated for a one-time lesson or for a special guest teacher. Britzman imagining a future in which queerness is not separate or held within the confines of the gender and sexuality binaries was revolutionary for me and got me thinking about what kind of future that is. This thesis is crucial for connecting how queer research and queer education *can* exist and *can* be revolutionary - or at least different.

Discussing inclusion, disruption of 'normalcy', resistance, and construction of knowledge, Britzman highlights how people, particularly straight heteronormative society, engages with queer theory. Politically and personally (the personal *is* political after all), I see queer theory as something that challenges the grounds of identity and theory and is not just centred on particular people; "the queer and the theory in queer theory signify actions, not actors" (Britzman, 1995, p. 153). 'Queering' then, becomes a way to challenge heteronormativity. While reading Britzman (1995) I kept wondering if my research was leaning towards inclusion or representation rather than about actually *queering* educational institution through examining how schools could move towards nurturance. Queering approaches however, help disrupt the conversation around inclusion - and push us to imagine the complicated but necessary ways schools need to move towards nurturance.

The act of queering education: Educational institutions have never been safe spaces for people who are not White, cisgender or straight (Britzman, 1995; Surette, 2019; Willinsky, 1998). By design educational institutions are exclusionary spaces. I am not saying that schools or educational actors all still operate consciously through this oppressive lens, rather, I am highlighting the fact that educational institutions, educational pedagogy, and traditional curriculum aren't created with the goal of being liberatory or inclusive. They have been created for capitalist goals: to create productive workers for our country. So, queering education is to imagine a system that is radically different than the one that currently exists, because queering means to critically transform. It means to commit to an ongoing practice and goal. It means to actively choose a different route. It means using queer perspective to take mainstream education and turn it into a place in which queer students are nurtured. It requires that the curriculum,

policies, and practices of schools are nurturing of all individuals and their experiences (Toomey et al., 2012). In *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks (1994), she writes,

> to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn…our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

I believe that queering education is a practice that disrupts the harmful systems that marginalizes students and educational actors and helps to care for the souls of students. After all, why are we teaching if not to care for our students?

In *Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy*, Kevin Kumashiro (2002) challenges the education system through imagining anti-oppressive education. Kumashiro shares stories from seven queer anti-oppressive activists who help give insight on oppression and education. Kumashiro also shares his own experiences of troubling education and resisting heteronormativity in educational settings. This book is a great example of queering education and challenging what it means to provide education. I have established that schools are often violent and unsafe places for queer youth. Though he does not use the words nurturance, I believe that Kumashiro's writing and pedagogy imagines nurturing spaces. The school needs to be a space where 'othered' identities and people will not be harmed verbally, physically, institutionally, or culturally (Kumashiro, 2002). Kumashiro (2002) engages in queering education by sharing a vision of schools where they are affirming places where "normalcy (cultural or sexual) is not presumed" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 34), and where marginalized and 'othered' students will have both the space and audience for their voices to be heard.

Many educational institutions do not have strict requirements for educators to engage with queerness or to queer their educational practices in any way. As a result of not having to take up topics of queerness, and "the topic of gender and sexual diversity from an anti-oppressive and social justice educational framework, the exclusion of these affirming messages not only perpetuates the beliefs that gender and sexual diversity is abnormal and inherently controversial, but also minimizes and oppresses the needs and rights of gender and sexual minority students" (Surette, 2019, p. 174). To queer education, educational actors can start to move towards nurturance "by understanding their own prejudices and biases, and by asking themselves why it is so important to maintain a heterosexist environment" (Little, 2001, p. 106). As part of queering education, educational researchers and educators have two roles: to understand the dynamics of oppression and suggest ways to work against it (Kumashiro, 2002). When educators begin to recognize and question why they are maintaining heteronormativity, they can begin to challenge the stereotypes surrounding queerness, and fully engage in their role as an educator. They can then create an environment where queerness is not abnormal, overtly sexual, or controversial. Without questioning heteronormativity within their schools, and not confronting stereotypes, discrimination and homophobia, schools are likely condoning it (Little, 2001).

Throughout my thesis, I emphasize how heteronormativity is at the core of educational institutions, a structural block making it very difficult for schools to move towards nurturance. Heteronormativity within educational institutions serves to erase and marginalize queer educational actors. Nurturing education is not just for queer students, but also for queer educators. In a study by Gray et al. (2016), researchers examine queer teachers' experiences, and within the study, all of the participants agreed that schools reflected the dominant culture (i.e.: heteronormativity), and that homophobia was linked to notions of social class, cultural capital,

and socio-economic status (Gray et al., 2016). From these studies, we can see how moving towards nurturance in heteronormative dominated educational institutional is highly difficult. Because schools are straddling both heteronormative discourses whilst trying to engage in 'inclusivity', schools create confusing and cognitive dissonant narratives. Schools simultaneously acknowledge "the risks to the health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender diverse young people" whilst the students remain in "an environment that vilifies them" (Gray et al., 2016). Moving towards nurturance requires a breaking of these contradictory practices. I suggest that this can be achieved through queering - understanding how heteronormativity is produced and reproduced and naturalizing the presence of queer identities in environments that have traditionally only accepted and given space to people with heteronormative identities.

Conclusion

In this literature review, I have spent time investigating the various moving parts in order to more fully understand my thesis goal and question; to understand how schools can move towards nurturance of queer identities. I employ the Riddle Scale (1994) as a framework and as a tool to paint a clearer picture of the levels of homophobia in society and to understand why 'moving' towards nurturance is an active decision. At the root of educational institutions is heteronormativity, a large beast that staunchly clings to violent and restrictive categories of being and living. Heteronormativity prevents schools from moving towards nurturance and holds schools within a mind frame and pedagogy that, at its worst – marginalizes and erases queer identities – and at its 'best' frames queer identities within the context of acceptance, inclusion, or tolerance. Heteronormativity prevents educational actors from radically re-imagining what education could look like. I suggest that through the act and process of queering we can trouble

educational institutions and disrupt the status quo of inclusion because it pushes us to imagine the complicated but necessary ways schools need to move towards nurturance.

In the next chapter, I discuss my thesis method and methodology. While early on in this thesis I discussed queer theory, this next chapter dives into narrative inquiry, and why I believe that narrative inquiry is a way of queering as well as a way to amplify and share non-heteronormative voices and narratives.

Chapter Four: Method and Methodology

Imagine with me for a minute that this thesis is a woven tapestry. Queer theory and narrative inquiry are the frame, and the data collected from publicly sourced information online and in-person interviews with educators at the Qmmunity Centre are the yarn or fabric. Myself and my research participants are the creators, constructing and piecing it all together in a way that people can see, understand, and engage with. In this chapter, I discuss my research methods and methodology, and how I have constructed this tapestry.

I find it laborious to read through deeply academic texts. While I recognize the benefits of all writing and disseminating of information, I know I would rather read a book or a story where the author shares their experiences. Through trial and error, I found narrative inquiry. While I will not be using poems, or artwork, or theatre in my work, I will be telling the story of this research, and have already shared my experiences in earlier chapters. By sharing about myself, the experiences of my participants, and other stories from the queer community, I hope that this thesis can highlight the importance of relationships when imagining how schools can move towards nurturance.

I chose to employ queer theory and narrative inquiry for a multitude of reasons. The primary reason is that they have the potential to challenge normative and taken for granted systems. When looking at education through the lens of queer theory, heteronormative institutions can be flipped and troubled, and we can imagine a different future - what schools could be like if they were queered and nurturing. As a queer person, I am a small part of a large history of queer people resisting institutions and desiring and implementing change. I felt it was very important to engage with a narrative inquiry and queer theory in ways that were not only critical of institutions, power, hegemony, and heteronormativity, but also one that ensured I was

being self-reflective and critical. Both queer theory and narrative inquiry give the space for

positionality and voice to be heard and reflected upon. This is not to say that narrative inquiry

and queer theory are without problems, or that they always go together seamlessly. By not being

critical, we can fail to engage in an intersectional approach – further marginalizing or erasing

queer Indigenous histories and experiences, and perpetuating homonormativity.

Throughout my thesis, I emphasize repeatedly that we cannot forget that behind

everything - institutions, theory, writing, etc. there are *people.* I collected my data over the span

of a year, taking mental health breaks in between. I am forever grateful for my participants who

took the time to talk and share their experiences with me. I could not have imagined how schools

can move towards nurturance without their expertise. Relationships are at the core of both queer

theory and narrative inquiry, and I am indebted to my participants. I think at the heart of

queerness is relationships, and without this importance, I do not think my thesis and findings

could be what it is. Ultimately, narrative inquiry helps communicate all the theory and data in a

way that makes sure that people are central - where people's voices and experiences take the

main stage, while queer theory allows for us to imagine possibilities outside of

heteronormativity. In the next section, I discuss narrative inquiry and queer theory in more detail.

Narrative Inquiry & Queer Theory

When I first proposed this research, I thought I would be using case study as my research

methodology. Case study allows for a certain kind of broadness with its definition, but also the

phenomenon being studied is bounded by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 15). I

figured that I could bind queer education within one not-for-profit that I would observe but

would contextualize it within my larger data collection and geographically place it in the

province of Alberta. This all changed once I conducted interviews with educators because I was made more aware of how narrative could be used in research.

Over the span of two weeks I conducted four interviews with staff who are current or previous on-the-ground, frontline educators, who have been working within schools delivering queer education. These conversations were guided by semi-structured interview questions (which can be found in Appendix A, and lasted around an hour each, with no two interviews going in the same direction. Talking, laughing, and reflecting about queer education with participants was a complete 180 from my preliminary research work. Instead, I got to ask participants the myriad of questions I had been compiling since beginning to imagine my research. It was refreshing and ended up being the start of my decision to rethink my research methodology as narrative inquiry. Harfitt (2017) writes, "Jean Clandinin describes narrative inquirers starting in the midst and ending in the midst of experience; in other words, there is no concrete beginning point or end. The emphasis, therefore, is for the narrative inquirer to engage in constant searching or broadening, burrowing, storying and re-storying" (p. 6). I feel that this encompasses my experiences with my research; I come into these scenarios in the midst, and leave in the midst, but seek to understand how narratives can help shape the future for nurturing education. Within queer theory subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable, and perpetually becoming (Browne & Nash, 2016). The challenge in narrative inquiry then is to gather, understand and interpret data within the 'midst'. Within this thesis, engaging in narrative inquiry through a queer lens is to recognize that this thesis will never be a finished project – only a part of the 'midst' of scholarship that hopefully can help challenge heteronormativity.

What is narrative inquiry? Narrative inquiry is described by Clandinin (2013) as "… an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a

source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17), and as "a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). The conversations I had with research participants were deeply impactful, and it was because they provided thoughtful insight into understanding experiences. As someone who appreciates reading stories rather than reports, I have always been naturally drawn to story as an important way of information sharing. Narrative inquiry allows me to have a deeper understanding of people's experiences. I had never originally considered narrative inquiry as valid for my research because I had never read examples of narrative inquiry that had a semi-structured interview outline and was couched within an examination of a larger institution. Since conducting my research however, I have come across similar forms of writing that convinced me that this was a possible approach for my research. An example of this is *Safe is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students* by Michael Sadowski (2017). Prior to conducting my research however, I did not understand how to connect all the pieces of reconciling my thesis question with interviews and data collection within a narrative. What I knew is that I liked reading and sharing stories and found them extremely helpful when I wanted to communicate an idea.

When I reflect on my experiences in university, it was only in women's studies or feminist classes in which queer, Black, Indigenous, and women voices and scholars were centred. Most of my classes featured the voice of straight, cisgender, White men. In my research surrounding narrative inquiry, I found that there were so many stories shared by voices that have typically been marginalized. This made me wonder why are all of the scholars and theorists we hold dear predominantly white men and women? bell hooks (1994) writes, "work by women of color and marginalized groups or white women (for example, lesbians, sex radicals), especially if

written in a manner that renders it accessible to a broad reading public, is often de-legitimized in academic settings, even if that work enables and promotes feminist practice" (p. 64). I have known for a long time how patriarchy, white supremacy, and ongoing colonization affects the sharing of thoughts and experiences of marginalized folks, so it is no surprise that I was only exposed to the work of women of colour and/or queer people in specialized queer theory or feminist classes. Questioning who is deemed as knowledgeable and with authority is an important part of narrative inquiry - especially when engaging with oppressed and/or marginalized people and identities. Who gets to script our lifeworlds as recognizable and valued is important. Are the voices of people being heard? Are we taking into account the narratives that have not been prioritized in academia? In my case, documenting the perspectives of queer educators was an act of queering and shifting who is traditionally deemed as knowledgeable.

I find when I am engaging in theory, I get a headache, or just assume that I do not have the capacity for comprehension, because it is often too dense for me to understand or even begin considering applying. bell hooks (1994) states, "one of the many uses of theory in academic locations is in the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references" (p. 64). While I recognize the value in all kinds of research, particularly any research that challenges heteronormativity and systemic injustice, I have been drawn to stories as a way of communicating ideas and as a way to challenge the production of "intellectual class hierarchy". I choose to engage in narrative inquiry in the hope that this thesis doesn't end up being obscure and hard to understand. Within my thesis, I know I will end up using jargon that probably is not accessible, but I hope that through narrative it does not end up being too obtuse. My hope is that I engage with queer theory and narrative inquiry in a way that the voices of educators can be

heard, and educational institutional practices are questioned critically. I am not saying I have all the solutions (because I do not), but it is my hope that through narrative, it is easier to read and digest. The narrative approach invites people into ideas in a different way than conventional academia might.

The importance of relationships in queer research: Relationships are so important, and especially so within the queer community. In order to have the trust and confidence to share personal lived experiences and information, relationship building is imperative. Similarly, narrative inquiry is all about relationality. How can you expect someone to talk with you without building some form of relationship? Harfitt (2017) writes, "it is not enough to simply represent data; narrative inquiry is relational and transactional in that researchers come into relation with their participants and therefore consider their own experiences narratively as well as their research participants' experiences and those of the people they encounter in the different contexts where the lives of the researchers and participants meet" (p. 5). This relationality is important not only for ethical research, but also for myself because of the ways that I am embedded within my research.

A majority of my participants are also my friends. I know most of them because we spend time with each other outside of work environments. I had to reorient myself (Ahmed, 2006) and engage in our relationship differently for this research. No longer were we just friends, but by working with the Qmmunity Centre, I was creating a new relationship between us - as researcher and educators. This orientation was vastly different than any other experience I'd had with these participants. Before I reached out to the Qmmunity Centre to recruit participants, I thought a lot about who would be best to talk to when it comes to providing queer education in Alberta. When I was planning my research, I purposefully chose the Qmmunity Centre because I

wanted insight from a particular point of view- from people who are experts in queer education. I wanted to talk with people I thought could imagine what moving towards nurturance could look like in the future, drawing from their experiences as educators. I dealt with this ethical challenge with much self-reflection, a central part of engaging in queer theory as a critical theory. The ethics process required by the University was an important part in writing out how the interviews would occur, which helped orient me in this new relationship I was embarking on with my participants.

When the time came to proceed with my research, I needed to enter the room honouring our relationship with the knowledge that they trust me, and therefore trust what I do with the information they shared. As a result of this built trust, I was able to ask deeper questions than I might have been able to if they were strangers. Connelley and Clandinin (1990) reflect on the relationships within qualitative research, stating, "narrative inquiry occurs within relationships among researchers and practitioners, constructed as caring community" (p. 4). These relationships are important in any qualitative research and are important when reflecting on the ethical considerations in engaging in narrative inquiry, especially because the participants *are* my community, even before I began this work. I worried that being friends with my participants would put our relationship in an ethical situation in which they might feel obligated to share or participate *because* they know me. As a result, part of orienting myself was establishing that in no means would I be upset if they did not want to participate, and to make it very explicit that their participation was by volunteer basis only. I am thankful that they are passionate educators who enjoy sharing their experiences and talk about their work because it made having these conversations extremely valuable. I am also thankful for the participants who I did not have a relationship with previously who trusted me enough to speak with me.

Relationships are what lead to the sharing of stories - which in turn leads to the ability to conduct and engage in research and analysis. Through narrative inquiry, I believe that there is more opportunity to share the stories behind the institutions. While I believe it is important for there to be a variety of qualitative and quantitative research, I also believe that there should be space for lived experiences to be shared. I have learned the most about queer history, politics, and education because I have *talked with people* about their experiences. I would not have learned about transgender teacher experiences without them trusting me to hear their stories. I would not have learned about what it is like to be a closeted queer teacher in Catholic school without people trusting to share those experiences with me. I definitely would not understand the complexity of providing nurturing queer education in Alberta without meeting and talking with the educators who are on the ground at the Qmmunity Centre. This research is narrative inquiry because it was created through the commitment to living and understanding experiences through a narrative view in a relational way.

I felt disconnected from people before I began my interviews with my participants. Very few papers I read for my literature review included a human voice that painted a larger picture of the landscape of queer education. Narrative inquiry is one way that people come to know experience through story, and as I began to piece my interviews and other data collection together, narrative inquiry provided a framework in which to begin assembling my thesis. Chase (2018) writes,

> a personal narrative is a distinct form of communication: It is meaning making
>
> through the shaping of experience; a way of understanding one's own or others'
>
> actions; of organizing events, objects, feelings, or through in relation to each

other; of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions, events feelings, or

thoughts over time (in the past, present, and/or future). (p. 549)

The personal experiences shared with me, though set within a specific context, helped me begin to see how my thesis question was connecting to lived experiences. This is not to say that piecing together the narratives is not a difficult task. Chase (2018) shares, "it is widely recognized that the question of how to analyze narrative material is especially challenging" (p. 552). I am incredibly nervous to write through narrative because I am afraid that I am not a good writer, as well as being concerned that all that my writing will not serve justice to the power and intelligence that I see within my participants and the queer community at large. A challenge in queer theory and queer academic scholarship is the difficulty of communicating across an increasingly wide range of identities, who each have their own experiences, practices, and relationships (Murray et al., 2016).

Narrative inquiry and the important of voice: Similar to queer theory, narrative "is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study which is appropriate to many social fields" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to engage in interdisciplinary thinking, drawing from a multitude of sources and fields. I have always been interested in the role narrative plays in topics surrounding social justice issues. How sharing lived experiences becomes a way to draw in readers with an interesting story can gain "a better chance at engendering the empathy that is so necessary for social change" (Callaghan, 2018, p. 40). Chase (2018) touches on the history of the intersection of narrative inquiry and social justice, sharing, "an interest in how narrative inquiry contributes to social change has been central to narrative research for decades. Those studying personal narratives often bring to light marginalized people's experiences, changing our perceptions of them" (Chase, 2018, p. 553). I

believe that my participants have played an active role in bringing light to the experiences on working in a field with marginalized identities. Additionally,

> many of these studies exhibit what Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2012) call 'critical bifocality' - 'dedicated theoretical and empirical attention to structures *and* lives' (p. 174). They argue that critical bifocality is essential to understanding how inequalities are institutionalized within and across social structures *and* how genuine resistance to inequalities is possible in local contexts. (Chase, 2018, p. 554).

Bifocality is something that I believe is important, particularly in this thesis, because I am looking at both institutions (educational) and social structures. Therefore, "in the case of narrative inquiry, this means dedicated theoretical and empirical attention to the interplay between narrative content and practices, on one hand, and myriad social contexts, on the other" (Chase 2018, p. 558). Clandinin (2013) writes, "the focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals' experience but is also an exploration of the social cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experience were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (p. 18). I have the task of investigating the complex relationship between participants' stories, their position within multiple institutions, and all of our combined positionalities within queer education. Narrative inquiry provides a framework for me to navigate this complicated task, and queer theory helped make visible how to begin to disentangle this complexity through queering/queer(y)ing.

Within this section, I have discussed why I chose to engage with narrative inquiry for my thesis. Drawn to stories from a young age, I knew I wanted to write my thesis in a way that I could weave the voices of people throughout theory, literature, and data. While all forms of

writing methodologies and methods are valid and have the power to provide important spaces for voices to be shared, I felt that narrative inquiry could be a space in which marginalized experiences are heard and shared. Returning to Eve Tuck's (2009) shift away from damage-centred narratives, it is my hope that this thesis will not just be a place in which queer identities are seen within a traumatic or marginalized lens, but instead highlights the importance of queering heteronormative institutions. Ultimately at the heart of narrative inquiry, like queer theory, are people. It is people who are affected by having or not having nurturing education, and it is people who have to actively make the choice to queer their perceptions of what education could look like. It is my hope through narrative that I can make clear the ways in which schools can move towards nurturance. In the next section, I will be discussing access to queer education. Before I interviewed my research participants, I first wanted to see what queer educational programming existed in Alberta. My interviews with participants through narrative inquiry is one part of my thesis data, while publicly sourced information was another valuable source of knowledge. In the next section, I connect how having access to queer education, and my process of researching queer education in Alberta informed my decision to utilize narrative inquiry, and how my initial online research findings actually shaped my thesis. I do this by discussing online education, data categorization, and data collection.

Accessing Queer Education

A large part of understanding how schools could move towards nurturance was first finding out if, how, and when queer topics are addressed within the Albertan education system. Publicly sourced information became my first source of data, and one of the main reasons for this was because I wanted to see what information was accessible through searching online. I

strongly believe that there should not be a requirement to have a university degree to be able to access queer education and resources, or be enrolled in university before queer education is presented to you, like I experienced. I actually co-wrote an article with another queer friend of mine about how we learned about our identities by turning to online spaces because there were no other options in our communities growing up (Maine & Anderson, 2019). Challenging heteronormativity, the internet was, and continues to be a way for queer people to have power and autonomy in knowledge and self-production. For both of us, queer topics were never addressed in school, so public information sharing was the only way we could anonymously get information. Similar to this thesis, in that paper we engaged with queer theory with the hope of challenging normative education. In fact, when it comes to learning about queerness, many queer, trans, and queer and trans people of colour have turned to the internet as a way of sharing valuable information that is not otherwise provided through public education (Manduley et al., 2018). Despite moral panic, something that I also discuss later in my data analysis, queer people continue to seek out information in alternative ways, including what they can find publicly online (Fox & Ralston, 2016; Manduley et al., 2018).

Drawing from my experiences online, I began my initial data collection through searching online for information about nurturing queer education programs - well, actually, for *any* queer educational programs that existed within Alberta. Later I share the process of data collection, and a compilation of the educational programs that are currently being taught or offered in the province can be seen in Appendix C. Because this part of the research process was done independently, conducting this part of data collection contributed a lot of mental reflection. I speak to this experience again because I need to make clear that doing this work is both painful but extremely necessary. I reflect back upon the literature here because I know that having access

to this information could help a not-for-profit get funding, or could put pressure on lawmakers to implement change. All of this information is useful and ideally serves a purpose, but does not make it any less hard to read. As part of this intial data collection, I absorbed information and statistics about how many queer youths are homeless, suicidal and lacking social support (Payne & Smith, 2013; Fredman et al., 2015; Case & Meier, 2014). I read about how the government does not provide adequate resources to queer youth and queer education (Little, 2001; Manduley et al., 2018). I read about how parental lobbying groups are putting queer education at stake because of religious and personal convictions (Callaghan, 2018; Peter et al., 2018). I learned about the lack of psychology services for queer youth inside of schools (Travers, 2018). With every paper that I read, I would have to take days or weeks off from my work because I was so emotionally exhausted. As someone who cares deeply for my community as well as creating socially just educational systems, I cannot fully articulate how I felt reading about the trauma, violence, and pain that the queer community faces. I know that these studies are important, and that the statistics are important for the public to understand. In the process of this data collection, it was also made evident how queer people searching online may also have to dig through all of these painful articles and statistics.

Everything I learned about being queer, I learned on the internet: Before moving on, I want to make note that a lot of public information and resources - and most importantly, vital information for queer people, is not going to be found in the classroom, and will always exist online or in-person. As Miller (2017) writes, "…for LGBTQ youth who are unable to find various social, sexual, and health needs met in offline venues, the Internet has functioned to fill in gaps in finding friends, romantic/sexual partners, LGBTQ related events and services, and sexual health information" (p. 511). In my experience the educational curriculum provided by the

government and taught in my classrooms actively erased part of my identity. It continuously

failed to give me the resources to explore who I was in a safe environment. I attended a Catholic

school, and any queer education was non-existent. It was because of my experiences of feeling

like the only place I could turn to was the internet, that I actually found thousands of other

people who felt the same way. These people also felt like their school, their family, their friends,

or the community they lived in, could not give them the knowledge they needed to live safe and

fulfilling lives. For myself and many others, the internet and subsequently social media websites

like Tumblr and Instagram, became the biggest resource when it came to queer education and

finding our identity within the queer community. Within the queer community, there is a vast

web of informal education and resources that is shared amongst us. As queer folks, we have

always been a source of information, often doing free educational labour for others daily. This

sharing occurs in order to counteract the harmful, non-nurturing messages queer people receive

within the educational system. The internet as an informal education platform invites curiosity

and learning without the subject matter being predetermined through a traditional

heteronormative curriculum design or approach. These platforms allow for self-directed learning

and offer many different conceptualizations, communities, and resources. Young people continue

to have access to different representations than might be offered through "mainstream modes"

and this is particularly true with user-drive content development (Tumblr, Instagram, Facebook,

etc.). In thinking about how queer educational programming is found and accessed, I also figured

that many youths might appreciate the privacy or anonymity that searching through social media

websites can provide. Additionally, information is spread rapidly through social media which

educators and students alike might come across more easily than online. So, this beautiful and

essential web of informal education is not only important for our survival but helps provide

crucial information and contributes to our resiliency. I could write another entire thesis about these informal education networks that exemplify appreciation and nurturance, but for this specific research, I limit myself to focusing on formal organizations that provide queer education in classrooms and within schools. This decision was in no way a means to devalue or erase the education that happens outside of the classroom, but instead to delimit this study to focus on how schools can move towards nurturance of queer identities.

Data categories: To better organize my thoughts I decided that I would collect all the information pertaining to access to queer education I could in one fell swoop. I created categories early on in my research that I thought *might* potentially hold some sort of relevance further on. As I reflected upon my personal history, positionality, lived experiences, and goverening literature, I began to write down the kind of information I might want to collect in this thesis. Since beginning my masters' work, I have been keeping a notebook that contains what must look like incomprehensible and scattered thoughts and questions about the things that emerged as I moved forward. I went through this notebook parsing out the most relevant questions before I began my data collection. Some of these questions include; what can schools be doing to get beyond mere inclusion and acceptance for queer children? Where do queer programs exist? Who has access to them? How did they find them? What happens to kids who are in rural communities? Why might being in a rural area make it harder to have queer education? What is the political climate in these communities? How does the political landscape shape access? How does Alberta's oil and gas industry play a part in queer education access? What ages are most affected by lack of nurturing education? Are there virtual education services available? Are the educators themselves queer? Do kids have access to queer adult support in their lives? What intersectional identities are being included/excluded in queer education (i.e.: two-spirit, queer

Black, Indigenous & people of colour [BIPOC])? Are teachers even looking into how they can

be more nurturing to their queer students? Who is funding queer education? What are the

misconceptions about queer education? The questions I was asking myself were, and continue to

be, endless. It is through thinking about my past and desperately wanting a future in which queer

kids feel supported and loved in their education that drives my work. All of this to say, when I

began my data collection through publicly sourced information, I went in with the mind frame

that accessing queer resources in any form is not just down to one barrier or root cause, but

rather, a variety of factors - including geography, ability, and socio-economic levels. As I

became more familiar with the kind of information provided publicly, certain categories of

information emerged. Because of this, I chose to pay particular attention to eight different data

categories in my investigation and data collection. I discuss mapping and the data categories in

more detail in the fifth chapter as part of the resonant threads that emerged from this research.

These eight data categories are:

1. Organization: The name and mission of the group providing the programming.

2. Program fees: What is the cost to have access to the program?

3. Do or can the educators travel for programs? (yes/no)

4. Virtual programs (yes/no): Can the program be taught online?

5. School board approved (yes/no): Have school boards agreed that this program can be taught?

6. Funding sources: Who is funding the program?

7. Grade levels taught

8. Programs taught: What are the topics discussed in the programs?

   The process of online data collection: I began by looking within the programs I already

knew existed. I knew about these programs through both my personal and academic research

interests, but also in part because a majority of my friends are involved in queer education, or in the not-for-profit world. I had already begun to engage with the Riddle Scale (1994) but decided against labeling or assigning what level of attitudes the programs I found embodied in the online resources. Rather, I wanted to see what the state of queer education was like in Alberta to get an idea of common themes. I used a variety of search terms, including 'LBGT education Alberta', 'queer education Alberta', 'LGBT inclusive curriculum in Alberta', and 'resources for queer education in Canada'. Through my data categories, I was able to keep key questions and investigations in mind. I was only collecting the information I could find online, so if there is data missing, or I left out a certain program, it is because at the time of my search, I could not find it online. Searching online also means that I did not reach out to organizations to provide further information, clarify, or expand on anything because my goal was solely on online information. I provide more details on the process of accessing this data set in chapter five, where I delve into the process and results of mapping queer educational programs in Alberta. In the next section, I describe what constituted my second data set, and how I accessed that data.

Research Participants & Ethics Process

I begin this section by sharing that a large part of the ethics process for this thesis was ensuring that I was in communication with my research participants and the Qmmunity Centre. For the final step of writing this thesis, I consulted with the Qmmunity Centre to ensure that they were comfortable with my thesis moving forward. I stated earlier in the introduction that the Qmmunity Centre is not a real organization name, rather a pseudonym, because the Qmmunity Centre ultimately decided to be anonymized within this thesis. They were primarily concerned for the safety of their organization and their staff, not with the contents or the value of this

research. Recently, ultra-conservative Albertans have targeted and harassed the Qmmunity Centre's staff about their work, their values, and their commitment to nurturing education. For this reason, the decision was made to anonymize the Qmmunity Centre rather than naming them explicitly. This is a reminder that advocating for queer people and queer education continues to be a challenging and difficult task, and the people who are doing the work are often faced with violence.

Research participants: The main source of data for this thesis was collected through semi-structured interviews with employees at the Qmmunity Centre. Qmmunity Centre is a Calgary organization that works in normalizing sexuality and sexual health. They have been in operation for many years, leading the way in areas of sexuality, healthy relationships, human rights, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, as well as equality and consent. They focus on three areas: healthy bodies, healthy relationships, and healthy communities, covering topics from puberty, challenging homophobia, violence prevention, and professional training. I chose to work with the Qmmunity Centre because of their ongoing commitment to accessible and queer education. Potential participants for my research were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they were current employees of the Qmmunity Centre; (2) they currently, or in the past have worked as an in-classroom educator (ie: not an after school, elective, or community program). Once I obtained ethics from the University of Calgary, I reached out to the Qmmunity Centre to gain their permission to interview their staff following the criteria outlined above. After a lovely meeting with the educational team lead and one of the Qmmunity Centre's employees and being signed off by the head of the Centre, I was approved to move forward.

Through narrative inquiry, I interviewed four participants. They all currently or previously work(ed) as in-classroom educators, and all hold different roles at the Centre at the

time of the data collection. Three of the four participants identified themselves as part of the queer umbrella, and the fourth did not disclose how they identify. One participant identifies as a gay man, another uses identifying terms such as queer, bisexual, or pansexual, and another identifies as queer. This thesis is queer inside and out. The voices of queer educators are central to the formation of this research which I think is a rarity. Engaging in queer theory within this thesis requires rethinking what it means to provide education, and the job of my participants is to do literally just that.

Temporality in research: Another aspect of narrative inquiry is temporality; sharing experiences across time. This aspect is relevant to my research for a multitude of reasons; (1) I am embedded in this research, drawing from my past and present experiences; (2) The participants are current and past educators; (3) The participants are discussing topics of the past, present and future, depending on my questions; (4) My thesis asks how we can provide nurturing queer education, engaging in the possibility of what could happen in the future. While these are just a handful of experiences, I believe they demonstrate how temporality plays a role in this thesis. As Harfitt (2017) writes, "narrative inquiry hinges on a past-present-future continuum, allows us to attend to human interactions and develops over time in a particular setting or context" (p. 12). I will be attending to past, present and future experiences throughout. Part of asking what nurturing education could look like is to imagine a future that is different than our present. This requires examining the how the stories being told are historically situated to understand how we can take up this task.

Research ethics and data collection: I was required to obtain ethics approval to conduct my interviews and study at the Qmmunity Centre. This process involved (1) creating my research proposal, (2) creating an informed consent form and semi-structured interview questions

(which can be seen in Appendix A), (3) completing the University of Calgary ethics application, and receiving approval to proceed with my research, (4) contacting the Qmmunity Centre for permission to conduct research about their work, (5) obtaining permission from the Qmmunity Centre to conduct research with their staff, and establishing the process of my research, (6) meeting with the staff at the Qmmunity Centre to invite them to participate, and (7) establishing an ongoing conversation with my participants about expectations, data use, and consent.

I communicated with participants through email, coordinating dates and times for our interviews. Prior to scheduling an interview time, I provided an informed consent form that explained to the potential participants what they would be agreeing to if they decided to participate in my research. I also went over the informed consent form with them again in person before I began the interview in case they had any questions. The interviews were all audio-recorded and then transcribed. Each participant was given back their transcript to review, edit or make further comments if they so chose.

As part of narrative inquiry and queer research, relationships are highly important, therefore I felt it was crucial to have the participants have the power to control their transcripts before I began data analysis. Before interviews, I let the participants know that their interviews would be around an hour. The Qmmunity Centre allowed for interviews to take place during the participants' work hours, so they did not have to be interviewed on their free time or leave work to participate. The interviews were semi-structured in style. Throughout my initial research, I had been compiling questions that came to mind, and found it helpful to take a majority of them and shape them into my interview questions. Having the interview questions was helpful in shaping and keeping the conversation relevant and insightful, but I found that most interviews led in different directions. Depending on what the participant was talking about, I guided the

conversation towards what they were naturally wanting to discuss, therefore each interview dug into different interview questions in more depth. It was a great learning experience for me, and wonderful to hear about all the different things the participants were passionate enough to spend time talking about. No two interviews ended up being the same, and as a result, all of them provided deeper insights into the complexities of what it means to provide nurturing education.

Queering research: Mathias Detamore (2016) suggests a queering of method regarding the process of researching. He asks questions like: how do we chose to research the topics or people in our research? What questions do we ask? How do we ask them? How do we organize and analyze our findings? These are all questions of method, all with ethical considerations and imperatives. Detamore suggests that we 'flip' the ethical and methodological in order to better see the complex and queer relationships between researcher and participants. He shares the idea of an ethics as a method that is queer because of its ability to "destabilise our assumptions about the ethical in research, disrupt the researcher/researched relationship and cultivate the intimacies necessary to shape new types of alliances and strategies for alternative social worlds" (Detamore, 2016, p. 170). In other words, everything in my research is an ethical consideration. From my positionality, to my lived experiences, to my queerness, to my participants, to the way I share the research data in this thesis, it all must come under ethical consideration. But for Detamore, these ethical considerations become less rigid and separate through the act of queering. Through this, we can recognize the ethical considerations, while simultaneously fostering relationships. These relationships are a part of imagining an alternative social world - in this case, imagining nurturing education.

Through narrative inquiry I intentionally entered into a relationship with my participants, regardless of if I knew them prior to their participation. I have shared throughout that

relationships are essential in methodology and as pedagogy. So, while narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experiences (Clandinin, 2016), queer theory allows for these experiences to become relational and political - aimed at future goals. Together these narratives made visible the complex but interrelated experiences we all share because of our collective commitment to understanding how to move the education system towards nurturance - even if we don't all use the language of the Riddle Scale. Choosing what parts of the interview data to share and not ultimately came down to relationships - the experiences the educators had on the ground or within their roles.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed why I chose narrative inquiry, and explained the research process in more detail. I also explained that the Qmmunity Centre chose to be anonymized in this thesis to ensure more safety for their staff members. In the next chapter, I discuss my data analysis. After conducting interviews and reading through extensive amounts of literature, the narrative that I felt needed to be shared became clearer. Through prompting my participants to share misconceptions about providing queer education, participants made visible the commonalities within the work of nurturing queer identities. These became the narratives I chose to share and are the resonant threads that I will discuss in the next chapter.

Weaving together the research, literature, my personal experiences, and the conversations with participants, the following sections make visible a number of themes that pertain to queer education. The most common themes I noticed over the entire span of my research were age and the connection of queerness to sex education, and that these themes were inextricably connected to Alberta. While I mapped queer education currently available in the province, I was made more

aware of the various factors to take into consideration when moving towards nurturance. I

believe that these themes are the most important findings from my research and reveal the major

ways in which nurturing queer education is taught or not taught. I refer to these themes as

resonant threads, because when I was looking at the interview conversations, these resonant

threads "echoed and reverberated across" (Clandinin et al., 2012, p. 14) the data, and the themes

highlighted above were made more visible.

Chapter Five: Resonant Threads

Before I begin this chapter, I want to make note that this chapter deviates from the

traditional master's thesis layout. I briefly will explain my reasoning for not following the

traditional model of a thesis where data analysis, findings, and discussion are divided into

separate chapters. To me, none of this work is separate. My experiences, the narratives from

participants, the research and literature, and queerness itself are not separate categories that can

be analyzed apart from one another but instead substantiate and validate each other. It is hard to

just share the interviews without immediately tending to a discussion around it, and connecting it

to other ideas or narratives because everything within this thesis is interrelated. Queer theory

pushes against the fragmentation of ideas and thinking that stem from Eurocentric

epistemological trajectories which actively work to distance and separate people and

communities through these processes of classification which ultimately ends up objectifying and

marginalizing the Other.

It is also hard to navigate the sharing of narratives alongside an academic voice. Queer

theory encourages the act of queering – and so I choose to queer the traditional model of a thesis,

and also connect to the tenants of narrative inquiry. In doing this, I can discuss concepts and

lines of thinking that are truer to my process of connecting the online mapping of programs in Alberta and the participant interviews. Within narrative inquiry, inquirers are able to uniquely represent and understand the phenomena being studied, allowing for a different theory, method, or line of study to be pursued (Clandinin et al., 2007). Representation of the narratives are informed and articulated through analysis and interpretation (Clandinin et al., 2007). So, when I was sitting in a coffee shop, hitting a brick wall about how I could fit the work I was compelled to do through the interpreting of the data into the standard thesis format, it dawned on me (or the coffee kicked in), that I chose to engage in narrative inquiry and queer theory to have the flexibility to let the stories lead the representation of analysis and discussion.

Conscious of this flexibility, but aware of ethical considerations, the biggest task I faced was determining what narratives I was going to share within this thesis. What were the resonant threads? Part of critically engaging in queer theory is being conscious of how queer methodology "must facilitate telling and interpreting narratives that do not inadvertently impose meanings" (Murray et al., 2016, p. 101). Keeping this in mind, I had to carefully spend time with all of my research data. Clandinin (2016) asks "who are you in this narrative inquiry?" (p. 81). Once I began data analysis, I spent a lot of time thinking about my interviews with participants, beginning to connect all the moving pieces of my research (data categories, publicly sourced information regarding queer education in Alberta, and literature). Working through the data, I could not help but reflect on myself and my positionality. Who was I within all of this? What are the stories being shared here, and how do I fit in? Should I even fit in? In the introduction chapter, I established that I am not approaching this thesis apolitically or separate from this work. Through narrative inquiry, as a researcher, I am intertwined with the narratives shared by participants. As Clandinin (2016) writes, "no story stands on its own, but rather in relation to

many others (p. 82). While there is a conventional institutionalized expectation that there is a separation between the researcher and the researched (Detamore, 2016), because of the nature and purpose of my thesis question this separation is almost impossible. I ask how schools can move towards nurturance, which is a highly personal and complex question, directly related and stemming from my lived experiences.

As I shared earlier in this section, through narrative inquiry I intentionally entered into a new relationship with my participants. The relationship between myself as a researcher, and them as participants, creates a "political space - or ethical terrain- that binds the one to the other" (Detamore, 2016, p. 181). This 'binding' allows for imagining queerer futures, which is what I believe both queer theory and narrative inquiry have the power to do. While narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experiences (Clandinin, 2016), queer theory allows for these experiences to become relational and political - aimed at future goals. As a researcher, I was already thinking narratively about my own experiences, and once the interviews took place, I continued to examine them alongside my participants' experiences. Together these narratives made visible the complex but interrelated experiences we all share because of our collective commitment to understanding how to move the education system towards nurturance - even if we do not all use the language of the Riddle Scale. These narratives and analysis became my two resonant threads.

Before I begin to introduce or discuss the resonant threads, it is important to know the people who made making these threads visible possible. I asked each of my participants what their role was at the Qmmunity Centre and how they came into their jobs. The particpants names are all pseudonyms, following the request of the Qmmunity Centre to be anonymized.

Frida (pseudonym): I've been working at the Centre for five years now, and I started in our in-school relationship and sexual health education program, and back then I was delivering education to students in grade seven to grade twelve… when I started here because my experience had been at Camp fYerfly prior to my position here, I brought a lot of the knowledge and community based values that I'd learned from fYerfly into the classroom with me. So along with my values, that also informed the feedback I was giving about curriculum and how we should be delivering curriculum in classrooms, and then I also worked in community programs after I worked in school programs. So, community programs here are anything that happens with youth outside of schools, so any specialized programs, sometimes they happen during school hours at a school location, but it would be a specialized program for vulnerable youth – would be the funding for that portfolio, but also in spaces like hospital settings in the youth psychiatric unit, or with services servicing like youth in care, so anyone in a vulnerable youth position in the city, when I was working in that job, I found there were a lot more questions about LGBT identities and a lot more people coming out in those sessions, because they were smaller groups and perhaps there was more safety within them because they were already established groups rather than a classroom. And then I moved into my current role which is working with LGBT youth or youth who are questioning their gender or sexual orientation and their family, so supporting their family and their social network to get that youth like well networked and well supported.

Alex (pseudonym): So, I am a Boys Education (pseudonym) facilitator, and Boys Education is a program designed for ninth grade boys, and it's been around for ten years, and the program runs the length of a year, and many things are focused on everything from healthy relationships to anatomy, sexual health, puberty, birth control, to gender in the media and kind of unpacking masculinities critically, to bystander intervention and like how can you intervene when someone is in a situation that is unsafe, and how can you also take the lessons you've learned in Boys Education and apply them to spaces outside of Boys Education, and consent is woven through the entire curriculum….I did all sorts of things, but long story short of it I really wanted to get involved with something akin to social work, but did not have a social work background, and so I felt very fortunate to do this…

Sarah (pseudonym): Right now, I'm the LGBTQ2S development coordinator, so I work with a couple different programs and work with communities to sort of build capacity within LGBTQ2S organizations or groups and also to run and support programs for LGBTQ2S youth. So, the GSA network is an example of that, where I'm providing support to GSAs like Calgary and area, communities around Calgary, coming in and doing presentations, or just bringing in resources, chatting with youth, playing games, whatever it looks like. And Camp fYerfly is another program I've been involved with for the last sort of almost five years, and it's an LGBTQ2S youth summer camp – happens once a year in the summer for four days and it's kind of an opportunity for youth to be together, learn, build skills and then another program historically I've been involved with is a program

called fYerfly in Schools, which was like a sort of educational program that

shared about gender and sexual diversity and the importance of inclusive

language, so those are – and also historically I was an educator, so I did do the

relationships and sexuality education in schools.

Jess (pseudonym): *I'm a relationships and sexual health educator, and I work*

with grade seven up to high school so age ranges from as young as eleven to as

old as twenty-three, I've worked with people over eighteen for sure, and yeah, we

just teach the Alberta sexual health curriculum in a better way, better than it's

outlined…The values of the organization align with my values. I think people –

like I'm very in tune with the idea that if you're not hurting someone, and you're

not causing harm, you get to be who you are. I've worked with youth quite a bit, I

like hanging out with youth, it's fun.

The participants in this study have a variety of backgrounds, but all are experts in the field of providing and facilitating queer educational programming, educating about often taboo topics and filling the gaps in the existing Alberta curriculum. Moving forward in this chapter, I discuss my findings, or what I refer to as resonant threads, and begin to interrogate what it means to move towards nurturing education in more depth.

Situating the Resonant Threads and Common Misconceptions

When I began sifting through the data that I had collected from interviews with participants I noticed a few common narratives were showing up repeatedly in both the data collection, and in the literature. While the conversations varied between each of the people I interviewed - which can be seen through how I really did not ask the same exact question twice-

there were a couple areas that were repeated. I have divided my data analysis into two parts in order to examine the major themes and to discuss how these themes either contribute to or prevent moving towards nurturance within educational institutions in Alberta.

I have structured this portion of the chapter to analyze and discuss the data simultaneously. I have pulled parts of my conversations with participants out and connect the voices of the participants with my observations and/or connections to the literature and research on providing and moving towards nurturing education. In the first resonant thread, I discuss the process of mapping programs in Alberta and Alberta educational systems. In the second resonant thread, I dive into the participant interviews to highlight common themes around providing and accessing queer education, including age and the publicly (and/or problematically) assumed connection of sex education to queer education. Age comes up the most in relation to queer topics in the media, from concerned parent groups, and from educational actors. It seems as though everyone has an opinion on when it is appropriate to discuss queerness, and directly connected to age is the link of queer education with sex education. The correlation of the two is a harmful misconception that affects access and implementation of nurturing queer education.

Misconceptions about queer education: Before we move forward in discussing the resonant threads, I want to begin by sharing common misconceptions that participants shared in order to contextualize the kinds of beliefs that they see are prevalent when it comes to queer education. Much of my research has involved understanding people's current beliefs about queer education in order to wonder how we can move towards nurturance. In all of the interviews I asked: what are some of the most frequent misconceptions that people have about education that involves any topic of queer identities?

Frida: That it has to do with sex… these [queer] identities don't just exist in the bedroom, they exist in our workplaces, in our families, in our friend groups, in our schools, and then we only talk about them in relation to the bedroom, and that's why they don't belong in the sex ed. curriculum because they- for sure let's talk about safer sex practices when we get there, whatever, in late junior high and high school - but let's talk about family and personal identity and community and relate them back to things that we're already teaching young children, like anti-bullying in schools. This includes not discriminating or bullying someone because they are gay, or lesbian or transgender.

Jess: That making it safe for everyone will ruin straight people's sexuality, or harm them that they have to learn that there are people different from them, which is not true…[and] I think that's the thing that makes me really sad is like, this idea that queer people are so different that they need a special sex ed, but – and arguably they do, because it is unsafe to talk about queerness, but, it's not sex ed that's the issue – it's the homophobia and transphobia, and all of those 'isms' – if that makes sense?…What the Centre exists for, I think, is to make ourselves obsolete. What we want is for people to be comfortable having these situations because that's the end goal. I should be working myself out of a job. So, it's kind of a challenge that teachers think that an expert needs to come in and teach it. But, on the flip side, you don't want a teacher with really gross values, or maybe values they haven't sorted through…. What makes me sad is that queer people will most likely be the most informed about sex…By virtue of being queer, those

conversations have to be had…. we as adults haven't set up the system for them to know what the heck is going on.

Sarah: Something that is unbearably frustrating for me and my work is that queer identities, queer and trans identities are immediately sexualized, particularly when working with younger age ranges of youth, so whether it's junior high or late elementary age, people are talking about GSA groups, and then it's immediately like sexualized or it's associated with these youths attraction instead of it's actually just about what their identity is and what feels best to them, because I think it's like, on so many different levels it's very frustrating, like, it is sexualizing youth which is super frustrating, but it's also equating queer identities with sort of sexual identities, but also perversely sexual identities…There's such a fear of like queer sex-so that's another – that's something that I really have had to be very, very careful and very, very clear about, but then I also think queer youth have a right to queer specific sex ed that represents them, that I've had to draw really clear boundaries in my work because like as soon as the topics of sexuality or sex comes up within the framework of a GSA for example, or even within the anti-homophobia, anti-transphobia conversation, then people start making assumptions and get very confused, so yeah, that's a huge challenge… I think there's also this idea that folks feel like they kind of have to know everything or know nothing and that that like pursuit of what every identity looks like is linear, like, what identities look like, the difference between sex and gender, what all the labels mean, like that that's somehow like an endpoint with knowledge,

whereas like for me I still am curious about identity and what it looks like and

how people are using labels to define themselves, and so I never want to

approach a conversation, even with a classroom or students saying like you have

to come out of this presentation knowing a, b, c, d, e, f, g, l, m, n, o, p, and

everything, and like having a perfect vocabulary…

Alex: *I think one misperception is that the program [Boys Education] is trying to*

fix boys. I'm sure you've heard the term toxic masculinity, and that's something

that organizationally and also in our program that we've moved away from,

because I think it assumes that rather than identifying certain behaviours as

harmful, that masculinity is innately harmful, which has a shameful connotation

to it. So, sometimes we go into schools and the perception is that; we're going to

give you all of the youth that we have the most difficulty with, because your

program is almost correctional…we're careful to be very specific with the boys

that what this is about is learning and connecting with each other and with

forging a better relationship with yourself, and we are not saying that being a guy

is wrong. I think that's a common perception.

Alex described the misconception about Boys Education was that people thought that goal was to "fix" boys. This is a damage centered approach (Tuck, 2009), and something that made both Alex and I pause and discuss further.

> **Alex:** *It's careful to be very specific with the boys that what this is*
>
> *about is learning and connecting with each other and with forging a*

better relationship with yourself, and we are not saying that being a

guy is wrong. I think that's a common perception.

Emilie: *Wow. I had not framed it in my mind like that before.*

Alex: *I hadn't either before I started to work here. It never occurred to me, but I think that idea and that narrative is out there for sure – that we're fixing. We're not really fixing, we're trying to correct a harmful gender norm and get people to behave in a way that's going to nurture a healthy relationship, but that's so different than shaming someone for how they identify or who they are.*

Emilie: *It reminds me of teaching from a deficit model. I was listening to a podcast once and it was saying that we are teaching ESL[5] learners as though it's a deficit that they don't speak English, but not recognizing it's a strength that they already speak two or more, and so it's kind of the same, of you know, we're not here because you're harmful, but we're here because you're so much more than whatever this narrative is.*

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[5] ESL is a common abbreviation used in schools and it stands for 'english as a second language'. Schools often use the term ESL when describing a student who is not a native English speaker (Morin, 2020).

Alex: Absolutely. And to draw another parallel to that, the same thing happened around emotional literacy[6]. I think there was a period of time when, I know personally, I can't speak for the whole team, when some of the discourse of like, we're teaching boys to be emotionally literate, but it's like wait what does that assume? And it's like, do we want to identify that boys are emotionally illiterate and don't have that capacity, or do we want to acknowledge instead that they are all emotional beings and they have great capacity for emotion, but they're being pressured not to show it. And so then we're giving permission to express, but permission to express something is very different than saying you don't know how. Then I think we realized that talking about emotional literacy and the need for boys to have it might have been harming them, so there's this other facet, right.

Emilie: Yeah, and to be it seems like it's about changing the narrative of what's being told to these youth. In queerness, it's not that we need to make other people feel comfortable, it's that we all need to feel comfortable with ourselves in however we identify. So, just because you're a boy doesn't mean x, y, and z but that we all hold capacity.

Alex: Yes, exactly.

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[6] Emotional literacy was coined by Claude Steiner in 1979 and is generally understood as learning to interpret and manage feelings. The principal skills of emotional literacy include knowing your feelings, having a sense of empathy, learning to manage emotions, repairing emotional damage, and emotional interactivity (Steiner, 2003).

>*Emilie: Which I think does lend itself to what nurturance is, is like*
>
>*being "what is within your capacity?" It's endless, but it just needs to*
>
>*be nurtured.*

>*Alex: Yes, absolutely.*

The misconceptions that participants shared made very visible the complicated beliefs that are held surrounding queer education. Keeping this in mind, I move forward with the resonant threads.

Resonant Thread One: Mapping Queerness in Alberta

Drawing from my lived experiences, I began my initial data collection through searching the internet for information about nurturing queer education programs - well, actually, for *any* queer educational programs that existed within Alberta, as I discussed briefly in the methodology chapter. While the internet is not geographically bound, there is a particular experience articulated in this thesis because of the relationship my participants and I have with our geographical location. Living in Alberta is hard for queer people, and as I shared in the introduction, queer youth experiences in schools are often laced with particular harassment, bullying, and marginalization that is relational to the social-political context. Access to education about queer identities also varies depending on which community you live in Alberta. For rural people, there is less access to queer programming than for those in cities. Through mapping, I was able to make clearer the challenges to just geographically accessing queer education – a significant barrier that exists alongside the other layers that prevent queer identities from being

taught and nurtured in schools. This resonant thread discusses the process of mapping queer education in Alberta and the kind of information that I found helpful in shaping my research inquiry. I begin with Alberta education, situating ourselves both temporally and geographically. I then move onwards to further animate the process of searching online for queer programs in Alberta, and what the implications were for my thesis.

      Data categories & mapping queer education in Alberta: In the methods and methodology chapter I discussed how in the beginning of planning my thesis, I had a notebook filled with questions. While these questions were the foundations of creating my thesis, it was not until I began my data collection that I could see that the different questions coalesced around a handful of different but interrelated categories. While my personal experiences gave me more insider knowledge, and my extensive reading of the governing literature was crucial, these categories actually emerged as I began searching online, and began to understand what was available publicly on the internet. I chose to pay particular attention to eight different data categories in my investigation and data collection. As a reminder, these eight data categories are; (1) organization; (2) program fees; (3) travel for programs (yes/no); (4) virtual programs (yes/no); (5) school board approved (yes/no); (6) funding sources; (7) grades taught; (8) programs taught. Below, I discuss what these categories mean in more detail, and what their implications may be when it comes to providing and/or moving towards nurturing queer education.

- **Organization:** This category is fairly simple in terms of data collection. This category is just to state what group is providing the educational programming. This could include a private program, a not-for-profit, or a government body.

- **Program fees**: Fees could potentially be a barrier to accessing queer educational programs. By documenting program fees, or the lack thereof, it was helpful information for me when I was trying to understand access to programs, and also how program fees may be connected to the kind of funding the organization has. This category is also relevant if the organization offers to travel for programs, and if there are any additional fees for those in areas that travel is required. This is especially relevant when we consider the time this thesis is being written - with a conservative government who is slashing funding from both education and not-for-profits. The Calgary Board of Education alone is facing a thirty-two-million-dollar budget cut (CBC 2019). In my hometown of Fort McMurray, public and Catholic schools are losing a combined $7.7 million in funding (Beamish, 2019). Because queer education is not standardized in the province, these budget cuts could mean that schools delay or push aside queer educational programming and educational training because they lack the funding.

- **Travel for programs**: As a young person who grew up in a rural area, I did not have access to face-to-face and formal queer education or representation. When I was talking with a friend who works at the Centre for Sexuality, they told me they were travelling for work in order to deliver programming to another community outside of Calgary. I discuss this more later on in this resonant thread, but it was from this conversation that I realized I should take note of the organizations that travel to other communities who may not have queer educational programs or access to a local organizations that provide queer programs.

- **Virtual programs**: For the schools that are rural and do not have access to in person services, can queer education be delivered through Skype, Zoom, Facetime, or any other form of virtual delivery of programs? This of course comes with its own complications –

like, what if a school does not have the technology to even have a virtual lesson? While this is outside the scope of my thesis, I think this reiterates how moving towards queer nurturing education is a highly difficult task because of a lot of disparity between school boards, regions, and funding.

- **School board approval**: This category was one that I created after I had already begun my initial searches online for queer programs in Alberta. There were a few not-for-profits that had it listed that they were school board approved. School board approved programs mean that the particular organization has been vetted and approved by the school district and can be taught in their schools. This is particularly helpful for teachers or administrators who want to bring in another organization in their classroom because it removes at least some of the barriers to access.

- **Funding sources**: This category was a result of the initial questions I wrote in my notebook. I queried about the various ways in which queer education is offered, supported, or prohibited. A large part of running queer educational programs (nurturing or not) is being able to pay the staff, pay the curriculum developers, pay for materials, pay for travel, etc. This category is also very closely correlated with program fees. I decided to separate the two though in order to document who was funding the queer educational programs, and if that made an impact on the curriculum being delivered. On a personal level as well, I was curious who in the province was funding queer education.

- **Grades taught**: Throughout my research, I found that a big question that often comes up in discourse surrounding queer education is what grades or ages queer topics should be taught (Janmohamed, 2010; Burt et al., 2010). So much so, that it became what I discuss in the second resonant thread. A lot of the controversy and concern from the public comes from

people who are worried about exposing children to gender and sexuality information when they are considered too young. Media discourse often discusses the controversy and political actions surrounding Alberta's curriculum. Many of the concerned questions include: at what age is it acceptable to teach kids about gender and sexuality? Are these topics inappropriate to discuss at school? Given that there is little information gathered around what grades and ages students are being taught anything to do with gender and/or sexuality, the *grades taught* category was important to document what ages nurturing queer education was being offered in order to provide insight into what grades are the most and least commonly taught.

- **Programs taught:** I was curious about precisely what made up queer educational programs. What was actually being taught? This data category allowed me to have insight into what programs are being taught, the topics that are most commonly taught, and maybe more interestingly, what is not being taught. This reminded me of Elliot Eisner's work surrounding the null curriculum. Eisner defined three essential forms of curriculum, one of which is the null curriculum. Null curriculum is defined as what schools *do not* teach. It is "'the options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire" (Flinders et al., 1986, p. 34). Eisner argues that it is not just what is taught that is significant, but also what is not being taught that we should consider (Flinders et al., 1986). He states, "ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problem" (Flinders et al., p. 34). I have kept in mind the null curriculum throughout my research process, because the curriculum does not explicitly

mandate the inclusion of queer education. Bellini (2012) writes, "44.4% of elementary and

40% of secondary teacher education programs failed to include queer issues in their

curriculum" (p. 384). The null curriculum is also a reason why I decided to look at external

organizations who *are* providing queer education, because they are often times the ones

filling the void.

These data categories proved to be incredibly helpful when I was trying to understand how

schools could move towards nurturance. In addition, knowing what information was publicly

available, or not, informed how I led conversations with my participants, and how I thought

about the kind of access in-school educational actors have. These categories both reflected and

grounded the literature I read, as well as the research that has been conducted regarding queer

education. They also made me more considerate of the various aspects to be considerate of when

discussing how schools can move towards nurturance. I also believe another benefit to these

categories is that they could be helpful for others who are doing other studies or have questions

about certain programming or organizations.

   The process of online data collection: When I first began searching online for publicly

available information about queer programming in Alberta, I had already begun to engage with

the Riddle Scale (1994). I decided that when I was searching, I would not label or assign what

level of attitudes the programs embodied, focusing more on just the information that I could find

on programs that exist in Alberta. Because this data collection was focused on the process of

finding out information online, there may be data missing. So, if there is a certain program

missing, or there is now different information available, please keep in mind that this process

was highly dependent on the exact time and way that I did the research. I conducted my online

data collection in March 2019 and again in August 2019. My search terms included but were not

limited to; 'queer education Alberta', 'LGBT education Alberta', 'Alberta LGBT resources', 'Canada LGBT education program'. With the goal of finding publicly accessible information, I did not reach out to organizations to provide further information, clarify, or expand on anything. Ultimately, collecting data on queer educational programming in Alberta from publicly available information online proved to be difficult, and my searches became harder and harder as I got past the first few pages of search results. This confirmed my assumption that this was most likely because there is limited queer education in Alberta.

I searched for queer education in Alberta on Google keeping the search terms basic, typing in things like, 'LGBT education programs in Alberta'. I wrote LGBT instead of using the word queer because as I explained earlier, queer is still a contentious and undefined word. At the time of my initial searches, in both March and August of 2019, Google's top results were both the Alberta Government and Alberta Education. This information was primarily around information about guidelines in Alberta surrounding the protection of queer people from discrimination, as well as information about gay-straight alliances (GSA). Amongst the top hits also included news stories about the United Conservative Party (UCP) plans to roll back school protections for LGBT youth. While I found the Alberta Government and Alberta Education pages somewhat helpful, I could not help but think about the people searching for queer educational programs. None of the top hits actually provided any resources, websites, or numbers for people to get access to queer education. Instead it provided a bit of government perspective, legal jargon, and some scary information produced from the newly elected conservative party. This process made me reflect upon a few things. How are people supposed to move towards nurturing queer education if they cannot easily find out how? How can someone publicly find information about queer education if it is buried in news that could be traumatic or triggering? How can rural

people access queer education since much of the programming is delivered in cities? I do not want to place any of the blame on the organizations, but rather I worry about the lack of widespread information about queer programs, and honestly, limited queer programs in general.

The first website I visited that was not a government website or current news story was the Centre for Sexuality. Looking through their website, I found a clearly marked page about the different programming they offered. On the 'School Education Program Objectives' page, I was able to see the topics they were teaching in schools. They divide their programs into grades and broke down each grade into a specific topics and learning objectives, where each grade had five to ten topics, including increasing their comfort discussing sexuality, develop knowledge regarding gender diversity, examine and gain appreciation for healthy relationships, and determine the ways that they can address oppression and embrace diversity. I also want to note that this was one of the first times I distinctly noticed a correlation between teaching queer education and teaching sex education - something I discuss at length in the second resonant thread.

Continuing my publicly sourced data collection, one search result was a surprise, as I found out about the Calgary Queer Arts Society. I would not have guessed to seek out this particular organization for education programs, nor would I have assumed they had educational funding. I discovered that they do have a specific education team and a variety of programs through their *OutReels Diversity Education Program*. They offer programs starting in Junior High (grade seven) to adults. Some topics include LGBT 101, Developing Ally-Ship, and Trans and Non-Binary 101. They also state that they will "address any topic or issue that can make a difference to your community, such as: transgender and intersex education, queer history, bullying, healthy relationships, homosexuality and faith, QTBIPOC (queer, trans, black, indigenous, people of

colour) and intersectionality, and indigenous acknowledgement and Two-Spirit identity. This search made me think more creatively about how nurturing queer education can be achieved, and I think also points to how queer education does not have to be siloed into a certain category of teaching. In other words, queer education does not have to be exclusively delivered in a health or sex education setting.

Ultimately, it became increasingly difficult to find information about accessing queer education in Alberta. Eventually, I exhausted the search engine and realized I had gotten to a point where the information was too obscure to be helpful. While I collected data from publicly sourced online information occurred throughout my thesis, establishing the eight data categories was the most helpful in my research, as it established a line of questioning that helped in my interrogation of heteronormativity in educational institutions, as well as the current access to queer education within Alberta. Below is a map that I have created of the organizations who provide queer educational programming in Alberta.

Figure 2: Map of Queer Educational Programming in Alberta
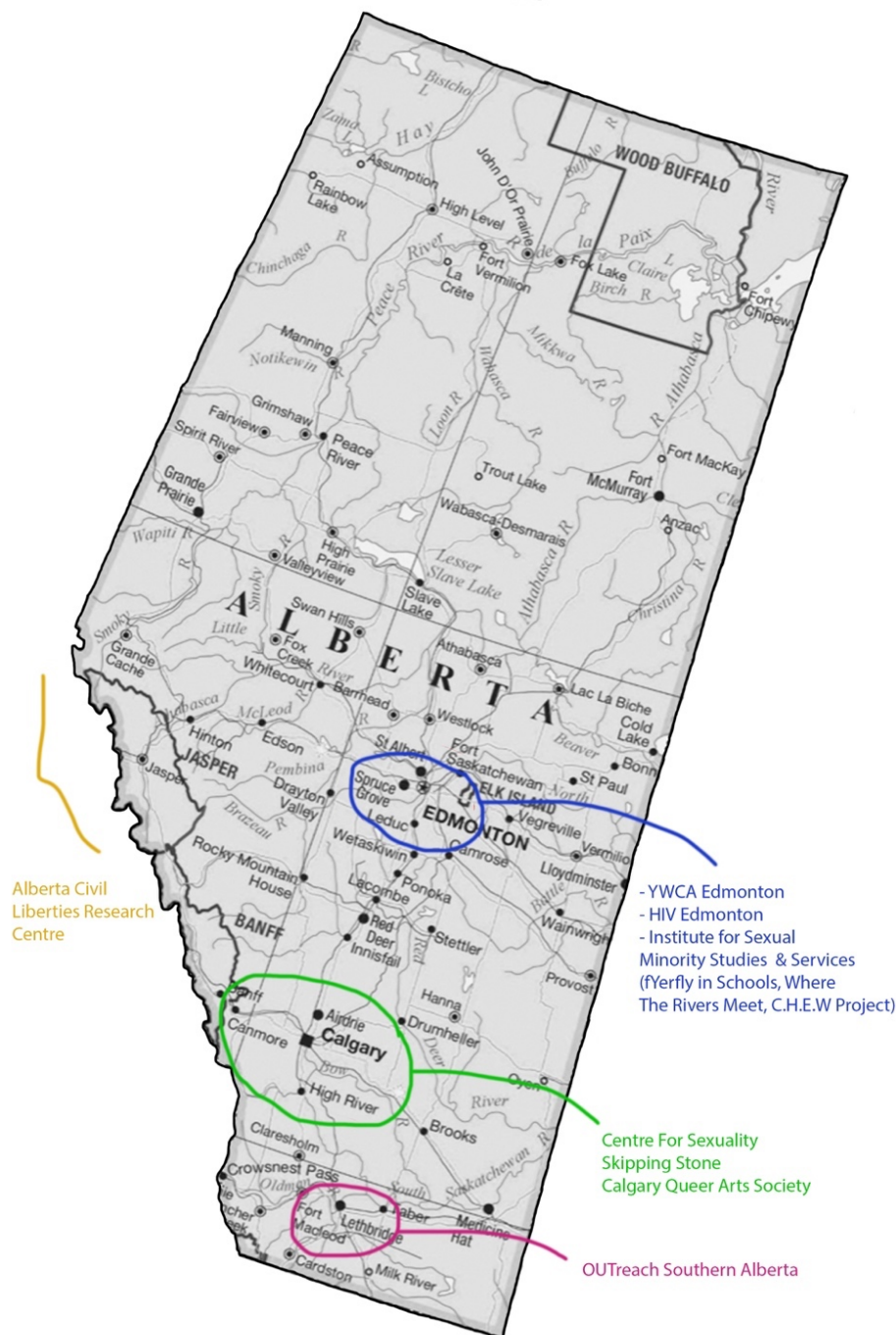
This map shows both where the programs are located, but to me, ultimately highlights the large amount of Alberta where queer educational programming is not readily available. In Appendix C you can find more detailed information about each program with information from each data category.

Education in Alberta

Growing up in Fort McMurray, Alberta, my mom and I lived in a one-story home, with a brick chimney and a big yard. For the majority of my life, my schools were only a few blocks away from my house. There was a big highway between them and my home though, and I remember having to take the bus until I was old enough to be responsible and safe crossing the highway. Growing up in Fort McMurray was strange and hard and wonderful and unique, especially as a queer person, because I did not have access to queer representation or community. Now I live in Calgary, Alberta, in a little, cozy apartment, and my school is still just a little way away from my home. The main difference between then and now is that my whole life centres around queerness. My friends are queer, I study queerness, and engage in acts of queering to move towards social justice. I wrote this thesis about Alberta education because it is my home, and it is what I know best. So, in this section, I write about the impacts of colonization and imperialism, conservatism in Alberta, Catholic schools, and rural access to education. My goal for this section is to pull apart the map I created to show the social and political undercurrents, as well as expand on the different data categories in order to tend to a more comprehensive discussion of queerness in Alberta education.

Education, colonization and imperialism: Educational institutions, particularly in the West, were shaped and made possible through colonialism, part of the larger imperial process (Willinsky, 1998). Colonial education originally began as missionary work (Willinsky, 1998), and was a tool to create future Christians.

In North America, "education" was used by the church in its colonization efforts through the implementation of residential schools. These schools were an "unremitting and near-lethal attempt at decimating First Nations and community" (Willinsky, 1998, p. 95). Colonization

included both Indigenous genocide and cultural annihilation, and the erasure of different genders

and sexualities. In a powerful statement, Bethany Schneider writes that "Indian hating and queer

hating form a powerful pair of pistons in the history of white colonization of the Americas"

(quoted in Morgensen, 2010, p. 108). The legacy of residential schools continues on

intergenerationally and is generally made invisible in the context of European-centred

educational institutions (Kerr, 2014, p. 91). The reality is that "colonial dominance is most often

hidden from educational conversations in the Canadian context, behind a benevolent

multicultural façade that ignores the history and current reality of settler violence and the

ongoing occupation of Indigenous territories" (Kerr, 2014, p. 102).

Within the education system, schools continue to teach through a colonial lens, because

foundationally they are colonial. Willinsky (1998) writes that Western education should "still be

thought of as a broadly imperial project by design" (p. 107). Educational institutions function "to

transmit the social and economic structures to generation after generation through defining and

(re)producing certain cultural and social values (Willinsky, 1998). Colonialism and coloniality is

> a perpetuating spatio-temporal structure that imposes intersecting global
>
> hierarchies in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality, economic
>
> system, and geography, that organizes bodies into complex hierarchal social
>
> organizations. It is a system of inequity and privilege that moves through time,
>
> claims geographic spaces, and is perpetuated through material and discursive
>
> epistemic practices in social and institutional spaces. (Kerr, 2014, p. 88)

These inequitable structures have created a particular narrative that is upheld within the

education system.

Imperialism was (and is) a quest for global forms of knowledge and dominance, and the West engaged in an enormous educational project of learning and teaching the world through a very particular lens. This lens centres on Whiteness, maleness, and heteronormativity, which is once again a reminder of the power of narrative inquiry and queer theory – to de-centre these perspectives. There are aspects of the current curriculum that seem to "carry forward that imperial history, which was largely determined to learn about the other… through subordination and surveillance, conversion and training" (Willinsky, 1998, p. 112). I was educated in a way that did not require me to think critically about my positionality, my identity, or how knowledge was constructed. Nor did it teach me to question the ongoing violence and marginalization of Indigenous people and trouble the knowledge I was receiving.

Educational systems in Canada have created a context in which privileged participation and ideas are portrayed as neutral, so much so that it is hard to imagine what the future of education could even look like. Wondering and urging schools to move towards nurturance asks people to do a lot of mental work and unlearning. I believe that through queering the education system and moving towards nurturance, we also have the capacity and responsibility to challenge and trouble colonial projects that reinforce and perpetuate colonialism and heteronormativity. It is through understanding education's foundations in colonialism that we can begin to understand why it is a hard task for schools to move towards nurturance - because schools were literally designed to marginalize queerness.

History of conservatism in Alberta: Alberta, specifically Southern Alberta, is sometimes referred to as the 'Bible Belt' of Canada and "is known for the predominant conservative values and beliefs held by many residents in the area" (Surette, 2019, p. 163). The overwhelmingly conservative majority has shaped how queer identities are perceived, supported, discriminated

against, and/or protected throughout the province. In schools, conservative parental voice has often superseded students' rights to accessing information regarding gender and sexuality (Surette, 2019). Teachers in these conservative rural Albertan communities may experience stress and pressure, avoiding queer topics altogether, or may have their own biases and beliefs that reinforce heteronormativity. Religious schools (publicly funded) are advantaged within the province, which draws important questions around the privileging of religious rights over students' rights (Surette, 2019). Furthermore, Albertan schools have no requirement to take up topics of gender and sexual diversity, which only perpetuates the exclusion and marginalization of queer identities and leads to more misinformation, harm, and violence.

Educational institutions are designed within harmful heteronormative structures, which fosters systemic disadvantages for queer people because all social and cultural advantages are afforded to straight and cisgender people (Surette, 2019). In Alberta, this is exacerbated by a conservative and religious climate which is consistently hostile to those who challenge traditional norms and values. The book, *Queer Youth In the Province of the 'Severely Normal'* by Gloria Filax is a fascinating and chilling look back into the history of queer movements and education in Canada with a focus on Alberta. Throughout the book, Filax (2006) writes about the effects and impact that laws, media, and societal norms continue to have on our current education system through the perpetuation of heteronormativity. Filax (2006) states, "the most important factor in the perpetuation of homophobia and marginalization of homosexuals… is the intense indoctrination in heterosexism that children experience, a great deal of it in educational institutions" (Filax, 2006, p. 85). In Alberta, queer people have consistently been marginalized, criminalized, and excluded from education.

In 1999 the *Research Institute* conducted a 'family rights campaign' in which "parents were asked to sign a declaration stating that their children were not allowed to be involved in any school program that portrayed the 'lifestyles of gays, lesbians, and/or transgendered individuals as one which is normal, acceptable or must be tolerated" (p. 90). Parental groups have been a strong influence on the exclusion of queerness in schools. While this 1999 quote makes me shudder, I can find eerily similar articles that have been written within the past couple of years. I actually did the awful thing of searching online to see if I could find something similar and found articles that induced severe anxiety and nausea. One article from 2018 angrily states,

> …curricula are social engineering propaganda tools that target children…why are these curricula centered on LGBTQ children and their supposed needs, ignoring those of all the rest of the children? These curricula, in effect, expose children to the politics and acceptability of sexual activity such as homosexual and gender identity (transgenderism). They also promote sexual activity which separates sexuality from marriage and parenting. (Real Women Canada, 2018)

That could have been written yesterday, ten years ago, or pulled from the same family rights campaign in the nineties. To this day, as Filax (2006) contended fourteen years ago, "for some people, any hint of homosexuality in schools constitutes recruitment and endorsement of a 'lifestyle'" (p. 92).

Filax's (2006) book reminds us of Alberta's history, but more importantly, shares how education has the potential to change. I need to constantly remind myself that we can imagine a different future; for me, that is a future where all educational institutions are queered and nurturing. After all, in a very recent past queer topics and identities were not, or could not, even be discussed in school settings. While many of the stories in Filax's (2006) writing was hard to

read, it is important to bring everything back to people. It is easy to forget that, at the end of the day, it is *people* who are being impacted by non-nurturing, homophobic, and transphobic discourses, policies, and curriculum.

Policy, legislation, governments, and school boards: In Canada, education is a provincial jurisdiction, and the inclusion of queer identities in schools varies widely (Kearns et al., 2017). Alberta is a hard province for queer rights, policies, and legislation to be implemented and is the only province or territory in Canada that continuously steps backward in policy (Rayside, 2014). For example, in 2009 there was an amendment to Alberta's human rights statutes, which allowed parents to withdraw their kids from learning about sexual orientation or sexuality (Rayside, 2014). When marriage was being debated in Ottawa in the mid 2000's, Premier Ralph Klein was unleashing a "tidal wave of homophobic sentiment" and "promised a crusade against same-sex marriage" (Rayside, 2014, p. 203). In 2016, after Alberta Education passed a new legislature that endorsed a "comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting healthy relationships and preventing bullying…to contribute to a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment that respects diversity and nurtures a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self" (Surette, 2019, p. 163), a Southern school board tried to argue that they were not legally bound to implementing them. They subsequently failed to meet the Alberta Education deadline for a draft of their queer policies. Furthermore, 2019, as I have mentioned, was full of political changeovers, the results of which deeply impact queer communities. I recognize that we are living on stolen land being controlled by settler-colonial government, something that is deeply troublesome, but I also recognize that voting and protesting is a part of harm reduction. Over the past year, my friends and I have been to protests and rallies, community meetings, and gathered in each other's living rooms - all aimed at fighting the

violence being perpetuated by the conservative government. An overwhelming sentiment at these protests is that our educational system needs to do better.

The protection and support for queer students has been outlined in various acts, documents, and guidelines which are created by institutions like the government, school boards, or unions. There are a few documents that specifically outline support for youth and staff with diverse sexual orientations, gender orientations and gender expressions. Up until recently, policies paid little or no attention to queer identities and, if the measures developed by education ministries and school boards in Canada *do* pay attention to queer people, they often solely focus on harassment and bullying, treating it as a problem derived from individuals and directed only at queer people. This does not actually change the deeply embedded heteronormativity and gender norms that are ingrained in educational institutions (Rayside, 2014).

In addition, government discussion surrounding queer identities also has the potential to further stigmatize or marginalize queerness. In my conversation with Frida, she brought up Pierre Trudeau's 1967 statement when he introduced the controversial Omnibus bill to the House of Commons. The bill called for changes to the Criminal Code of Canada, which included advocating for the decriminalization of homosexual acts. In one interview (CBC, 1967), he stated, "there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation". When I asked Frida about some misconceptions she hears when it comes to providing queer education, she shared a her thought that Pierre Trudeau's statement was an example of the perpetuation of the narrative that queerness is inherently sexual or something that needs to remain outside of public forums. Frida frankly states;

> **Frida:** *I just reflect back to that statement. And that statement was*
> *meant to… normalize or bring inclusion or bring safety to this*

population, and I think in that moment, what it did was isolate these

identities to sex. Because these identities don't just exist in the

bedroom, they exist in our workplaces, in our families, in our friend

groups, in our schools, and then we only talk about them in relation to

the bedroom, and that's why they don't belong in the sex ed.

curriculum because they- for sure let's talk about safer sex practices

when we get there, whatever, in late junior high and high school, but

let's talk about family and personal identity and community and relate

them back to things that we're already teaching young children, like

anti-bullying in schools. This includes not discriminating or bullying

someone because they are gay, or lesbian or transgender. It's not just

about not picking on the kid with glasses.

While I have previously shared this quote from Frida it is important to read it again within this

particular context. When considering the various misconceptions about queer education and

identities, statements from the government make a big impact on societal norms. As Frida says,

different identities exist outside of our bedrooms and our homes, so why are we not

acknowledging this reality in the educational system? And further, is this statement a reflection

of the thought process when it comes to changing school or provincial policies?

Policies are usually reactive rather than actually challenging institutional norms.

Evidence suggests that school policies do not actually make queer kids safer "because they

individualize anti-gay and anti-trans aggression rather than attending to heteronormative

structural factors, and because they punish kids rather than marshaling appropriate resources on

their behalf" (Travers, 2018, p. 194). In other words, while policies outlining protection for queer

people are important, they do not actually address the deeper institutional issues that perpetuate heteronormativity and violence. I think this line of thinking is similar to Trudeau's statement – in both cases queer identities are positioned in a way that places queerness within a particular box that is contingent on queer people to change and adapt, rather than society. Rights, policies, and public discussions are obviously important for attempting to reduce the precarity of queer people within educational institutions but needs to be pursued within a broader examination of the heteronormative systems (Travers, 2018). Conversely, other studies (Canadian Civil Liberties, 2014; Travers, 2018) have shown that queer students feel safer and more accepted when they know their schools have policies and procedures that explicitly address homophobia and transphobia (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2014; Travers, 2018).

Within each individual school, policies and rules vary vastly. In Alberta, local school board responses to demands for queer education and justice have been restricted largely to Edmonton and Calgary (Rayside, 2014). In 2011, Edmonton's public-school board became the first in Alberta to implement a policy specifically aimed at protecting queer people. In June 2019, Education Minister LaGrange introduced the Education Amendment Act. Bill 8, or Bill H8 (hate) as Janis Irwin, NDP for Highlands-Norwood in Edmonton, Alberta called it, would remove certain protections for students in gender and sexuality alliances (GSAs) (McMillan, 2019). Bill 8 does not have the Bill 24 protections enacted by the NDP in the fall of 2017, which made it illegal for teachers to tell a parent if a child has joined a GSA (McMillan, 2019), and prevented students from being outed to their parents. Unfortunately, in September 2019, Bill 8 passed.

I believe that a part of moving towards nurturance is realizing that there are large disparities when it comes to protecting queer youth and teaching queer topics. Though there is

legislation in place to protect and support queer students from discrimination and harm, it is seen through the lived experiences and study findings that queer students aren't actually being protected. In order to move towards nurturance, educational actors need to recognize their responsibilities and roles, but also understand the social and historical context in which they are navigating, as well as the current state of rights and protections surrounding queer identities.

Catholic school education in Canada/Alberta: I debated for a while if I was going to go into more detail about religious schools, specifically Catholic schools in Alberta. Writing about queer programming within religious educational institutions, while I believe is important to discuss, is difficult and complicated and wrapped up in my own history and lived experiences which makes it particularly challenging to address. While I know a lot of great people within Catholic districts, it is really hard to separate them from the complicated and frequently very violent (Canadian Catholic schools literally aided in genocide) history and present of the Catholic Church. Many of my friends have been deeply harmed by the Catholic school system because of their identities. I find it hard to separate myself from the feelings of isolation and shame I experienced and embodied as a former student of Catholic schools, which I know makes this section really biased. I find it hard to engage with, but I know it is important to do so, because we need to look at how all schools can move towards nurturance. Ultimately, I felt that this section was important because of my personal connection to it, its dominance in the province, the media, and its centrality in many debates and conversations regarding queer education and educators.

Alberta has both public Catholic and public non-denominational schools that are part of a system fully funded by public tax dollars. "Alberta has permitted the establishment of private schools since 1967, but those institutions are only eligible for financial support if they teach the

approved curriculum" (Brackett & Janovicek, 2019). It is estimated that in the province, one in four kids attends Catholic school, which is more than 160,000 students (Fletcher, 2018). Only three provinces in Canada still have publicly funded Catholic school systems. For this reason, I felt it was important to discuss Catholic schools, because when we are thinking about nurturance in Alberta schools, students are primarily attending either a public or public Catholic school. Both of these are very different learning spaces and contexts. A major concern pertaining to queer education within Catholic schools are the ways in which Catholic doctrine and belief systems continue to view queerness as abnormal, a sin, or, for some 'progressive' Catholics, something to be tolerated. Tolerance, if we look back at the Riddle Scale (1994), is still a level of homophobic attitude. Further, when we are looking more deeply in the concluding chapter of this thesis at the various actors within education, we need to keep in mind the various layers involved, including what it means to be working and educating in the Catholic school system.

There are many contradictions in Catholic educational practices, teaching, and programming when it comes to queer education. While there is a narrative that Catholic schools are overwhelmingly homophobic and transphobic, "…a 2014 Leger poll in Alberta, Canada's most conservative province, found that only 18 percent of Catholics in Alberta opposed GSAs in schools, and many Catholic educators in a national study reported that they use various LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practices, even though Catholic Church doctrine describes homosexuality as 'objectively disordered', and Church leadership routinely denounces any legislative requirement to support LGBTQ students as a totalitarian evil" (Peter et al., 2018, p. 19). If we are to take this statistic alone, I could see how someone could conclude that a majority of Catholic schools are inclusive. However, if we zoom out from individual teaching practices, we also see regular opposition from religious authorities regarding queer identities. In a review of academic and

periodic literature by Peter et al. (2018), it reveals that there is "regular opposition by Roman Catholic and other religious leaders when several Canadian provinces introduced legislative measures to institutionalize support for LGBTQ-inclusive practices in Canadian schools" (p. 21). While there may be individual teachers in Catholic schools who are at least trying to be inclusive of queer identities and students, unfortunately and infuriatingly, the institution itself has asserted their dissent. Again, I am left frustrated because I do not think queer students should have to fight for just mere acceptance or inclusion or defend their identity against oppressive doctrines and institutions.

In *Homophobia in the Hallways: Heterosexism and Transphobia in Canadian Catholic Schools* by Dr. Tonya Callaghan (2018), she uncovers the stories and experiences of queer students and teachers in Alberta and Ontario. With regards to curricular concerns in Catholic schools, particularly as it pertains to queer curriculum and queer topics, Callaghan (2018) writes, "although publicly funded Canadian Catholic schools are mandated to deliver the provincially approved curriculum, they consistently opt out of the human sexuality component of the physical education or life management curriculum because of perceived conflicts with religious doctrine" (p. 27). Canadian Catholic School Boards instead have developed their own guidelines for teaching about human sexuality, "which is taught in a family life unit comprising approximately 20% of a course simply called Religion, where the Catholic heteronormative version of human sexuality can be safely presented within the confines of Catholic doctrine" (Callaghan, 2018, p. 27). When I was in grade twelve, I remember sitting in the back row of my Religion class, where I was whispering to my friends, probably bored from whatever lesson was being taught that day, doodling in the margins of my textbook. The teacher asked us to turn to another page, so I complied. I do not remember the exact title of the chapter, but the words jumped off the page.

Homosexual lifestyles were a sin. I can assert from my personal experiences in relation to the

research that Callaghan (2018) did that Catholic schools are not even close to the position of

nurturance. Some may be moving towards that direction moreso than others, perhaps even

embodying positive levels of attitude (Riddle), but these anomalies are largely dependent on

individual actors rather than because of institutional mandates and protection. This is seen

through queer theory, where structural oppression in institutional settings enables the

maintainance of social inequities, like heteronormativity. In other words, while individual actors

may attempt to queer their surroundings, the institutions were designed within an oppressive

framework that does not allow for queering.

Callaghan (2018) questions the effects that Catholic doctrines have on queer individuals

within Alberta. She concludes that it is overwhelmingly negative, where "…most student

participants felt it would be safer to stay in the closet, some student participants were outed by

the school to their parents, and most teacher participants were apparently fired or forced out for

behaving in ways considered contrary to Catholic doctrine regarding non-heterosexuals" (p. 87).

Reading this, I was not surprised. I *was* a student who stayed in the closet. I know current

teachers who are employed by a Catholic school district who have been explicitly told that they

are not to mention or disclose their queer identities within the school. How can we even imagine

nurturance when Catholic school districts and administrators are literally telling their teachers to

hide who they are? Callaghan (2018) writes, "though a concern for the dignity of all people is a

cornerstone of Catholic social teaching, this study shows that sexual and gender minority

teachers and students continue to be educationally marginalized and dispossessed in Canadian

Catholic Schools" (Callaghan, 2018, p. 26). Queer education and nurturance impacts and affects

everyone, and as a person whose identity was never validated in school, this is why I think it is

so important and crucial to examine how *all* schools can start to move towards nurturance and keep in mind the various contexts educational actors may be operating from within.

   Accessing queer education in a rural area: Growing up in a rural area, I did not have access to queer educational programming. When mapping the programs, I saw that there are major swaths of area that just simply do not have access to any queer education because they are not near an urban center. From my research online, I had a general understanding of the lack of access but wanted my participants to share their perspectives and experiences about rural or non-urban access to queer education. Beginning with travelling to deliver programs, I asked generally who could access the Qmmunity Centre's programming, and if the participant had travelled beyond Calgary to deliver programming themselves. Here I will start with my conversation with Sarah:

   Sarah: *Yeah…for example we do some work out in Drumheller which is super cool, it's about an hour within Calgary, so I can travel within that ring of one hour, so what would be a good example? Like High River.*

   Emilie: *So, you have then gone?*

   Sarah: *Yeah, High River, Canmore, Banff, Cochrane tons, Airdrie a lot.*

   Emilie: *And are the people contacting you educators or admin themselves?*

   Sarah: *Yeah, teachers, often GSA teachers or sponsors. Yep.*

Emilie: And do you think – so let's say you're working out of that one-hour loop, do you think there are enough organizations, let's say they all have one-hour loops, to cover Alberta in programming?

Sarah: I think it's a real challenge. There're some really challenging areas that do not receive resources. So, like I would identify that as Medicine Hat and Lethbridge can be quite hard, especially Medicine Hat, Lethbridge is a little bit bigger…Medicine Hat I think is really challenging, like Southern Alberta I think is a really challenging environment, and then Northern Alberta too, I think it can be really challenging for folks to get resources, you know, within that hour North of Edmonton…yeah, definitely the further South and the further North and communities that are also sort of outside of that ring.

Emilie: Do you think that it's getting easier for them [students] to get education in schools? Let's say if they are in that 1-hour ring? So, someone living in Airdrie or Edmonton, do you think that students could easily find the information to get education that they need in their classrooms?

Sarah: Probably not…Our gateway is definitely the teachers in the systems, so like because we do school based – the relationships and sexuality education it's like we have all these great contacts... for students to access this information it can be really challenging. I think the GSA's are a really great gateway to that, that's why GSA's are so, for me, most crucial to support in those areas, whether

*it's that ring around Calgary, or whether it's especially in communities like
Hanna or Grande Prairie, where that's the only queer resource you have in your
town is the GSA, so yeah, to get education then into their schools it's challenging,
and I don't think students are given agency often to make choices like that around
their education, which is too bad, because if a student was going to say in their
social studies class, I'd really like to learn about human rights specifically
LGBTQ2S rights in our province, that's a big ask right. So yeah, we usually are
linked in through teachers or admin.*

Next, I spoke with Frida:

*Emilie: Do you think that youth in Alberta have access to queer educational
programming?*

Frida: No.

Emilie: Do you think that progress is being made towards that?

*Frida: I don't know how to answer that question. There are not for profits like us
that have specific programs designed for queer youth, and so if they know about
us, then they might have access to that, but even if they know about us, if there
could be any safety risk to accessing that information, they might not access that
information. So, if a youth has a question, they can email us, but if they're*

worried that their parents are going to find that email in their inbox – maybe their parents check their email regularly, then they don't have access.

And within the public – within school systems in general, not just the public system, if the curriculum outcomes from 1998 don't explicitly say something, then we don't know for sure which teachers are interpreting this and not, and then teachers also don't get the training to have confidence in how to explain why they are delivering this curriculum to parents. So, you know, I read this research every single day, it's very easy to explain, here are the mental health outcomes that we're trying to avoid, here's the vulnerabilities and risks we're trying to avoid, here's the benefits to delivering this education, but if the teacher is receiving a complaint from a parent, that complaint might mean the end of that conversation within the classroom because there might not be the same ability to talk about it, or the confidence to talk about it because there is a lack of training to talk about it.

Jess shared;

Jess: *Yep! I was just in Springbank, I've been to Cochrane – well, I haven't actually taught there, I've observed there. Okotoks, I'm going there in December. I've been to Blackie, Alberta, I didn't know about it either, it's very cute.*

Emilie: *And who is coming to you asking for it? Is it teachers, or on behalf of a district? Or have you had youth say come down here?*

Jess: We have an agreement with the CBE, so we're on contract to do as many schools as we can if teachers request us. Rocky View is another- so the CBE is the largest school district in Calgary, and then Rocky View is another bunch of schools that have banded together, and I don't know if we have an agreement with them, but they're actually quite receptive…I think rural communities get a lot of flak, but they're actually like quite lovely because they are more intimate…

My conversation with Alex was my final interview, so I was aware of what all the other participants had said in regard to the one-hour periphery of travel to provide education.

Alex: Yeah, so, we have programming in Cochrane, Airdrie, Black Diamond, Okotoks, and we have programming in Rocky View, so within the city of Calgary, and then the ring around it as well.

Emilie: And were those also schools then that reached out to you, or was it kind of – I ask about that rural bit because it usually seems to be that hour periphery around a major city that has all the programs, so I'm curious of how they found out about it, and if they're able to access it just because they fit within that hour…

Alex: I'm not sure about its origins, but I know within the most recent, for this year, it was a combination of we reached out to these schools, and these schools reached out to us.

Emilie: Do you think that youth in Alberta have increased access to queer education at all?

Alex: As in right now?

Emilie: Yeah.

Alex: I think… I guess it depends the scale you want to look at it, but I think if you were to look over 5, or 10, or 20 years, I think that yes, they would have way more access, but I think recent developments have made that harder. So, for instance the ongoing political battles around GSA's in schools is something that I think prohibits that or makes it less likely. So, like right now, relative to maybe before that conflict emerged, no. But like, over a large time scale, yes absolutely youth have more access. In Alberta…? I just answered that question thinking about Calgary to be honest. I don't actually know. I don't know how accessible that is for folks in rural communities, because my impression is sometimes, I'm like okay, we need to find resources for folks in rural communities, because you're not going to come in to the Qmmunity Centre but I think it's an area that there needs to be more focus on.

Emilie: I guess that's what I'm trying to work through in my thesis, like do we all have access…? Growing up in Fort McMurray, not at all. They just formed their first GSA's 2-3 years ago, and even then, they're very tiny GSA's. I mean, they're

the tiny GSA's that could, but that's been an ongoing discussion – and Fort

McMurray is quite a big center now. It's not even more rural, and so I know I'm

guilty of occasionally framing it within an urban context, being like, oh here's

these programs, and being like, oh no… I always have to put myself in context.

Alex: I think that's a really good point. And thinking about it more, then the

answer would probably be no, because ideally the urban centers improve and that

there is equity, in that all rural areas have as much access as people do in the

city, and they certainly don't. So, if we're going to say all of Alberta, then I would

say no.

Overall, the participants shared that their reach at the Qmmunity Centre was in about an hour ring outside of Calgary. Returning to my map of programs, this substantiates how come we see the large amount of rural communities in Alberta that do not have access to queer educational programming.

Should schools have to teach about queer identities? Given all of the uncertainty, lack of provincial or federal commitment or discipline surrounding teaching about queerness, I asked two of my participants if they thought publicly funded schools should be required to teach about queerness.

Emilie: Given that there isn't that access, do you think that government publicly

funded schools should be mandated to teach queer topics…?

Alex: Yes, because we know the realities that there are going to be youth who

identify that way and have experiences that are compatible with that kind of

programming. I think that if it's not mandatory, then you get a kind of erasure of like, we're not going to represent it, or talk about it, which in many ways is isolating and gives people the impression that there isn't a viability or community formation happening and can be quite harmful. So, for instance, growing up I didn't have access to that kind of programming in school, and that's one of my motivators to do this work. Is I was like oh, if I could have had a twenty-six year old guy that me and my friends could connect with and do work on anti-homophobia, or like, to use the language that you're using, the nurturance of queer folks, I would have – it would have changed the next ten years of my life, it would have been life-altering for me. So, yes, it should be mandatory, and it's not the case that everyone can't learn from that. You know, even everyone can learn from that diversity and those experiences. It's not like heterosexual people can't derive benefit from that kind of education, because they can. I mean, they do it in social studies when they learn about the history of how the Canadian government treated Indigenous populations, and there's that empathy piece that's promoted, right, just to give an example.

I asked a slightly different variation of the question to Frida:

Emilie: Knowing all this expert care that goes into this, do you think publicly funded government schools have the responsibility to provide this programming? I ask this because – do you think it should be mandated in part of the curriculum, or do you think this should fall on experts? To come in, should it be a mix of both?

Frida: I think it should be a mix of both, because again, when we rely on experts, we're making it appear as if this is an alternative lifestyle, as if this is a group of other, and so you need someone who specializes in it to deliver it, but what we're talking about is that these students and families are already in our schools, and so every member on staff needs to know how to create a safe learning environment, and what we're talking about is that they're not isolated to the bedroom, so you don't need a sex ed. expert to talk about them, what we need is good training while students are still in university, so that when they enter the classroom, or they're promoted and becoming an administrator, that they know on all levels within the school environment how to be inclusive. And we're already thinking about that like you mentioned before around students who have developmental disabilities, not all staff are experts, but there are students in classrooms who have adapted learning plans and teachers have to learn on the job how to create these adapted learning plans or create inclusive learning environments for their students who have these different learning styles. And the same thing is around these identities, how can we adapt or be flexible or inclusive of students who identify as LGBT or if they don't may at some point, or if they don't at some point, may have a family member, or friend, or colleague, or classmate who does.

Conclusion

In conclusion, mapping queer educational programs in Alberta, and subsequently creating the eight data categories proved to be more impactful than I had originally intended. It was foundational for coming to understand that accessing education about queer identities in any

form is not just down to one barrier or root cause, but rather, a variety of factors - including geography, access to training that prepares teachers to teach and advocate for queer education, and receptiveness and engagement of school districts. Stemming from a long history of colonialism and imperialism (often connected to Catholicism) educational institutions have never been places that include the identities and voices outside of the White heteronorm, and queerness has been criminalized, marginalized, and erased. Alberta is a particularly challenging province for queer rights, policies, and legislation to be implemented, and the inclusion of queer identities in any way varies drastically throughout school districts. Ultimately, nurturing queer education should be accessible to everyone in this province. From rural areas to urban centers, everyone benefits from learning about queer identities. In the second resonant thread, I discuss how misconceptions or misinformation surrounding queer education and queer identities is actually a part of why there are barriers to accessing and providing queer education throughout the province, connecting to why Alberta continues to be an extremely difficult province for queer rights, policies, legislation and curriculum to be implemented.

Resonant Thread Two: Age and Sex, and the Subsequent Complications of Teaching Queerness

From the data, I noticed two topics that came up frequently – age and sex. Some brought up age as part of misconceptions about queer education, others talked about specific topics that worked well for certain age groups and not others, and some shared that their hope for nurturing queer education is that it is inclusive of more age groups. Because of this discussion around age, may of the discussions often revolve around course content in regard to queerness. The data revealed that queer education is both connected frequently to sex education programming and is

correlated most frequently with sex. In this resonant thread, I talk with participants about misconceptions surrounding queer education, why sex education is frequently connected to queer education, and how discussions around age may actually prevent schools from moving towards nurturance.

Returning to Further Queer Misconceptions in Education

While I was writing this, I tried to remember the first time I heard about queer people. I think it is wild that there was a time in which I did not know about queerness, given that my life is arguably really, really, queer. It is hard to sift through my memories to find the exact moment I was cognizant of queer identities, which I actually think speaks to how the educational system in Alberta fails to include queer people or topics in their curriculum. I do remember hearing the word fag being used by some of my peers, as well as hearing 'that's so gay' thrown as an insult. I do not think I had the knowledge to understand fully what either of those slurs meant, but I do remember that once I did know about queer people, it was not something I could talk about in school; and if I did, I was probably going to be teased, bullied, or socially isolated for it. I am not blaming my classmates for their actions. After all they did not know better. In school, none of our educators were telling us that being queer was okay and normal and natural or affirming, so, of course we picked up on what was 'abnormal'. Because "let's face it: most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teachings reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal" (bell hooks, 1994, p. 35). For example, Frida shares;

> **Frida:** *Well right now what I see is that the parents that I meet, most of them, I'm going to say like 90-95% of them say they didn't get any of this education*

growing up, so they say like, in my community maybe there was like one gay

person, but in my community I really didn't know anyone who was gay, or any of

these other identities, in school they never taught me any of this, and in fact, like

parents and grandparents and folks from those generations of the folks that are in

school right now, probably learned very rigid rules around these things.

Part of asking schools to move towards nurturance is recognizing that everyone is starting from different places. Students from the age of four are learning and absorbing so much about how to think and act in the world, and we have a responsibility as educators to question why we are not incorporating queerness into the classroom from the moment the children enter. Connected to ideas of innocence and morality, there has been some weird consensus with early childhood professionals, school administrators, teachers, and curriculum makers, that teaching about queerness is *especially* unacceptable for young students.

> **Frida:** *It was just five years ago but a very different time in our province, and in*
>
> *society so… I would talk about gender and sexual orientation, but it was only*
>
> *really socially acceptable to start having those conversations in grade eight, even*
>
> *though we were meeting students in grade seven and they would have questions*
>
> *about that stuff in grade seven.*

Curious about what she meant by "socially acceptable", I prompted her to explain this part in more detail.

> **Emilie:** *…you were saying that it wasn't socially acceptable until grade eight.*
>
> *Was that because of like, government curriculum? Or people just had this idea*
>
> *that grade eight was the time?*

Frida: People just had this idea that grade eight was the time. The government curriculum is from 1998 I believe – I could fact check that off the curriculum website, but the curriculum outcomes are… not very specific. So, if I am recollecting correctly – or recalling correctly, the outcomes will say things about understanding diversity, but they might not name gender and sexual orientation as that diversity. We could – if a different person read that, they could interpret that as it's ok to have mixed race couples or other forms of diversity, and so it's not explicitly in the curriculum that students must understand gender and sexual orientation as part of diversity but just that diversity is to be taken account for as part of the curriculum outcomes and in grade seven the curriculum outcomes focus more on like puberty and body changes and self-esteem, and grade eight is where we'd get into things like sexually transmitted infections and birth control and those things that people stereotype, or when people bring up sex ed. the things that first come to mind…

Frida and I were only three minutes into our conversation, and the topic of age already came up. In Frida's experience there was no explicit mentioning of queerness as part of diversity within the curriculum. The curriculum was geared more to puberty and sexual health rather than discussions of other parts of queer identity. While Frida's job was specifically to teach sex education, I believe it was through a much different lens than how traditional heteronormative sex education is currently taught and/or what is stereotyped about sex education.

Frida: Our understanding here at the Qmmunity Centre is that sexuality – we take like a holistic approach to it so that it's tied to other areas of a person's life,

and so we include pieces very intentionally around relationships and consent and

things that are approachable and safe to talk about, and then we scaffold that

conversation up to conversations that might feel more stigmatized in our society

about sex or about birth control or about STIs.

I interpret this holistic understanding of sexuality and education as one that is aligned with nurturing queer education. Information surrounding students' identities are not relegated or siloed solely around topics of sexual acts and health - which is a common fear and misconception from concerned parent and public community groups. Rather, nurturing or holistic queer education recognizes each student's unique experiences.

Frida also shared that the educational programming she delivers is scaffolded. This means that the programming is delivered in a way that builds up to discussing more complicated or taboo topics and does not launch students into topics that they are not ready for. Using scaffolded education helps students work their way up to certain conversations. As part of moving towards nurturing education, we must recognize that there is no one-size-fits all checklist when it comes to teaching queerness and queering education. Scaffolding allows for individual educators to reflect on what that looks like in their own classrooms with their own specific students. What topics can be discussed? How do we build up to talking about topics that students might have never heard of before? Am I considering the variety of experiences and levels of knowledge in the classroom? Are my concerns surrounding teaching queer education actually because of student's ages, or because I fear or have misinformation about what exists outside of heteronormativity? When people are concerned about age appropriate education it is in part because of the misconception that queer education is throwing children into talking about sexually deviant topics. With nurturing queer education however, educators deliver programming

in a way that ensures that students are learning at a pace that is suitable to each situation and classroom, which is seen through how the Qmmunity Centre structures their programming.

Teaching Queerness at Every Age

I saw in my research that queer education is often taught primarily to older students. Curious about what ages are affected by a lack of nurturing queer education, I asked two participants what ages they thought are being most affected, as well as what age groups they believed should be taught nurturing queer education.

Frida: I think if we are going to move towards that nurturing society, we need to be looking at a different age group. If we're fine with status quo, with things being as safe or as comfortable as they are now and not moving any safer, then we can keep things as they are. But, what the research shows is that there is still a disproportionate number of youth who experience anxiety, depression, are more at risk for addiction and homelessness because of their LGBT identity, and so I would hope that society would want to move forward and figure out what adaptions need to be made to ensure that the most vulnerable youth are not at risk in the way that they currently are. So, from the research standpoint, I would say that we should start these conversations aged three to five, because age three to five is when developmentally, every child, regardless of what their gender identity is, every child begins to understand what gender is.

Sarah: I would say it probably works differently in different age groups, like, if people are just having these conversations in grade nine, that might be too late.

Like, I really believe that especially when it comes to inclusive elementary

curriculum, there's absolutely nothing wrong [in teaching queer topics]- there's

been some great folks doing that sort of work in inclusive elementary curriculum

realm…sharing books and sharing examples of families that aren't just like you

know, the nuclear model of what a family is, and that's just important for students

and teachers and everyone on a variety of levels. So, I think that if folks are

appreciating and nurturing LGBTQ2S identities from elementary on, that is a

critical piece. I don't think it's ever necessarily too late, but it can be really

challenging for people to move past and work through homophobic and

transphobic attitudes as they age.

These educators, given their experience and expertise, both concluded that it is important to start

having conversations and access to nurturing queer education from very young ages which is an

opinion that heteronormative educational institutions and the general public do not hold.

Frida brought up an important aspect and point for nurturing queer education; scientific

data substantiating that children are learning about themselves and others from a young age. In a

document compiled by social and scientific researchers for the *U.S Department of Health and*

Human Services, they break down several stages of gender development. They share that by

eighteen to twenty-four months old, "toddlers begin to define gender, using messages from many

sources…gender is one way to understand group belonging, which is important for secure

development" (Early Childhood National Centers, n.d., p. 4) For ages three to four, part of the

age group that Frida mentioned, "gender identity takes on more meaning as children begin to

focus on all kind of differences…they form stronger rules or expectations for how each gender

behaves and looks" (Early Childhood National Centers, n.d., p. 4). The Canadian based *Caring*

for Kids (2018), which provides information to parents from Canadian paediatricians, states that from ages two to three, "most children can identify themselves as a 'boy' or 'girl', although this may or may not match the sex they were assigned at birth…some children's gender identity remains stable over their life, while others may alternate between identifying themselves as a 'boy' or a 'girl', or even assume other gender identities at different times (sometimes in the same day). This is normal and healthy" (Caring for Kids, 2018). At four to five years old, "children become more aware of gender expectations or stereotypes" (Caring for Kids, 2018).

In a nurturing environment, instead of reinforcing cis-heteronormativity, classrooms would instead nurture each individual child's gender expression and identity, family structure, and innate curiosity.

> *Frida: And so that's where you will hear young kids, ages three to five start to make statements about gender. So, I was just at my friend's house on the weekend who has a three-year-old, and out of nowhere she got up from playing and came over and said "there are three girls in this room" – so making these kind of observations about people or assumptions about people starts at age three, because we're figuring out how we're the same and different. And so ideally, parents would have tools within their home already to explore gender diversity and communication strategies, how to talk to their three-year-old about that. That we can't assume everyone in the room is a girl, we have to ask, or it's okay if people in this room are girls right now and if they want to express their gender or talk about their gender in a different way later on in life, that's okay too. And so, by age five, we're putting kids into Kindergarten classrooms and teachers are*

saying things like "boys and girls, boys and girls", and we're reinforcing those

things that they've already been reflecting on since age three.

Frida's experience with her friend's child connects with Janmohamed's (2010) research, where "children's curiosity about gender identification is more fluid and evolving than the dominant expression of heteronormative gender that is often imposed by others" (p. 315). The result is that "heterosexuality is continually constructed in the children's talk as they separate and heighten the difference between themselves as male and female" (Renold, 2006, p. 493). To assume that all children's identities are predetermined is a failure to the students. The way in which education prevents children's exploration of gendered identities, i.e. trying on different names and pronouns, discussing our similarities and differences, and having open conversations, results in the perpetuation of harm and violence though heteronormativity (Travers, 2018). As part of moving towards nurturing education, schools need to be moving away from the binary system of gender, finding ways to interrupt the idea that children's identities are static and cannot be explored with curiosity and openness.

"Are you a boy or a girl?" How queer education benefits all ages: In my conversation with Frida, I remember really reflecting on my more recent interactions with kids. Within the past few years, I have changed my gender expression. When I was an educational assistant, I definitely presented within what heteronormativity would ascribe as 'feminine'. I wore femme clothing like dresses, skirts, and blouses, and I took the time to curl or style my long hair. Now, I present more masculine (if we are to ascribe a binary to how I look). Combined with the fact that I am tall, have short hair, and generally wear dark, non-form fitting clothing, I can understand how my gender expression can be confusing to some people, particularly children who are

growing their knowledge and stretching their curiosity, if they have been taught that men and women are supposed to be dressing in a certain way.

Emilie: Yeah… kids always come up to me and ask, "are you a boy or a girl?" And then I look to their parents to be like, "I could have a gender conversation with your child right now…" But I think it's really interesting how that component of shame, like if it was a holistic system, shame would be removed, because that wouldn't exist, but say a kid comes up to me and asks are you a boy or a girl, and I'm like, "what do you think?", and their parents respond 80% of the time with like a, "you don't ask that question!" Or, "oh my gosh I'm so sorry" –

Frida: So, we're already teaching kids - do not ask other people their gender, and then we're teaching adults, please start asking your colleagues for their pronouns at work, and so people have to undo this message they've received since age three when they were curious – it's not a judgement, it's all curiosity mirroring the sponge brain reflection what does this information mean into my world context. So, a lot of parents have been asking me this lately; when a young child asks a question like that they're embarrassed, what are they supposed to be saying? That's a great learning opportunity. When we want to learn about someone's gender, we can respectfully ask "what pronouns do you use?"…for a child it might not be as taboo for them to ask if you are a boy or a girl or what how do you identify. As adults that sometimes puts people in awkward positions in their work environment if they don't want to come out to their colleagues or things like

that, but if we were teaching that from age three then maybe by the work environment stage in someone's life, talking twenty-five years from now, maybe it will be a safe question to be talking about at work… The really important thing about that too is that that what children are asking is not necessarily about someone's gender identity. They're confused by the messages that they are receiving. So, when they see a woman with short hair, that's confusing. Because they have learned that women need or have to have long hair, and so we're adding new information. We don't even have to talk about gender identity when kids ask those questions, we could ask – "what makes you curious about that?" "It's because they have short hair", and then we can supply information to them, like "oh that's so great that you brought that up, women can have short hair, they can have long hair", and so it also benefits straight cisgender people because now they have this freedom that they can have any haircut that they might want to have. And that might seem so small, but we already know from the research that young girls have huge self-esteem issues, so if we were creating these positive conversations around expressing yourself and being who you are, and being unique, and that being okay, that can also have an impact on the self-esteem issues that we see pre-pubescent girls experiencing.

People often forget or are unaware that nurturing queer education is beneficial for everyone. Exploring the spectrum of gender and sexuality helps all people discover what feels best for them when it comes to their expression, identity, and orientation. Surette (2019) states,

gender and sexual minority students are not the only ones who benefit from these inclusive curriculum and classroom practices, but that their majority heterosexual

peers benefit as well by challenging their own biases and expanding their own

understanding of gender and sexual minority individuals and their struggles

against homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. (p. 175)

This also reminds me of when I was talking with Jess. We were mid-discussion about

nurturance, and she said:

> **Jess:** *Schools shouldn't be a little hell that everyone walks through… a really*
>
> *tough conversation that comes up [in the classroom] is that gay is still used as a*
>
> *slur… who does that slur affect? Gay people. Who else? Queer people. But who*
>
> *else? Men, straight men… we're all affected by homophobia. To be in a*
>
> *homophobic society it's not safe for anyone to be anything.*

Contrary to popular belief in Alberta, nurturing queer education is not about

indoctrinating kids into a particular lifestyle or sexual club, but instead is a pedagogy that

encourages all people of all ages just to spend time thinking about how the gender binary

and rigid normatives around sexuality affects their lives.

Bridging this section to the next, I recently ran into a friend at a local bookstore. She

asked me about my thesis, and I told her about what I was researching and my progress so far.

After a quick explanation of my thesis work, she started talking about her six-year-old daughter

and the kinds of conversations she was having with her. Without even mentioning details about

my findings or what kind of queer education topics I was looking at, she sighed mid-

conversation in frustration and proceeded to say how absurd it is that people oppose queer topics

because they think we're teaching kids about sex. I laughed and then told her that I was actually

writing about this misconception as part of my data analysis, unpacking the common belief that

queer education means sex education. We continued talking for a while, and she shared how she

talks to her daughter about relationships and love, and all the different kinds of love that can exist in the world. In the next section, I discuss the common beliefs that connect queer education and sex and how this resistance to teaching certain ages ends up perpetuating harmful misconceptions that ultimately harms all students.

'Ideological Sex Clubs': The Sexualization of Queerness

Earlier this year, I read about how The Justice Center for Constitutional Freedoms in Canada has been leading legal challenges against GSAs arguing that as parents, they as have the right to know if their child is part of the group. The group stated that GSA's are "ideological sex clubs" where graphic information on gay sex is available. While my first impression was to bash my head against a wall, this is an important example of the pressing need to deconstruct how people have come to the conclusion that GSA's are sex clubs, or further, why people think queer topics or queer people are inherently sexual.

When queer topics, issues, or identities are only recognized on a few occasions throughout the year, or only discussed within the sexual health curriculum, queerness is not normalized within the classroom. It actually further 'others' queer identities by not creating a nurturing classroom environment where gender and sexuality can be explored by *all* students at *any* time. Combined with community 'concerns', like the parent group, it makes it extremely difficult to move towards nurturance. In addition, when queer identities are only taught in conjunction with sex education, it unconsciously and/or consciously suggests that queer identities and people are inherently linked to sexual acts. The assumption that queer sexuality automatically involves deviant sexual acts and behaviours is "detestable or aberrant" (Bittner,

2012). This harmful narrative doesn't allow people to see queerness in its full glory - as something communal, normal, social, and positive.

Intrigued, frustrated, and confused by this narrative, I knew that this would be an important resonant thread. I asked myself, what was or is the reason for this connection? What are the implications of this connection? Why is queer sex education important? How does this link contribute or disadvantage schools and educators moving towards nurturance? I am reminded of Sumara and Davis (1999) who state, "queer theory does not ask that pedagogy become sexualized, but that it excavate and interpret the way it already *is* sexualized- and, furthermore, that it begin to interpret the way that it is explicitly heterosexualized" (p. 192). This section seeks to unpack the harm that this assumption creates. Through examining the data both found publicly online and through participant interviews I investigate the connection of queerness and sex education, and I also challenge what it means to conceptualize and move towards nurturing queer education given the misconceptions that are seemingly engrained within society.

Why does the correlation between queerness and sex exist? Unsurprisingly, as with most queer research, it is very difficult to find literature and studies surrounding the connection between queer education and sex. The reasons vary, from political, historical, and social influences. For example, because gay men have been criminalized throughout history, and their identities conflated with paedophilia (Gray et al., 2016; Gray, 2014), parents in the contemporary setting have mobilized this harmful stereotype. They argue that queer people shouldn't be teachers as they are 'exposed' to young children, and they worry that queer people may affect their children's identities, or sexual activity (Gray, 2014). Queer educators' fears of being accused of child molestation and recruiting to a 'gay lifestyle' have been consistently expressed

in research (Gray, 2014; Singer, 1997; Endo et al., 2010). More recently in 2018, twenty-five faith-based schools and other parent groups in Alberta went to court to overturn the law banning schools from telling parents when their children join a GSA. They argued that GSAs are ideological sexual clubs, where graphic information on gay sex is available (The Canadian Press, 2018). Of course, this is untrue, however this example points to ongoing discrimination and misinformation regarding queer identities and that queer people/spaces expose students to sexual information. To this day, queer teachers are still assumed to be deviant, sexual, or predatory (Gray et al., 2016).

Moving away from these historically rooted fears and misconceptions, Daniel Marshall (2016) urges a consideration of spatiality when imagining queer education. Marshall believes that how sexuality education is spatialized and consolidated within a clinical and/or health setting, ultimately constrains young queer people, and that the correlation of queerness exclusively with sexual acts is perpetuated because we continue to place the two together throughout space and time. Marshall (2016) argues that heteronormativity in schools has been structured around inherited anxieties around queerness. In another study, many teachers "thought that gay and lesbian issues should be addressed only by health teachers as it was not going to be an issue in their classrooms" (Bellini, 2012, p. 385). There is a belief that queer issues should *only* be discussed in health or sex education contexts.

We can find examples of school districts and curriculum changes attempting to broaden the subject areas surrounding queer identities, with health curriculum being restructured to shift from just focusing on sexual and reproductive health. The Ontario health and physical education curriculum, colloquially known as "sex ed" was " revised in 2015 to include topics such as gender identity sexual orientation, homophobia, and gender-based violence" (Callaghan, 2018, p.

25). These are important shifts in education, but still relegate queerness to a health lens rather than considering the ways in which queer identities are spatially relegated.

Liberating queerness from sex education: Rather than confining queer education within sex education, Marshall (2016) suggests, teaching queer education outside of sex education. He writes about how queerness is located in "the very streets and addresses of history" (Marshall, 2016, p. 412). Dismantling the connection of queerness as solely sexual in nature is required in order for queer identities to be nurtured. Within a nurturing education framework, queer education would focus on more than sex, and would expand the narrow conversation into one that tackles harmful narratives. Queer education "…should address the biological, sociocultural, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality within the cognitive learning domain (information), the affective learning domain (feelings, values, and attitudes), and the behavioral leaning domain (communication, decision making, and other skills)" (Faulkner, 2017, p. 27). To acknowledge queer identities and their realities would require a critical examination of heteronormativity and oppressive structuring of educational institutions, which is something I do not think educational actors are necessarily ready or prepared to do. Ultimately, nurturing queer education would shift the misconception of queerness as inherently sexual, shifting our cultural and social understandings to realize that sexuality, gender identity, and other aspects of queerness are necessary companions to *all* ways of knowing (Sumara & Davis, 1999).

Why queer sex education still needs to be taught: Even though there is the connection between sex education and queer education, I still strongly believe in having queer sex education as part of a nurturing education. The problem persists when the belief is exclusively that only queer identities are sexual in nature. While sex education is still stigmatized and politicized for all students it actually still negatively affects queer youth the most. For example, one study found

that "…after being exposed to heteronormative sex education, more than half of the participants reported previously and/or currently engaging in self-blame and shame associated with their sexual identity, feeling 'different' than other students because they were excluded from curricula" (Hobaica & Kwon, 2017, p. 434).

Currently in Alberta, we have a new conservative government who are directing a lot of their focus onto education. Queer identities as they pertain to education and curriculum were often at the centre of debates leading up to the election, and now that Jason Kenney is in power, he is currently threatening and implementing harmful changes to curriculum. Filax (2006) writes, "the political and moral anxieties of each era have found their way into sex education curricula. Not fully informing youth about safe sex because of the conviction that youth is a time for a moratorium on sex is a potentially deadly action" (p. 53). Jason Kenney is one of many problematic people who have held a position of power and have imposed their uninformed opinions onto curriculum. This only contributes to the narrative that queer identities are shameful, political, and sexual in nature. I think that often people forget that "sex education for youth is not meant to encourage actual sexual practice" (Filax, 2006, p. 53). Heteronormative discourses around sexuality ultimately restricts students learning within a narrow frame of marriage and reproduction, rather than addressing the highly important, and potentially lifesaving, topics.

Conclusion

Curriculum and educational systems aren't currently at a place where they see the importance of ingraining queer topics and identities throughout the school. While some queer youth hold more knowledge about their identities and experiences, curriculum and educational

institutions should become more aware of the ways in which identities are arranged, and the remarkable ways that they shift (Sumara & Davis, 1999). Beginning from an early age, it is essential to teach about queerness, in order to combat misconceptions, challenge stereotypes, and allow for youth to have space to explore their identities. While sex education is undeniably important for students to learn, it should not be the only topic that touches on queer identities that students have access to. Because of the misconception or willful ignorance of the connection between queerness and sex, I can somewhat understand how people who have never encountered or interacted with queer people or have never received any nurturing queer education think that young students should not be learning about queerness. I obviously do not agree with this in the slightest, but I at least see how they came to their conclusions a bit more clearly.

I do not like to centre non-queer people in my arguments, but queer sex education is important to teach because *everyone* benefits. Sex education is still a taboo and highly controversial teaching subject, regardless if queer identities are being taught. In spite of all this, I still believe that it is highly important to be teaching sex education. As one of my participants Jess stated,

> *I think queerness should be – it shouldn't just be for queer people, it's our history, we should just be talking about it to everybody. It's almost as if queerness is strange or being on the margins or outside of what's normal, but I think realistically to be queer is normal.*

The pervasive misconception that queer identities are only sexual and can only be discussed at a certain age within a certain narrative or topic ultimately ends up harming all students and contributes to ongoing violence towards the queer community.

Ultimately, everything in this research always returns back to people – whether that is students, teachers, parents, or society. Implementing nurturing queer education is done by educational actors and has an impact on students. In the final chapter of this thesis, I write about the various educational actors and the barriers they may face in the pursuit of nurturance, but also the power they have in queering and radically changing educational pedagogy. I conclude with the voices of my participants who share what they imagine nurturing education could look like.

Chapter Six: Imagining and Moving Towards Nurturance

I begin my conclusion in the same place I began my introduction. Working alongside my friend in a coffee shop, talking each other through our ideas, our frustrations, and our hopes for the future of queer education. I share with him how I have always been in educational institutions. I went to school almost every day with my mom as she worked. I had my birthday parties in the gym of the school she worked at. I would curl up in my Barbie sleeping bag by her desk as she graded papers, and I would line up my stuffed animals and teach them math problems. By the time I was eight I understood what IPPs (individual program plans) were.

Part of being so connected to the educational system was learning about the procedures that educators have to follow. I knew when report card season was because of the amounts of stress worn on teachers faces, and alongside this, I also grew to understand how teachers were supposed to evaluate their students. I knew what reading level my friends were at because I understood the levelled reading program, even if it was not marked explicitly on the book. School to me seemed like a whole lot of checklists and measurements. Teachers would be given a situation, and they had this kind of 'handbook' to follow. After they followed their 'handbook', they would check off whatever the objectives were, and whatever kids passed were considered successful, and those who did not were either, in rare cases provided with more help, or were left in the dust.

When I started my thesis and formulated my thesis question, I thought that at the end, I would be able to provide an answer. Throughout my life I had been shown that if there is a problem, there is always a solution somewhere. If something was not working, well you developed a solution and then taught others how to implement it. I saw that changes happened in schools through someone sharing a new idea, program, or pedagogy, all of which were

communicated in palatable and widely applicable ways. I have seen countless teacher briefings, professional development trainings, curriculum adjustments, and pilot programs, all aimed at spreading the news of a newer and better approach in a clear way. I, somewhat naively, thought that I could do the same in my thesis. I had found a problem, that queer identities are not being supported and nurtured in the education system, and figured that my thesis could offer a solution. I would love to conclude with a ten-point checklist for how educators can move towards nurturance in whatever role they have, but nurturance does not work like what I have been taught or have seen. It is not as easy as running a pilot program or distributing a pamphlet about teaching queer topics. Instead, my participants and my research showed me that there are so many complex ways in which nurturance could potentially be articulated. Nurturance requires queering the way we do education, which is not found through a one-size-fits all fix.

I share this because I wish I could conclude with a checklist for how schools can move towards nurturance. I wish that I could have solved all of education's problems. I think we know by this point though how this is not possible because of all of the complexity behind my thesis question. So, to conclude my thesis, rather than having a clear-cut answer, I end with people. People created heteronormative educational institutions, and I believe that people have the power to change them.

Educational Actors

Using the term 'actor', I refer to a variety of positions of people who are involved in delivering or supporting education. When it comes to shifting towards nurturing queer education there are many levels in which queer identities can be affirmed or denied, and queer youth must be supported in schools from all educational actors. Kumashiro (2002) writes,

schools and other social institutions serve two functions: they privilege certain

groups and identities in society while marginalizing others, and they legitimize

this social order by couching it in the language of 'normalcy' and 'common sense'.

Thus, the role of the school in working against oppression must involve not only a

critique of structural and ideological forces, but also a movement against its own

contributions to oppression. (p.45)

Kumashiro highlights the ways in which schools perpetuate non-nurturing educational

practices. Educational institutions need to be critiqued, but it is easy to forget that educational

institutions consist of people; people who should be thinking critically about their role in either

protecting or harming their students. Moving forward, I discuss the various levels of actors

within these educational institutions, how and if they reinforce heteronormativity, and how each

educational actor could move forward towards the goal of nurturance.

Classroom Teachers

Educational institutions put immense pressure on teachers and as a result, teachers don't

have the capacity to address every topic. Teachers have limited time to teach an already full

curriculum, though it is important to note that many teachers have expressed that they would like

to learn and engage in queer education, but are not given the opportunity to. This being said,

teachers are the people with whom students spend a majority of their time with. As part of their

role, teachers are tasked with educating, protecting, and supporting all of their students and all of

their various needs, which I recognize is no small task. As a result of lack of standardization

across Alberta for teachers in supporting queer students, there is not a consistent commitment to

teaching queer topics within classrooms. There are no overarching repercussions for not teaching

queer topics, or not supporting queer youth. Due to the lack of standardization for the treatment and education of queer students and topics, queer students are not consistently being supported and nurtured in their classes.

Lack of knowledge: Christine Bellini (2012) examines if queer students are receiving support in the public-school system, and if/how teachers are trained to give that support. Within her research, she highlights that because guidelines surrounding queer education and queer topics are vague teachers feel unprepared to teach queer topics and issues. This is due to a couple of reasons, including that queer topics (a) have not been included in teacher's training, or (b) have not been addressed in professional development. Bellini interviewed seven participants with different roles within the school system, including guidance counselors, high school teachers, educational assistants, and a board employee. All of the participants shared that queer acceptance was not being addressed by the current education system especially within the curriculum (Bellini, 2012, p. 389). Even though it has been identified that many teachers have a lack of knowledge surrounding queer topics and issues, and that queer topics are not being addressed, the reality is that teachers still are not being taught how to implement or teach queer topics in education. They are not provided with counter-narratives that unmask the dominant narratives of shame, disgust, and historical/ongoing 'othering' of queer people. They are not taught how to challenge heteronormativity, let alone understand how heteronormativity is engrained in the school system.

While the word 'training' is used in many of the studies as a response to a lack of knoweldge, including the above study by Bellini (2012), the language of 'training' evokes a sense of the check-list and solution oriented approaches to teaching that I previously discussed. Instead, a lack of knowledge amongst educational actors needs to be addressed through

conscious action and understanding of the complexity of moving towards nurturing queer identities. I suggest addressing the lack of knowledge will not come from training or checklists, but rather conscious and active engagement in a life-long learning process. For example, in the field of adult education, transformative learning provides opportunities for critical thinking, opportunities to relate to others going through the same learning journey, and provides opportunities to act on new perspectives (Christie et al., 2015). So, in other words, teachers need transformational and intentional learning opportunities that guide them towards nurturance, rather than training or checklists.

Kitchen & Bellini's study (2012) found that queer issues are seldom addressed in teacher education professional development (p. 445). Further, "teachers often appear to be bystanders silently abetting the homophobia and homophobic bullying that pervades secondary schools. One reason may be that educators often think they are not knowledgeable enough about LGBTQ issues to address them properly" (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012, p. 445). Freedman et al. (2015) found that educators they interviewed repeatedly stated that they'd like to have training "to better prepare them to be inclusive educators and create safe spaces" (p. 75).

Before we can even imagine moving towards nurturance, there must be recognition of how vital it is for all teachers to feel comfortable and supported in teaching queer topics. Sadowski (2017) states,

> many educators just don't know where to begin…. acknowledge the reality that if
> materials, resources, and expectations are not made clear and accessible by
> building leaders, only the most diligent advocates for LGBTQ youth are likely to
> follow through. It is therefore critical that school systems, as they do for many

other curricular materials, make those related to LBGTQ issues readily available

for youth (p. 35).

In order for schools to shift to nurturing and appreciating queer students, teachers must feel

supported to teach in ways that nurtures all students and to disrupt, challenge, and "call out the

perpetuation of racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic mindsets and discourses" (Milner,

2017, p. 89). In most research, teachers express their concerns about hearing and seeing harm

towards marginalized students (Payne & Smith, 2013), but "due to structures and systems

designed to maintain business as usual, many educators will not work to explicitly help students

heal and work toward building strategies to pursue justice themselves" (Milner, 2017, p. 88).

These structures maintain inequality and further marginalize students.

Pre-service teachers: In addition to existing classroom teachers, studies (see, Airton,

2014; Bellini, 2012; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Mayo Jr., 2008; Meyer, 2008) highlight that

another reason for the lack of queer education is because there is a lack of training for pre-

service teachers. If from the very beginning teachers are not being instructed about how to teach

queer education, how can we expect schools to shift towards nurturance? Contrary to popular

belief, teaching queer education does not need to be exclusively taught by queer people. For

example, I am bad at math. I do not understand math and I find it extremely challenging.

However, this does not mean I am incapable of understanding or teaching math. If as an educator

I am given the skills to teach math, I will eventually be able to build my confidence and get to a

place where I am more comfortable with the subject. The same goes for queer education. For

those who do not have the knowledge or the confidence, as educators, they still have the capacity

to learn and to eventually teach. Furthermore, it is problematic to suggest that it is the

responsibility of queer people to educate non-queer people. This places the burden of cultivating

nurturance on those who already expend affective energy guarding themselves in a society that is violently and structurally opposed to their very being. In Meyer's (2008) study, they found that

> most teacher education programmes did not sufficiently prepare them to address incidents of harassment or bullying, particularly related to gender and sexual orientation. This reflects findings by other researchers in their field who have noted the lack of information in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues in education texts as well as resistance to addressing issues related to sexuality and homophobia in teacher education programs. (Meyer, 2008, p. 560).

Additionally, because nurturing queer education is not being taught from a young age, pre-service teachers are going into teacher training holding prejudiced or incorrect information about queerness. For example, Kitchen & Bellini's (2012) study revealed that many preservice teachers hold prejudiced or ignorant biases against queer people, stating, "many believed that sexuality was an issue for parents, not schools; that there was no need to learn about LGBTQ issues as all teenagers and educators in schools are straight; and that LGBTQ students often has mental health problems" (p. 445). This terrifying finding is all the more reason why pre-service teachers should be taught about teaching queer education, and even further, why nurturing queer education needs to be taught and normalized from a young age. Teacher education programs have the power to help transform education, and to redress transphobia and homophobia (Kearns et al., 2017).

Facing community and parent upset: Many teachers are uncomfortable addressing queer issues and topics because it may result in repercussions from parents, community members, and administrators (Bellini 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2012; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Fredman et al., (2015) conducted research with sixteen public educators who teach at the junior high or high

school level. They investigated the ways in which educators navigate social and academic environments in order to incorporate inclusive queer educational practices. In the study, they found that there were 'rules' that governed whether or not queer topics could be discussed in school or not. The rules include silence about queer topics, approval for discussing queer topics, or managing queer content so as to not incite upset from parents or community members (Fredman et al., 2015). All of the rules the educators shared contribute to maintaining heteronormative classroom environments. While none of these rules are official policies or documents of the various school districts, they end up being reinforced through administration and the school districts in informal ways. The study also found that a majority of the educators brought up the risks they perceived as influencing their decisions about navigating teaching queer education. Educators were concerned about backlash, and all had to weigh their personal thresholds which include their energy capacities and their job security. When it came to standing their ground, some of the comments from educators are heartbreaking. One educator shares, "I think we get tired of fighting the good fight sometimes or standing up to principals. It's a horrible thing to say that, but sometimes I think teachers sacrifice what they would do in the perfect world, just based with the realities we have" (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 70). Others felt it was important to confront the controversy and upset from parents, community members, and administration head on, feeling like it was their responsibility to take personal risk in order to implement change and to support their queer students.

Returning to employing and engaging with queer theory, as part of teachers' commitment to nurturing their students, teachers need to reflect upon how they can challenge educational norms. I would be lying if I did not say that I wish teachers would just get over themselves and stand up for their students regardless of the outrage or controversy - because it is their job to

support students. If queer students have to navigate harmful school systems, then it is literally the least teachers can do to stand up for them. Through a queer theory lens, nurturing education helps both teachers and students to question, disrupt, and challenge heteronormativity (Bellini, 2012). In addition, there would be more pressure and expectation for teachers to challenge the violent and harmful controversy and upset from community members and parents. Teachers cannot challenge heteronormativity alone. While I wish that individuals could push past their discomfort, I realize that it currently is not a reality, and for schools to move towards nurturing education it does requires more effort than just on the individual level.

Action and/or inaction: Throughout my research, I found how common it was for teachers to revert to silence on queer topics. This includes not intervening when there are targeted homophobic and transphobic attacks and harassment. Taylor et al. (2016) write,

> the silence of teachers on LBGTQ human rights is particularly meaningful because it occurs in the context of a Canadian K-12 school system that strongly advocates acknowledgment and respect for human rights, promotes equity, and celebrates many other forms of human diversity and inclusiveness (e.g. ethnic, religious, disability). (p. 130).

Albertan/Canadian educational institutions pride themselves on inclusivity, but this is not often reflected in reality. Due to the assumption of inclusivity, teachers often do not believe, or feel compelled to engage in anti-oppressive action daily. The resounding belief that Canadian schools are good places for all students actually results in educational actors 'checking out' of being continuously active in their support of queer education and queer students, as well as being critical of larger power structures that contribute to oppression and marginalization.

From my experiences within classrooms and the educational system, there are so many well-meaning people who truly believe that they *are* being allies or supportive of their queer students and when it comes to teaching queer topics, but in actuality are not doing enough. Researchers have argued "that educators need to acknowledge the diversity among their students, as well as embrace these differences and treat their students as raced, gendered, sexual, and classed individuals" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 34). Further, Little (2001) writes, "now that queer rights are gaining momentum, most people would say they 'have nothing against gays' but fail to work proactively against homophobia" (p. 106). Unfortunately, it often depends on individual teachers' comfort around queer education and issues whether or not queer education is taught in school.

Ultimately, teachers are at "the nexus of a complex system of power wherein they reinforce systems that work to stigmatise non-normative identities and behaviours and potentially challenge normative conceptualisations of gender and sexuality" (Preston, 2016, p. 22). Teachers hold a lot of power to challenge or maintain the status quo. In the introduction, I shared statistics about the experiences of queer youth. From this, we know how pervasive and overwhelming discrimination, harassment, and bullying impacts queer and queer perceived students. When teachers refuse to acknowledge the presence of queer students and the pervasiveness of harassment and bullying of queer or queer perceived youth, students are not actually in a safe space, no matter what the teacher may say. Actions speak much, much louder than words. The failure to recognize the unique experiences of queer students' needs to be addressed. Teachers engage with students on a daily basis and have the opportunity to take action or be complicit in violence through their silence and inaction.

Through connecting teachers to the larger power of educational institutions, we see that intervening and moving towards nurturance is difficult. Due to the myriad of barriers, resources, and training, it is very complicated for teachers to provide nurturing queer education as well as begin to even move towards nurturance. Teachers are not being trained properly, are not being supported within schools, fear repercussion from administrators or parents, or are ignorant to the fact that queer students need to be supported. The combination of no standardization for queer topics and support of queer identities in schools with the idea that Canadian/Albertan schools are inclusive of everyone, has resulted in queer students not actually being supported and nurtured in the ways that they need or deserve.

Administrators

Another actor within the educational system are school administrators. This includes vice-principals, principals, and classroom support teachers (CST). Many studies, including some discussed earlier, highlight that for schools to include queer topics and stand up against school districts, parents, and the public, support is needed from school administrators. If a school has a champion of queer education in a position of leadership, the school is more likely to have a standard for which teachers have in their classrooms in regard to queer education (Mayo Jr., 2008). In one study, authors state, "educators must have encouragement, support, and resources from school leadership to talk about LGBTQ topics not only with their students but also with each other. Strong support from school leadership is a key factor in overcoming educators' fears, misgivings, and misinformation" (Taylor et al., p. 134). Teachers report that if they had clear support from administrators, they would be more likely to discuss queer topics within their classrooms (Bellini, 2012; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). The unfortunate reality once again is that

due to lack of standardization for the care of queer students and teaching of queer topics, "school authorities are able to abandon any moral responsibility for sexual minority youth, to whom they are supposed to have an ethical and professional commitment. Sexual minority youth are produced as outsiders to the discourse of equitable and fair treatment in education" (Filax, 2006, p. 103).

Curriculum

Technically curriculum is not a person - however, curriculum is created by people and ultimately informs what students are or will be learning. Because of its centrality, I argue that curriculum is at the core of nurturing education. After all, what is being taught (or not taught) directly impacts students. Curriculum holds a lot of power when it comes to challenging harmful norms in society, including heteronormativity. Sumara and Davis (1999) argue that "curriculum has an obligation to interrupt heteronormative thinking - not only to promote social justice, but to broaden possibilities for perceiving, interpreting, and representing experience" (p. 191). Curriculum has the wonderful possibility to embody nurturance all throughout each subject but has not…yet. Curriculum has the power to reflect students' identities back at them in a positive way. All students deserve to see themselves within what they are learning - in both explicit and implicit ways. For queer students, they should see themselves in curriculum and images in order to (a) challenge heteronormativity, (b) to help them feel nurturance in the larger school community and in society (DeWitt, 2017), and (c) because they are not controversial, and queerness exists everywhere (however, not in curriculum, for some reason?).

What if we are to imagine nurturance in curriculum as a queer act? A queer curriculum and queer curriculum workers live queerly, because they digress

from the mainstream 'official' discourse; (b) challenge the status quo by queerly

reading texts (uncovering potentially radical politics), or queering texts (points

out silences or absences of marginalized groups…and adds them to the text); (c)

understand that curriculum is gendered, political, historical, racial, classed, and

aesthetic; (d) see herself or himself as a co-learner with students. (Morris, 1998, p.

234).

By queering education and curriculum, the queer curriculum, if anything,

might trouble curriculum, troubling the relationships of the day-to-day lived

experience of school life. A queer project unrests curriculum. Curriculum as a

queer text makes strange gender, politics, identities, and aesthetics. Curriculum as

a queer text turns the everyday of school life inside out, upside down, backwards.

(Morris, 1998, p. 234).

Educational institutions are not neutral sites where all students have equal opportunities

(Payne & Smith, 2013), rather systems designed to maintain hegemonic heteronormative power.

Educational actors all have a role of maintaining and giving power to this system, which is why I

felt it important to underscore how each actor contributes, both positively or negatively, to the

larger educational and societal institutions that perpetuate homophobia and transphobia. In order

to move towards nurturance, educational actors need to be aware of the ways in which

heteronormativity is taught and engrained in school systems. Bellini writes, "both teachers and

administrators need to move past this fear of community outrage over mentioning LBGTQ issues

and realize that it is their right, responsibility, and obligation to teach within a social justice

framework as dictated by our laws" (Bellini, 2012, p. 392). Similarly, Filax (2006) states,

"harassment of queer youth will continue until principals, teachers, and superintendents are

willing to take their rights seriously" (p. 104). It is only when there is a collaborative commitment to nurturing queer students that schools can begin to move towards appreciation and nurturance of queer identities.

Presently, queer students, teachers, and other educational actors are not nurtured, and this goal is hard to achieve without a drastic shift in how queerness is taught (and not taught) in schools. By first recognizing the various ways heteronormativity is reproduced, beginning in early childhood education, educators can see how they are complicit in, or othered by, heteronormative discourses. I think a great tool to achieve this is through the act of queering because it is an active choice to critically reimagine and transform. By queering education, I believe that educational actors could better start to dismantle heteronormativity and begin to move towards nurturance. Once educators are aware of the ways in which heteronormativity is at the root of why queer youth are more likely to face discrimination, harassment, and miss school - then they can begin to shift towards nurturing education practices.

It is not a question about *who* exactly is responsible for providing a nurturing queer education - because the answer is that the responsibility falls on *everyone.* When we are thinking about how schools can move towards nurturance, we must keep central in our minds the fact that we are talking about how all *people* within educational institutions must actively engage in this goal. A part of why I chose to interview educators at the Qmmunity Centre was because I wanted to add the human experience and voice so that we never forget that it is people who have the power to actively work at nurturance. Nurturing education requires a symbiosis between all of the actors. To reduce the complexity of providing nurturing education on one person's or system's shoulders does not do justice in understanding the ways in which heteronormativity is embedded everywhere, within everyone. In the final section of this thesis, keeping in mind the

roles of educational actors, I want to conclude with narratives from my participants. They imagine for us what a queerer and more nurturing future could feel and look like.

   What could nurturing education look like? I have spent so much time imagining what nurturance could look like in schools that when I was creating my interview questions, I realized one of the most important questions I should ask my participants is what their ideal nurturing education would look like. Asking this question was my favourite part of conducting this research. It was fascinating and wonderful to hear how they all imagined what nurturing education could look like.

> ***Jess:*** *You know, it's so interesting…I think, I don't actually think - this might actually sound like not a great statement - but I don't think it's a big deal to be queer. It is a big deal to be queer, but it shouldn't be a big deal to be queer. I think there's a history of queerness, whether it's recorded or not. I think, it's like there is no queer way, no set way of how somebody is supposed to be….So, I think queerness should be – it shouldn't just be for queer people, it's our history, we should just be talking about it to everybody. It's almost as if queerness is strange or being on the margins or outside of what's normal, but I think realistically to be queer is normal.*

> ***Frida:*** *If there were no restrictions, and no one was going to get in trouble for having these conversations because of societal homophobia and transphobia, I think in like the utopian ideal world, we'd start having these conversations in kindergarten and not – again it's about scaffolding these conversations at age appropriate levels, so I'm not talking about teaching sex ed. in kindergarten, but making sure that these topics aren't concentrated or isolated within the sex ed. curriculum… I'll say a common thread I see in*

my work with parents one on one, is that parents think that their eleven or twelve year old is telling them about who they want to have sex with, and it takes a lot of education and unlearning for the parent to understand what the child is communicating is their identity, their core part of their identity and who they want to be in the world, and that the sex stuff has probably nothing to do with it at all – not at age eleven or twelve. And so like, starting those conversations around identity and who you are and authentically expressing yourself – we already have those conversations in kindergarten, we're already talking to kids about like, what do you want to be when you grow up, what's your favourite animal? We're asking them these reflective questions to figure out what are the core parts of your personality, what makes you unique and special and important and we're forgetting to include questions about like, who do you want to be in relationships with when you grow up, or how do you envision your gender as you age? And maybe people are going to be wrong about those things, lots of people say they want to be a doctor when they grow up and they end up being something - like an engineer, and lots of people might say I want to be this when I grow up and maybe they never end up in those relationships but we're not opening up those conversations early on.

Emilie: *Yeah, those little kiddos need that space.*

Frida: *Just for reflection and to normalize it right? That this is – often when we talk about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and any other identities under that umbrella, we talk about them as if they are the other, that they're different or alternative to mainstream identities…but human diversity is a spectrum it's not like a one size fits all situation and so*

nobody is alternative, nobody is other, we're all just different versions of human beings and so starting those conversations early on helps people understand like we come in all ranges of skin tones, we have a huge range of interests, and we have a huge range of identity, which includes straight identities, gay identities, transgender identities, bisexual identities, etc.

Sarah: I think for me it's really about nuanced and diverse levels of representation that extend past tropes and kind of the common narrative, and then are visible not just in curriculum but are visible in school, within the staff, administration, particularly folks who are in leadership positions, and yeah, like moments of celebration, like you were speaking to that idea of nurturance as something to do as celebration of identity as opposed to sort of voyeuristic, like kind of othering of identity… I think I like the idea of nurturance, because a lot of people say, I want to live in a world that being gay is just like normal, or being gay is just like whatever, like, you don't notice, or you don't have to come out, I also think like, I want to live in a world that when people come out they're celebrated, and it is a part of their identity, and it is like a facet.. so yeah that resonates with me for sure, that concept… When I was a student, I think that I wished that those topics were discussed more often, like I wished there was a shred of representation in the like… I have an English degree so was highly invested in English in junior high and high school, in like the books we read, right. That's it's not just maybe like some subtle hints in a separate piece or something, you know what I mean? Where you're not just like, grabbing the scraps. Yeah, I think that would be amazing.

Alex: Ideal nurturing education. I think that's a great question. When I think of nurturing education, I think of education that is relationship based, that has like a relationship component. So, a nurturing education is one that is like innately social and about bond between either like students together, or students and teacher, or facilitators even – if they're not traditional teachers. I think of nurturing education as something that is not about knowledge transfer from point A to point B, it's about probably again, like highlighting the youths or the learners experience as being really, really pivotal… and nurturance education with no limit. That's such an exciting question. It is one where - that's like very affirming. I would almost say one where participants feel loved – but that is a tricky thing, because there are boundaries, right, and facilitators and educators might care and respect the students they work for but they probably wouldn't say they love them like their own children, but something that is so affirming and uplifting for the youth, maybe something that would resemble that. Where they feel safe and accepted and also you know, like they can ask any question, and also that there's a degree of modification. To me if something is nurtured, it's tailored. Like, you can't have a nurturing education that is like, every youth is the same. A nurturing education is one that's like super nuanced and always changing and is adaptive…if you treat every child with a formula, it's not going to work, whereas nurturance is like, you enter into this relationship in a very unique way, and my response is going to be as equally unique for what you need – and also like, what you want.

Through summarizing the conversations about what nurturing education should look like, I saw a much bigger picture of the vast possibilities for what it could mean to actually do and teach nurturing queer education.

Utilizing Riddle's (1994) definition of nurturance, participants were able to imagine and articulate a future where educational settings actually embody nurturance. By sharing their hopeful narratives, my goal is to make clear that there are so many complex and unique understandings and articulation of the various things that could be a part of providing and creating nurturing educational institutions. When considering how schools can move towards nurturance, I advise the consideration of the suggestions from my participants. Combined, they said that their ideal nurturing queer education would be relationship based, be loving, affirming, and safe, be a place for questions and curiosity. It would be nuanced, with diverse levels of representation, and be a celebration of identity. Nurturing education would be unique to each person and what they need or want, and it would not be always connected to sex education. Nurturing queer education would share and teach queer history with everyone, and all of this would begin at a young age. This is a very different picture than the current education landscape in Alberta.

Reflecting back to each of the resonant threads, we can see how these aspects of nurturing queer education were brought forward throughout the data and analysis. Imagining nurturing queer education is to queer the future of education. It is moving towards a goal that is drastically different than how classrooms are currently addressing queer education. For schools to move towards nurturance, they need to radically change the ways in which they are teaching and training. These aspects of nurturing queer education might seem simple when listed out like this. After all, what's so hard about being loving and safe? I think we can see from our current education system that it's actually a lot harder to actively do. Nurturance seeks to disrupt heteronormativity. Nurturance cannot be articulated in the current school system, because the school system was not set up to ever be nurturing. The current education system was not set up

to allow teachers to have time to have nuanced conversations, or celebrate students' identities, or be loving, affirming or safe for queer youth. My thesis disrupts heteronormative educational institutions by asking educational actors to consider their role and responsibility to queer education, and while nurturance ultimately does not provide an easily applicable formula, the work done in my thesis is important for creating the societal and personal shifts that are necessary for disrupting and dismantling heteronormativity in education. Moving towards nurturance requires self-reflection from educators as well as a commitment to action, and this thesis provides a space for queer educators' voices to be heard while providing room for educational actors to reflect upon how they can shift their pedagogy, their curriculum, their practices and their learning. Queer youth deserve to feel not only safe in school, but to be treated and seen as truly indispensable. I believe that through each educational actor recognizing the importance of their role in queering educational institutions, challenging heteronormativity, and imagining a future in which queer identities are normalized and taught from the moment students enter the school system, we can begin to move towards nurturance.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Questions

<u>Interview Guide:</u>

One-on-one interview outline:

A: Welcome/Thesis Overview: Introduction of the project, short introduction about me and what led me to this work:

"My name is Emilie, my pronouns are she/her, and I'm a student at the University of Calgary. We're here today because of my master's thesis project.

When I first began conceptualizing my research, I was told about the Riddle Scale. This scale was created by Dr. Dorothy Riddle in 1985 and was one of the first modern classifications of attitudes towards queer people. The scale has eight levels, divided up into homophobic levels of attitude and positive levels of attitude. I was originally going to create curriculum on how I thought nurturance might look in schools but realized that there are educational programs that are already doing this work. One of the places that came to my mind was here.

Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel through my own curriculum, from my research question I hope to see how schools and school curriculum can embody nurturance, where queer people are seen as indispensable in society. I asked you here today to help provide greater insights into what it means to provide queer education services and share your perspectives on my research question; how can schools move towards nurturance?"

B: Guidelines

"We are audio-recording this interview. I'm recording this interview because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and I can't write fast enough to get it down. We will be on a first name basis during this interview, but if you've chosen to be anonymized, you won't have your name used in any papers, or in any of the data. As a reminder from the informed consent form, any non-anonymized data will only be seen by myself and my supervisor.

There are no right or wrong answers, I am here to listen to your experiences and perspectives. To reiterate the information in the informed consent form, your participation in this thesis research project is completely voluntary, and you can answer any or no questions, and can withdraw from the study at any time before the final withdrawal date.

My role is to prompt discussion and to learn more about what goes into designing, creating and implementing queer educational programming."

C: Any Questions?

"Do you have any questions before we begin?"

D: Interview

- Inform person I will start recording

Potential one-on-one interview questions:

Nurturance/Riddle Scale:
1. What does nurturance mean to you?
2. What do you think nurturing queer education looks like?

"I'm asking this question because I am using the framework of the Riddle Scale in my study. This scale was created by Dr. Dorothy Riddle in 1985 and was one of the first modern classifications of attitudes towards queer people. The scale has eight levels, divided up into homophobic levels of attitude and positive levels of attitude. The very top level is nurturance, and she defines it as 'assumes that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. People on this level view lesbians/gays with genuine affection and delight and are willing to be their allies and advocates.'"

Programming:
3. What are some misconceptions that people may have about queer education?
4. What made you want to work in queer educational programming?
5. What do you think are the key important pieces that go into creating a good queer educational program?
6. How do you decide what topics or curriculum you will be teaching?
7. Have you pushed to discuss a particular topic in your programming? If yes, what was it and why?
8. Does the public have an influence on what you will decide to be teaching? (ie: if there is a demand for a certain topic)
9. Do you think publicly funded schools have the responsibility to provide queer educational programming?

Age/Grade:
10. What ages do you think are the most affected by a lack of nurturing education?

Funding/Politics:
11. How much does your funding affect what you can create? Ie: are certain educational topics chosen because funders wanted that specific program?
12. On a scale of 1 to 5, one being the most concerned and 5 being the least concerned, how concerned are you about the current government having an impact on your programming?

Geography:
13. Do you think youth in Alberta have access queer educational programming? Please elaborate.
    - If no, do you think progress is being made to have accessible queer educational programming?
14. Who has access to programming from the Centre?

- If you have travelled, have you gone to rural areas to deliver programming?

15. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make?
16. This question, like all the others, is not essential if you are not comfortable. Do you identify as queer, trans, or as part of the LGBTQI2S+ community?
    - Do you think it's important for youth to have queer educational programming led by queer people specifically?

Appendix B: Mapping Alberta, Data Categories & Information

Alberta Wide
Edmonton and Area
Calgary and Area
Lethbridge and Area

Organization	Program Fees	Travel for Programs? (yes/no)	Virtual Programs? (yes/no)	School Board Approved? (yes/no)	Funding Sources	Grades Taught	Programs Taught
Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre	Unknown	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Alberta Law Foundation, Alberta Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund,	Unknown	- LGBT issues - Transgender support, challenges, etc.
YWCA Edmonton	None	Yes	Unknown	Yes	Edmonton Community Foundation, Eldon & Anne	Grade 4-12	- Sexual Health (safer sex, reproduction,

					Foote Fund, Bell Let's Talk Community Fund, Butler Family Foundation, Canadian Western Bank, Edmonton Civic. Employees. Chartiable. Assistance Fund, RBC Foundation, Shoppers Drug Mart, Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation, Joyce Family Foundation, and many, many more.		masturbation, puberty, STIs, etc.) - Emotions - Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation - Healthy Relationships and Consent
HIV Edmonton	None	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Alberta Government, Edmonton Community Foundation, The City of Edmonton, ViiV Healthcare, Gilead, Edmonton. Lifelong Learning, Edmonton Transit Services, Fruit Loop, Public Health Agency of Canada	Unknown	- HIV 101 For Youth - LGBTQ+
fYerfly in Schools	None	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	ISMISS, Centrre for Sexuality, ATB Financial, Edmonton Community Foundation, Calgary Foundation, Alberta Government	- Grade 7-12	- Reduce discrimination against sexual and gender minority youth - Awareness of the impacts of homophobia and transphobia - Allyship - Debunking myths and stereotypes

Where The Rivers Meet	None	Yes – Edmonton region only, but are expanding to serve Indigenous communities across Alberta	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	- Ages 12 to 24. No grades listed.	- Program goal is to uplift and empower Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous youth. - Workshops help to reduce discrimination, increase awareness of the impacts of homo/bi/transphobia, and integrate local knowledges and teachings into allyship and advocacy practices. - Workships designed to follow the teachings of the medicine wheel with each section focusing on brininging the whole community into the conversation.
C.H.E.W Project	None	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Region 6	Unknown	- Sexual Health - Indigenous/Two-Spirit Support
Centre For Sexuality	None	Yes	No	Yes	F.C.S.S., United Way and United Way Donor Options, Alberta Lottery Fund, The Calgary Foundation, Alberta Community HIV Fund, and community donors	Grade 7-12	- Sexual Health (safer sex, reproduction, masturbation, puberty, birth control, STIs, etc.) - Gender, sexuality, LGBTQ+ identities - Consent and communication - Healthy relationships - Oppression - Values (personal/societal)
Skipping Stone	None	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown – contact for inquiries
Calgary Queer Arts Society	Unknown	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Norton Rose Fulbright, Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund, RBC	Grade 7-12	- Transgender and Intersex Education - Queer History - Bullying - Healthy Relationships

					Foundation, Alberta Government		-Homosexuality and Faith - QTBIPOC and Intersectionality - Indigenous and Two-Spirit Identity
OUTReach Southern Alberta	Suggested donation of 100$	Yes, in Southern Alberta	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	- LGBT 101 (language, terminology, etc.) - Establishing GSA's - Developing allyship - Modelling inclusive communities - LGBTQ+ needs in health care - Creating safe community spaces + will tailor for specific needs.