Title page:

'I don't think my sexuality would come into teaching at all': Exploring the borderland discourse of Australian LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers.

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Abstract

Experiences of non-heterosexual teachers are relatively understood, but little work focuses explicitly on LGBTQ+, pre-service teachers and none in the Australian context. Alsup's (2006) borderland discourse is used to explore the role of gender and/or sexual identity in developing teacher identities of 12 Australian LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers. Findings show identity management and negotiation practices relating to decisions to hide or disclose identities in school contexts. Creating opportunities for borderland discourses, where tensions between the personal and professional can be deliberately brought to the fore, is presented as key to support the development of all new teachers.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, pre-service teachers, teacher training, Australia, borderland discourse

Introduction

Research has shown the impetus for addressing issues around sexuality and homophobia in teacher education as critical in getting pre-service teachers[1] ready to provide support for LGBTQ+[2] pupils in schools, where institutional cultures are widely

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[1] Pre-service teacher refers to all those who train to become teachers and is the terminology used in New South Wales, Australia. The term trainee, however, will be used from this point on.

[2] LGBTQ+ refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning as an umbrella term for sexual diversity. Queer is often used synonymously with any non-heterosexual characteristic. Where possible I have used the terminology employed by researchers/participants.

recognised as heteronormative (Ferfolja and Robinson 2004; Robinson and Ferfolja 2001, 2002; Vavrus 2009). These cultures often discriminate against individuals who fail to conform to legitimate gender performances, reinforcing normalising heterosexist discourses that punish transgressors and is specifically a concern for LGBTQ+ identified teachers (DePalma and Jennet, 2010; Ferfolja, 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Ferfolja and Hopkins, 2013; Gray, 2013; Gray, Harris, and Jones, 2016; Henderson, 2017; Rudoe, 2010). While the experience of LGBTQ+ teachers in practice has a strong basis in the research literature, experiences of LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers is less understood. This experience is further complicated in contexts, such as Australia, where religious exemptions to anti-discrimination acts permit direct prejudice against non-heterosexual teachers in some contexts. The following paper situates the study within the teacher training context for LGBTQ+ trainees generally, linking this to a wider discussion around the role of gender and sexual diversity[3] training in teacher training more broadly, and how LGBTQ+ trainee experiences are influenced by their Australian setting.

Trainees often use their own 'school biography' (Britzman 2012) as guides to inform ideals around what it is to be a teacher, often based on previous experiences prior to (e.g. presence of LGBTQ+ teachers in schools), as well as engaged in training. Henderson (2017) notes how difficult this might be for LGBTQ+ trainees without recall to what that might look like. Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) argue that 'pre-service teachers tend to rely on personal experiences and hearsay to form their opinions and

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[3] Gender and sexual diversity is a term employed by Airton and Koecher (2019)'s to encompass all aspects of gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, without the need for a specific focus. It is used here to reflect the wider discussion of gender and sexuality in teacher training.

biases around difference without a critical understanding of power relationships' (123). Understanding aspects such as race, ethnicity, class, as well as gender and sexual diversity should be viewed as intersections (see Shields, 2008) rather than in isolation. I would argue that while these are essential for developing a socially aware teaching philosophy for working with future pupils, its equally relevant to how trainees come to see themselves as the *becoming* teacher.

Benson, Smith, and Flanagan's (2014) study of Canadian queer trainees, recognised that queer student experiences are unique, facing hurdles heterosexual counterparts may not experience. This may include the 'discursive silence' around queer matters in education more generally (Dejean 2010) and within teacher training specifically (Ferfolja and Robinson 2004). Vavrus' (2009) work on auto ethnographical critical pedagogy highlights how raising awareness of how gender and sexual diversity might influence teacher and teaching identity development can be effective for all, but especially LGBTQ+ trainees. Benson, Smith, and Flanagan (2014) contend that there should be space to help LGBTQ+ teachers and allies explore why the silencing happens (in teacher education institutions and schools) to generate authentic discourses about future teaching opportunities.

Airton and Koecher's (2019) review of 35 years of gender and sexual diversity in teacher education certainly positions a hope about the types of teachers we (as teacher educators) might prepare teachers to:

> '.. reflect on their own situatedness in relation to gender and sexuality, deliver anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia curriculum, disrupt heteronormativity in the classroom, maintain pockets of safety for queer and/or transgender students, loosen up norms of gender and sexuality for all students, or be leaders in changing hostile school environments' (190).

In order to do this, *how* trainees are trained becomes important. While there is some evidence of the experiences of LGBTQ+ trainees in the UK (Nixon and Givens 2004), Canada (Benson, Smith, and Flanagan 2014), US (Evans 2002), and New Zealand (Lee and Carpenter 2015) none to date are from the Australian context. Jones, Gray, and Harris (2014) provide the political and legislative context for working in Australia within which LGBTQ+ teachers (and trainees) have to manoeuvre. Australia operates within a state and territory system, so depending on where you work, you may experience slightly different employment laws. Whilst all states and territories protect individuals against discrimination based on sexual orientation and trans*[4] identities, all have certain exemptions for religious schools. What this means in practice is that 'religious schools can claim the right to refuse to hire, or to fire, an employee on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity' (Harris and Jones 2014, 16). Alongside this are recent backlashes from conservative Christians against the Safe Schools Coalition program (http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au) 'a national network of organisations working with school communities to create safer and more inclusive environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families' (1), which had its funding stopped in 2017. This coincided with the divisive nature of some of the rhetoric regarding the Marriage Equality plebiscite of 2017[5] (see Abbas 2017; Sloane and Robillard 2018) which did result in same sex marriage being legalised. In addition,

[4] Trans* is used here to be inclusive of all transgender identities

[5] The plebiscite is similar to referendum practices where individuals are asked to vote on particular issues. Whereas a referendum would seek to amend the constitution, a plebiscite is more of an advisory role; the government does not have to act on its decision. In this case the Australian government did.

the Australian Professional Standards of Teachers (2018) do not explicitly include gender and sexuality as diversity issues required by trainees to become aware of, as say 'diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds' are. This has the possibility, therefore, of furthering the isolation of LGBTQ+ trainees in discussing these issues throughout their educational experience.

This implies that Australian LGBTQ+ trainees are learning to become teachers at a time of considerable tension. Creating a teaching and learning context that allows space for critical discussions concerning identities and *how* this may influence future teaching careers is therefore essential.

Borderland discourse

Alsup's (2006) borderland discourse is the central concept for exploring trainees experiences in this study. Borderland discourses are the conversations trainees may have with themselves or others regarding the development of professional and personal roles. These conversations expose '"narratives of tension" between professional and personal subjectivities that move towards the possibility of aligning/integrating different narratives, or identities of themselves, into this new becoming teacher. Alsup's empirical study of trainee teachers in the US noted how narratives could include 'conflict about educational philosophies, curricular emphases, pedagogical approaches, political and familial loyalties, sexual orientation, and epistemology' (64). Alsup found tensions between personal belief structures and expectations of being the professional the most challenging to overcome because little 'transformative' discourse was present, arguably because the training context was unable/unwilling to facilitate these discussions. Students with the most tensions chose not to become teachers upon graduation.

This suggests that the borderland between being the trainee and *becoming* the professional is mediated by complex factors present within the teacher training/practice contexts, and the trainee themselves. The argument presented in this current paper is that teacher training institutions *should* initiate these borderland conversations as part of the preparation for teachers to become ready for whatever their future holds especially for conflict between expectation and reality. To assume that teachers (becoming, new, and experienced) all engage in an inner dialogue about self-identity and how this impacts on their day to day professional work simply because they *are* teachers is naïve and the data that follows shows this. Creating a discursive space for borderland discourses to be generated is essential. By having conversations about identity and in particular about the professional and personal, trainees expand awareness of and engagement with those aspects of who they are and reach a negotiated borderland discourse – for some this might be a fatalistic acceptance, for others a re-affirmation of the power of an authentic self, and for others the decision to leave the profession altogether.

Alsup adopted Gee's (1999) notion of discourses as situated identities – where the individual is active in the development of their subjectivity - rather than necessarily constrained by discourses of schooling that Foucault might argue. Alsup (2006) frames her work in Gee by noting how 'the individual brings certain subjectivities to a discursive act, while at the same time, the discourse affects the individual engaging in it' acknowledging how the context and the structures within it shape possibilities (9). This is particularly relevant to trainees in the current study where we might argue that the trainee brings their gender and sexual subjectivity to the discursive act of teaching. At the same time, the professional narrative of being the teacher is being mediated by discourses of the Australian context that might limit their future teaching opportunities,

especially if the trainees want to work in any faith-based school. This may also be influenced by understandings of agency (e.g. Day et al, 2006) in which identities can be shaped by the possibility for action. It is also relevant to acknowledge the disciplinary practices and monitoring of performances of trainee teachers. Given that much of the work on LGBTQ+ teachers have been framed by Foucault and other poststructuralist readings of discipline, negotiation and performance (e.g. Ferfolja 2007a, 2007b; Ferfolja and Hopkins 2013; Ferfolja and Robinson 2004; Gray 2013) it would be remis to not accept its influence in the analysis process. What is missing from teaching identity research, however, is a specific examination of how LGBTQ+ trainees might develop borderland discourses in and through their training process.

Britzman (1991) argues that trainees are often asked to give up, suppress or deny aspects of themselves that might not adhere to notions of being a teacher; that somehow, we (teacher educators) should teach trainees to be objective about who they are rather than ask them to consider how that might influence how, what and where they choose to teach. Trainees are left to work through this 'tricky social negotiation' (Britzman 1991, 54) by themselves. When we overlay gender and sexual identity dynamics to this negotiation the narrative tensions can be extremely challenging. Alsup wanted borderland discourses to deliberately support trainees in 'reaching the in-between ground, the place of becoming, the space of ambiguity and reflection' (9). In the interviews that follow trainees were directed to imagine the future and consider how and if their sexual or gender identity would influence their teacher and teaching identity. This is important, as if we spend too much of our time *managing* ourselves rather than in the act of teaching itself something is potentially lost for the becoming teacher, for their future expectations, and for their pupils and school communities that they will inhabit.

Methods

12 LGBTQ+ trainees were recruited from undergraduate and postgraduate teacher training programs at a metropolitan university in New South Wales, Australia during 2012-13 to participate in a study on the experiences of LGBTQ+ trainees. Participants were asked to self-identify their gender, sexuality, degree, year of study, out status[6], and ethnic identity/family background[7]. There is an acknowledgement that out status may have different implications for those who identify as LGB or trans* both in and out of the school context. Table 1 below presents the characteristics of each participant (pseudonym provided).

Table 1. Participant details.

Pre-Service teacher	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Degree/Year
Anna	26	Female	Bisexual	HPE (Sec)/4th
Helen	20	Female	Bisexual	HPE (Sec)/4th
Hattie	22	Female	Bisexual	HPE (Sec)/3rd
Cate	20	Female	Lesbian	English/History (Sec)/2nd
Kath	22	Female	Bisexual	English/History (Sec)/4th
Jackie	25	Female	Lesbian	English (Sec)/4th
Simon	22	Male	Gay	MTeach Primary/1st
Pete	32	Male	Gay	MTeach (Primary)/1st
Rich	27	Male	Gay	MTeach (Primary)/1st
Blake	22	Male	Gay	MTeach (Sec)/1st
Greg	28	Trans male	Queer/Bisexual	MTeach (Primary)
Aaron	26	Male	Gay	MTeach (Sec)

HPE – Health and Physical Education; Sec – Secondary teaching; MTeach – post graduate qualification in teaching, similar to PGCE courses in UK.
Greg described himself in this way to represent his female to male transition.

Each participant was invited to a face-to-face interview (50-70 mins) with the author to explore: experiences of teacher training, place of gender and sexual diversity content within degree, teaching practice experiences, and expectations for a future career. The overriding aim of the project was to explore how their gender and sexual identity may play a role in becoming a teacher.

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[6] All trainees were out at university but not in practice contexts.

[7] All students identified as Anglo Australian (coming from white European heritage).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes present in the data set. This process includes: 1) Familiarisation with the data; 2) Generating initial codes from the data linked by a common theme to the project focus; 3) Searching for themes to identify broader patterns of meaning; 4) Reviewing themes that best reflect the data; 5) Defining and naming themes; and finally, 6) Producing the written report by contextualising the analysis alongside Alsup's borderland discourse and other relevant literature. As Alsup (2006) identified, borderland discourses are the conversations trainees may have regarding the shaping of professional and personal roles. In this instance, while we (the trainee and myself) were having these explicit conversations, they represented the ways in which narrative tensions did, could or would appear for them in their future teaching experiences. In this way the concept of borderland discourse informs the methodological choices and approach to analysis of this research project.

The following section identifies the following themes present from the trainees' interviews: privilege of passing; managing identity; role models; and future imaginings. It would also be useful to frame the reading of the data within a wider understanding of the Australian school sector where around 66% of school children attend a public (government funded) school, 19.5% in Catholic schools and nearly 15% in other private (independent) schools (ABS, 2020), which overwhelmingly have a religious affiliation.

Results and Discussion

Findings focus on ways in which trainees thought about and experienced gender and sexual identity in relation to teaching. As Alsup (2006) found with her trainees, borderland discourse occurred when students accepted the discourse of others (reluctantly or willingly), when they changed their minds, when they realised they were

not aware of all that could happen, and when they did not totally reject their authentic teacher self.

Privilege of passing

Many trainees spoke about the concept of 'passing[8]', at times deliberate and considered, as in Greg's case (as a trans* male), but also accepted by students like Hattie (female lesbian) in less critical ways. This section acknowledges that passing can mean something very different for trans* individuals as it might do for LGB people in regard to visibility and acceptance; recognising the range of experiences for these trainees. Greg recognises his privilege in being able to pass with his post transition gender (as male), acknowledging the possibilities this affords him:

> I guess I have the privilege of passing, I've been taking hormones, I've had surgery and things like that. So, it's easy for me to pass, but…it's not necessarily something that I don't want to talk about, or I want to live as 'stealth'[9], so I haven't had many conversations with people in my course about me being trans*… in HPE we had a tutorial around sexual identity and gender identity…I was talking about the rise of 'out' transgender kids…and the importance of having conversations that are inclusive of those identities in the classrooms…I know a lot of transgender people don't have the privilege of the capacity or space to be able to be out. I think it's important if people can be because I think that's the way change comes.

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[8] Being consistent with accepted presentations of an identified gender and being recognised as such by others.

[9] Stealth refers to Greg deliberately hiding his trans* status.

Greg's reflection of his embodied performance as male is considered. There is an explicit conversation about the borderland discourse of his representation as male (his living as stealth), alongside needing to find space to be 'out' in order to positively influence others. The borderland discourse *is* the way in which he tries to align these two aspects of his identity. Here we can also see the intersection of agency in identity work (Day et al. 2006); when a trainee realises their identity through the performance of it in a range of contexts with possibilities to change *some thing*. Danielewicz (2001) talks about agency as being that aspect of an 'individual that makes doing possible; it means believing that one's self is capable of action' (163). Evans (2002) explores the shifting between the situating of a self in the 'local/global' context; that 'we negotiate our identities in relation to daily lived experiences as individuals (the *local*) and to larger concepts (the *global*)' (italics as per original) (4). Greg is aware of both the local and global impact of his decisions and his borderland discourse. Greg can 'pass' and so his privilege is now based on whether he chooses to disclose that to others for a particular outcome. As Alsup (2006) proposes, borderland discourse is useful because it is transformative whereas a simple narrative tension is not. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) agree noting how, for the trainee, empowerment is gained through moving ideas forward or even transforming the context itself.

Hattie has an alternative experience; when asked if her sexuality (as lesbian) would influence her teaching, she was absolute:

> No, I don't think so and like I don't have short spikey hair, I'm not like big and butch and stuff. If I looked different; if I looked like a man or if I were transgender or something then maybe kids would talk, and teachers would talk...and I probably wouldn't feel very good about myself.

Interviewer: But because you look - how would you describe your look?

Hattie: I don't know?...Normal? I don't look in any particular way but…I'm not like feministic, butch, short, fat little thing, you know like that typical dyke looking person…I think if you look like that…it would make it harder because people might talk…I think for me I'd struggle with that but….

Interviewer: But….because you look....'normal'?…

Hattie: Normal, yeah it wouldn't be an issue I don't think. Yeah, I don't think my sexuality would come into teaching at all.

For Hattie, 'passing' as straight, meant she embodied the heterosexual norm as a female teacher, creating no tension between her and her sexuality and therefore no borderland discourse. As Hattie's body was not 'marked' by subjective identifiers of lesbianism (being butch etc.) this absolved Hattie from having a 'narrative tension' (Alsup, 2006); there's no need to negotiate anything because she could also 'pass'. This indicates not only a layer of internalised homophobia on the part of Hattie by aligning herself as 'normal' and distinct from the 'typical dyke', but also about how her planned teaching life will unfold. As Carrie, a lesbian within Alsup's' 2006 study noted, her overt sexuality (being butch and having short hair) explicitly limited opportunities for introducing gender and sexual diversity into her classroom, creating a negative impact as to the teacher she wanted to be. For Hattie, her lack of engagement with the borderland discourse could result in challenges later on for what and how she wanted to teach.

Managing identity

Anna (bisexual female) highlighted a concern over identifying as non-heterosexual at school but connected it explicitly (and unproblematically), to the separation of personal from professional. This forms one of the key borderland discourses present for trainee teachers; an often-worn mantra that students feel comfortable with expressing. It creates an *anchor* for them to explore narrative tensions in emerging identities as teachers:

> I would never come out as a teacher, so I would identify myself as just following the mainstream…I guess I'm very good at distancing myself from my personal and professional self in that way. Like, when I'm a teacher, I present as heterosexual teacher. If I was asked 'Miss are you gay?' I would say 'no' or 'are you bisexual?', I would say 'no' because that's what I feel I should say. I feel I shouldn't influence them either way, even though that could potentially influence them to go down a straight line.

The tension here for Anna was two fold; on the one hand it was about the professional discourse of 'distance' distinguishing between person self and teacher self – clearly seen in the third person nature of her comment as performing as 'heterosexual teacher'. On the other hand, Anna suggests her role should be in avoiding *any* influence on sexuality development in pupils, acknowledging that her decision to hide her bisexual identity could influence pupils in becoming straight (as discussed later on in more detail with reference to Blake's account). Later on, Anna discusses the tension at the intersection of a curriculum around sexuality, and her sexual identity. When asked if it was only LGBTQ+ teachers that would/should discuss alternative sexualities in the classroom, Anna explained:

I think they might be even more discouraged not to discuss those issues. I think if you do identify as being gay, I think you might get told, "now we know you're gay, but this is the curriculum to follow, don't let that influence your teaching". I think they might be warned against it.

Interviewer: Do you think that if someone was straight that would be the same conversation?

Anna: No 'cos straight's normal, being gay, bisexual and lesbian is not

Similarly, Greg explores this borderland discourse through the dynamic tensions between the personal and professional but focused more on how this would affect the individual:

I think that, yes, there is a split between your…personal and professional life, but I don't think it has to be as strong...I think there's a lot of internalised homophobia and transphobia when people choose to silence things that are important to their lives. When someone else [heterosexual] will come in and talk about their husband or their kids and there's no issues around…bringing that into the classroom…but there's a silence with what comes with people not knowing how people will react to that [non-heterosexual identity] and trying to protect yourself and perhaps your professional life… If someone was to outright ask me about things I would definitely answer, like I'm not going to hide…it's about having people that are open to that as a possibility…you would have to be supported by the staff and the Principal and the school to want to come out in the classroom and to have those conversations with parents. I think that would be key, otherwise professionally it could be quite dangerous.

Interviewer: …you'd want to be supported first?

Greg: Definitely, I think it would be a bit difficult to feel secure at all in employment if you didn't have the backing of that and who knows what some parents would say.

There are a couple of tensions going on here for Greg. The first is an acknowledgement that some teachers (straight ones) have an automatically granted privilege afforded in this context that is exclusive; that using examples of their lives to extend the teaching conversation is permissible (Ferfolja 2014; Ferfolja and Hopkins 2013; Gray 2013). Gray (2013) talks about schools being places where sexuality is positioned as private, but that this only seems to apply to non-heterosexual teachers, as illustrated by Anna's example too. The second feature of Greg's discourse is the search for a safety net. Nixon and Givens (2004) and Evans' (2002) research with queer trainee teachers in the UK and US respectively all showed similar strategies; the context and the 'who' changes the possibility to come out or not. If you can 'pass' then its safer to stay hidden or you make choices about who you selectively tell (Evans, 2002).

Other trainees, however, completely accepted the separation of professional and personal; sexuality (of any form) had absolutely no place within the schooling context. Blake (gay male) explains:

I kind of feel, if it's not pertinent at all to the lesson, or if it's part of my personal life it should be as far away from the scope of the learning environment as possible. Like my idea of a teacher, there is personality there, but it doesn't really factor…for me to impose any aspect of my identity or personal life on to that process is limiting or it impedes the learning of the student.

Interviewer: If you were straight do you think you would think differently

about that?

Blake: No, absolutely not. I wouldn't be bringing anything up from home

or where I went last night or that sort of thing unless it pertained to the

lesson.

Blake's view might represent the positioning of himself as the teacher to centrally about

delivering the necessary material; *who* you are is less important. Both Ferfolja (2014)

and Gray's (2014) work with LGBTQ+ teachers indicated a belief that denying sexual

identity was necessary for shaping professionalism. As Ferfolja explains, focusing on

'*any* sexual subjectivity…was incongruous with teaching as it transgressed the

discursive boundaries of the "teacher as professional"' (37); being 'in' or 'out' in their

schooling context was an irrelevance to their teaching capability. In both of these cases,

the question might be whether this is about appearing 'professional' (where any

sexuality should not be displayed), or more about protecting themselves and having that

'safe distance'. Ferfolja (2014) highlights that when LGBTQ+ teachers shifted their

subjectivities towards the discourse of the 'teacher as professional', rather than *as* the

LGBTQ+ teacher, they created 'space' to 'engage equally within an otherwise

heterosexually-dominated organisation' (43), thus creating agency. I might argue, that

this process also gives *permission* for LGBTQ+ teachers to actively not 'come out'. As

we see in Blake's commentary and Hattie's earlier reflections: why do they need to

come out if it has nothing to do with teaching? For both, there was a lack of narrative

tension (Alsup, 2006) about the whole situation (at the start of interviews at least) and

so no movement towards a borderland discourse. Acceptance of a situation without a

critical consciousness of the self (Alsup, 2006) could be really problematic for trainees if it means the deliberate and sustained hiding of identity.

For Hattie, however, there was a creation of the borderland discourse as the interview progressed. We heard earlier that as Hattie was able to 'pass' she was not as concerned as other LGBTQ+ trainees might be. As questions turned towards her expectations for the future, however, her convictions started to waiver:

I've never really thought about it. I've kind of taken for granted that everyone's ok with it and that everyone's fine…but I haven't experienced anybody with strong cultural backgrounds or religion. So yeah if I went into an Islamic School or a Catholic School then yeah, I'd have to totally re-think the 'out and proud'…it wouldn't affect my teaching in any way so why?...like I wouldn't go out and tell them I was a lesbian, but if they asked, if it was in the staff room…I don't know that I'd lie…I guess you gauge staff reaction to things. I guess if there were misogynistic males…maybe I'd feel a bit uneasy about saying I was a lesbian but…I don't think I'd have to go into a class room and say "students, I'm gay"…it doesn't affect anything and you know normal teachers would never say "oh by the way I've got a husband" so why should you if you're a lesbian?...I don't know, I guess it would depend on the parents and the type of school and whether they were super protective. I think it shouldn't be a thing…I hope it's not a thing but who knows it might be.

Hattie reflects issues seen across many of the trainees interviewed. Initially we see the tension between the perceived necessity to *have* to come out in school (Ferfolja 2014) alongside negotiating her sense of an authentic self. She intersects this with a belief that

a teacher's sexuality is irrelevant to teaching ability and finishes by considering how the school context would influence the whole process. Of all the trainees interviewed; Hattie shifted the most from an almost naïve approach to life as a queer teacher to a recognition of the need to have space for conversations like this to foreground her ongoing development. Hattie's interview was a strong example of the inhabiting of the borderland discourse where there is an awakening to the reality of becoming a (lesbian) teacher with the possibility for transformative understandings of her agency. Her reflection on the possibility of tension between her sexuality and working at a faith-based school is one example of the burgeoning borderland discourse that could be relevant to her as training progresses. Alsup (2006) argues that those students who engaged in these types of tricky conversations were far more likely to be successful (in terms of becoming a teacher after graduation) than those that stayed in an almost passive state of ignorance. As a first-year trainee, there was certainly scope for examining this in more detail as Hattie progressed.

I would argue that Hattie's story highlights that the space for difficult conversations about sexual or gender identity and how it relates specifically to teaching and teacher identity development should be a key component of any initial teacher education. Given that the social context for gender and sexuality discussions has changed within Australia (e.g. marriage equality), that trainees are still experiencing limitations in regard to their teaching futures (real or imagined) is concerning. For Alsup (2006) the borderland discourse is more than just critical reflection but an 'enhanced consciousness' (125) that promotes critical action following the process. By engaging our trainees in and through these 'narrative tensions', we as educators might be able to support LGBTQ+ trainees to become more ready for the challenges that face them.

Role models

This theme represented the potential for trainees as future role models for LGBTQ+ and other non queer pupils in schools. For some this was about an explicit performance *as* LGBTQ+, represented in a clear out status, and for others about resisting conservative/heteronormative ideals of the teacher. For Greg (trans* male), this was interconnected with his physical embodiment in a kindergarten context:

> Look, I look different, I've got tattoos, I've got piercings, I don't look like your normal teacher, so the kids were really funny like "wow he's got his ear pierced". It's funny, the kids pick on those differences and are drawn to you. I definitely had a lot of those funny conversations…like "you don't really act like a boy sometimes". I'm quite an effeminate man I know that, like that's my identity but it's like there's no kind of veil or screen, they just kind of blurt things out, which I think is great because they just talk about it the way it is. Like yes, some boys have earrings and there's nothing wrong with that…So, you're having these conversations that are what I see my future teaching being about, providing this idea of difference. How do you see the world in a different way than perhaps you're being shown in every other aspect of your life? I guess that's my big way of looking at my role as a teacher is like being able to open up or like give students the capacity or chance to look at the world through a different lens.

Greg found his borderland discourse because, as we saw earlier, Greg had the 'privilege of passing' as a trans* male *but* he does so in a way that still enables a queerness to his

primary teaching identity. He indicates that part of his *job* as this type of teacher is to generate discussions about difference and for Greg, this is possible *because* of his physical embodiment (Alsup, 2006) of queerness. Evans (2002) has similar examples of 'pre-emptive strikes', particularly in the teacher education setting, where notable difference or queerness is deliberately visible and performed. It is acknowledged here that the concept of a role model in teaching is complex and not without tension. In particular, ideas around the 'need' to have a gender alignment with teachers to encourage greater connections to students or to enhance academic performance (in particular for boys) is contentious and often based on out moded theories of social learning (Carrington and Skelton, 2003, Francis et al, 2008). What Greg identifies here is the desire for his difference to 'count' in some way and to employ that aspect of his identity to allay other concerns about being 'out'.

For others, including Blake, this narrative tension was premised by a perceived obligation to be authentic (read as 'out') for others:

> …there is a bit of a moral obligation sometimes that, if you feel as an
> LGBTQ teacher or staff member comfortable to come out for students then
> you should because statistically there's definitely some kids
> questioning…their gender or sexuality...I trust myself to make the best
> decision I can whenever a situation presents itself to me and…I feel more
> and more strongly about the idea that I am able to be 'out' at a
> school…remembering about my own student experience…how significant
> that is because it's not just the responsibility of the identifying staff
> members role, like it's not just their role to be modelling behaviour it's all
> the other staff as well because that really makes the difference to kids I
> think.

Blake's commentary on this aspect contradicts his belief presented earlier that sexuality should not be relevant in teaching. This may also show the movement through the interview process itself from narrative tensions to inhabiting a borderland discourse (Alsup, 2006). Blake's reflection situates the necessity and value of having positive LGBTQ+ role models for *all* students (Ferfolja 1998; Nixon and Givens 2004).

Simon (gay male) talked about the tension of an outward bodily performance and embodiment of 'gayness' that he wanted to resist whilst still wanting to be seen as an advocate. Importantly it highlights the lack of a homogenous experience among trainees:

> I don't want to be a role model; I want to be someone that's clearly not ashamed of it but at the same time I don't want to be someone that shoves it in everyone's face. That's the thing with the persona of gay... I feel as though I'm not as in your face as some gay people I have met…I'd like people to know that I'm gay based on what I do and what I represent not how I act and what I sound like…that's what I'd more like to do. Oh you know, I am a teacher but I am gay. Not [camp] "Oh my god I am a teacher and I am gay!"

This theme reflects a similar trope to Harris and Jones' (2014) and Ferfolja's (2014) Australian LGBTQ+ teachers recollections; that its possible for non-heterosexual teachers to be accepted as long as they are able to reflect heteronormative qualities in 'other' ways, for example, being in a long term monogamous relationship, having kids, or living in the suburbs. Trainees learn how to be LGBTQ+ but in non-threatening ways i.e. less overtly queer and more 'normalised' lifestyle choices.

Future imaginings

For some trainees the question that caused most narrative tension and engagement with borderland discourse was related to future prospects and how gender and/or sexual identity could influence this. Whilst Kath's (bisexual female) cooperating teacher was supportive of her and her same sex relationship, there was still an obvious and clear directive to hide her identity:

> A couple of weeks ago she [cooperating teacher] asked me to apply for a job at the school and very explicitly expressed, "do not mention your sexuality to the head teacher of English or the Principle because they will not hire you"…That would be enough not to get me a job, which is kind of frustrating. I'm a good teacher, my sexuality shouldn't play into that, but it does as I am applying for jobs in the Catholic School system. I feel like it's something you shouldn't, you can't actually present if you're applying for a job...I would still apply but I'm careful about how I present myself. There is a certain stereotype of what a lesbian looks like and I don't look like that, so it's not obvious

Kath's borderland discourse revolved around the embodiment of the 'passing' straight appearing teacher even if that contrasted to her full identity (Alsup, 2006). Whilst not all trainees in this study knew about the specific exemption for religious schools in NSW, discrimination based on sexual identity is a reality (Jones, Gray, and Harris 2014).

For Simon's imagined future, his gay identity put into question possible career opportunities:

I still think at a public school[10] if a parent…had a problem with me being

gay it could be a detriment to my career, which is so stupid…I don't want

to re-closet myself or be ashamed of who I am and it just gives them even

more power and…I don't want to be controlled by [that]...the only way to

change it is for me to be comfortable with who I am…is it worth more

keeping my job or is it worth more trying to promote change?...I don't

blame the people who want to be closeted and get a job, but I also

think…It's just such an injustice that I think conforming to it is kind of

like selling out. I think staying in the closet creates more anxiety, more

stress and perpetuates you becoming depressed because you can't be who

you are.

Simon is torn between what his authentic self is telling him he should do – be open

about his sexual identity – whilst his teacher self is urging caution. It highlights the

importance of engaging early in these conversations (the borderland discourse) to

explore strategies about what to do next. Pete's concern was heighted by his plan to

work within a primary school:

I think it's important that people do embrace that [be out at school] but

then it's easy to say that, I don't know if I could do it. If I could be the

first gay to come out at my primary school and…with the teachers, once

again there would be no problems…but with the parents and maybe with

the students…I would be very hesitant about it. I don't want my future

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[10] In the Australian context, public schools are government funded as opposed to the term

'public' school in UK which generally implies privately funded.

career prospects to be hampered by that which is very sad, but I feel like it could definitely.

For some there was the clear acknowledgement that their sexuality would influence their experience of work in the future. In particular, trainees who identified as bisexual were clear in that their experience was and could be different depending on the identity of their partner at the time. It changed *how* Kath would teach as much as what she would teach:

> I have the advantage of the fact that I am bisexual; I also identify with finding men attractive. I did Romeo and Juliet with year 9 girls who watched Leo DiCaprio and they thought they were just checking him out in the pool scene, shirt sticking to him, they thought it was the hottest thing ever, so we made some jokes about that…but like I can make those jokes and make those comments and not be lying but at the same time..
>
> Interviewer: Would you make those comments about Claire Danes?
>
> Kath: No and I wouldn't have, and I couldn't have, and the girls would not have dealt with that. Particularly the culture of this school…like it's a very conservative culture. The girls are very quiet…from very good families and sexual identity is not something that's discussed at school

What Kath's experience of this private girl's school highlights here is the heteronormative nature of the conversation and how the school itself permits these uncontested explorations of sexuality – as being 'safe'. An assumption is also made, by Kath, regarding the lack of openness to non-heterosexual identities from 'good families', perhaps reflecting her own biases and avoidance of the issue. In the same way that other trainees noted how heterosexual signifiers about life

outside of schools were allowed, anything other than this were to be avoided at all costs (Ferfolja and Hopkins, 2013; Gray 2013; Harris and Jones, 2014; Ferfolja, 2014).

Beauchamp and Thomas (2010) noted the tentative nature of trainees imagined futures, in the sense that many were not used to being asked to reflect on the prospective nature of their careers. This lack of engagement with future narratives is further complicated for LGBTQ+ trainees, where the uncertainty of how their identity may impact on possibilities or acceptance in school structures is unknown. Tensions may appear as questions over the physical embodiment of the teacher and how that fits (or not) with the heteronormative status quo is explored. In this way, Alsup's borderland discourse is present – it actively encourages trainees to explore the 'what if' scenarios that at least bring forth awareness to their future and how they may negotiate it (or not).

Conclusion

This paper has identified the ways in which gender and sexual identity has influenced the experiences of 12 Australian LGBTQ+ trainees. Trainees noted how 'passing' as heterosexual was a privilege, and this impacted upon how they engaged with teachers and students within their training contexts. The data also suggest that learning to 'manage identity' was a key focus of their identity work, where decisions had to be made around coming out or hiding on a regular basis; something their heterosexual counterparts do not have to engage with. Developing as a role model as an LGBTQ+ teacher was also explored and the hope for future work. Trainees note how this process of becoming a teacher is far more complex than first imagined.

It is the dissonance that borderland discourses create that is the most important aspect of a developing teachers identity work (Alsup 2006). How LGBTQ+ identity intersects with professional demands and other personal values facilitates the raising of conscious awareness about teacher and teaching experience. For Alsup, this process allows for the development of a 'personal pedagogy', a model of critical reflection that goes far beyond simply reviewing how a teaching session went. Teacher education should be about the pedagogy of the subject but also the self, situating practices that can deliberately and explicitly explore borderland discourses. Only by truly engaging with the narrative tensions of future imaginings of being an LGBTQ+ teacher can trainees find a way to negotiate the process. For some, reluctantly, this could mean that teaching is not for them, for others deciding to be 'out' and pursuing the right to be authentic. For others this may well be the borderland discourse that says, 'I am a professional and my sexuality has nothing to do with it' and choosing to withhold that aspect of self in the school context. Day et al. (2006) would argue that identities are dynamic and multifaceted, because context influences them. We need to give trainee teachers some scaffolding to work with that changing identity as they go through their teaching experiences and this may be one option for that.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) conclude that while an individual's teacher identity development will occur in and through practice later on, the place of teacher education programs is important, and I would argue essential, in the beginning of that process. Trainee teachers need to explore what and who they are as individuals and as teachers in the boundary contexts of places they work in and who they may work with. Of course, not all trainee experiences are the same, regardless of whether they identify as LGBTQ+ or otherwise but the voices need to be heard so narrative tensions can be generated, and borderland discourses can be produced – or at least brought into the

forefront of teacher education. This project was only able to work with 12 LGBTQ+ trainees in one training context and accessing larger numbers of trainees that also acknowledge the multicultural nature of the world we live in would be beneficial. Data was also collected in 2012-13 reflecting a time before both Safe Schools Coalition Australia was withdrawn from schools and the plebiscite for Marriage Equality. Given the changes that have occurred since this time, perhaps views are different; although as Rusmussen (2017) has discussed elsewhere, the tension of religious freedom on one hand for schools alongside sexual freedom of staff and pupils is still very much contested. Mapping trainee borderland discourse through their training would also be beneficial to see what might impact on its emergence. The final area for further research would be to explore how teacher training institutions address LGBTQ+ identity within their training pedagogy. Whilst not presented here, trainees were clear that their courses had not addressed GSD in any great depth in comparison to areas such as Special Educational Needs; exploring the role of LGBTQ+ identity in becoming a teacher was avoided, awkwardly sidestepped or absent. This must be redressed.

> When those who have the power to name and to socially construct
> reality choose not to see you or hear you...when someone with the
> authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it,
> there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the
> mirror and saw nothing. (Adrienne Rich, 1986)

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