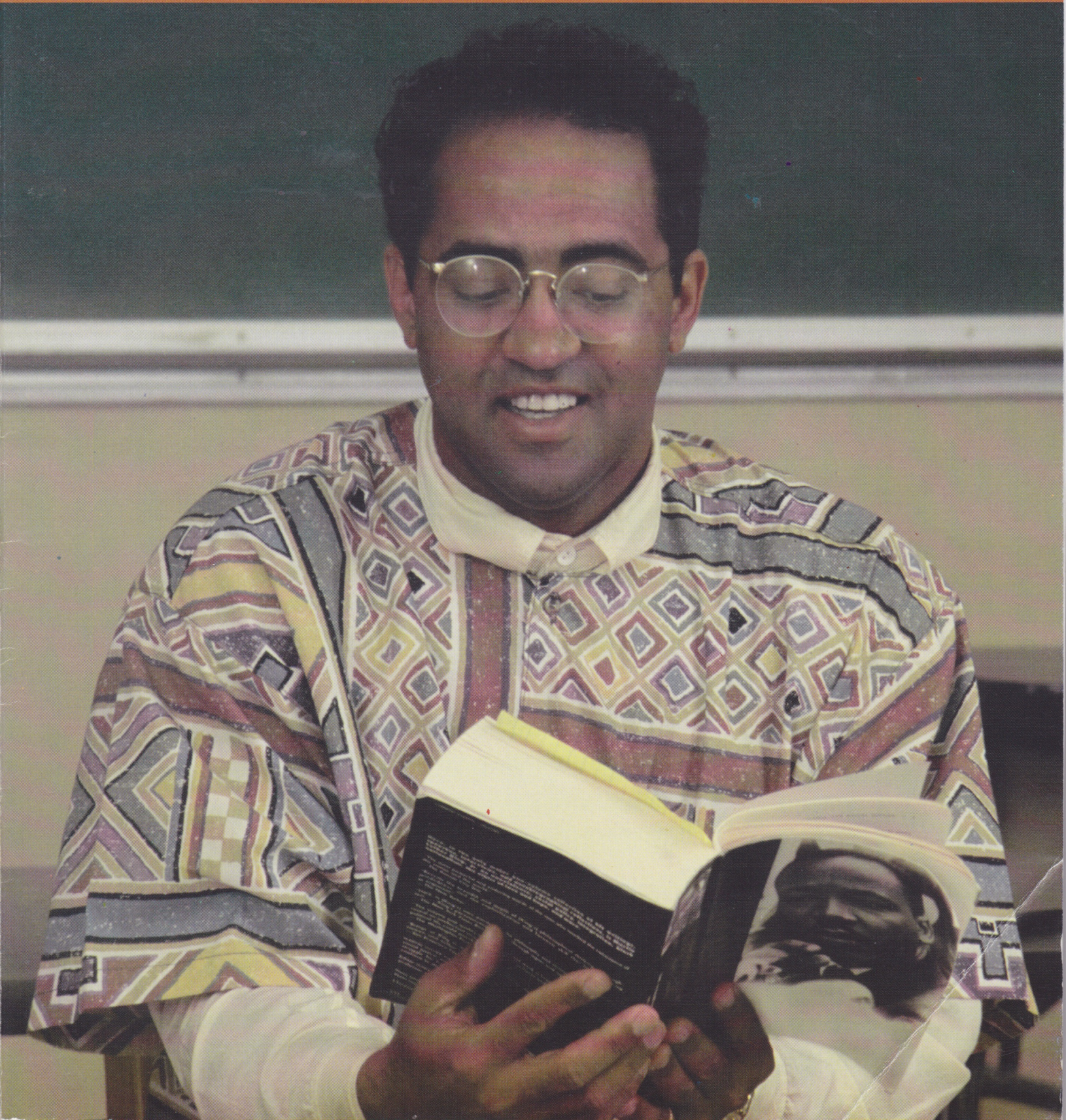


VOLUME 14, NUMBER 1 • WINTER 2001

# ENCOUNTER

*Education for Meaning and Social Justice*





# ENCOUNTER

EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

VOLUME 14, NUMBER 4

WINTER 2001

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ENCOUNTER is an independent journal that views education from a holistic perspective and focuses on its role in helping a student develop a sense of personal meaning and social justice. Manuscripts (an original and three copies) should be submitted to the Editor, Jeffrey Kane, Long Island University, 700 Northern Blvd., Brookville, NY 11548, typed double spaced throughout with ample margins. Since a double blind review process is used, no indications of the author's identity should be included within the text after the title page. All manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the author-date format as described in chapter 16 of the 14th edition (1993) of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

ENCOUNTER (ISSN 1094-3838) is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December by Holistic Education Press, P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733-0328. 1-800-639-4122. E-mail: <encounter@great-ideas.org> Website: <http://www.great-ideas.org>. Annual subscription rates are \$39.95 for individuals and \$85 for libraries and other multi-user environments. (Foreign subscribers, please add \$9 to above rates.) Back issues are available at \$10 per copy. Periodicals postage is paid at Brandon, VT, and at additional offices. This issue of ENCOUNTER was produced with Corel Ventura software and printed by Sharp Offset Printing (www.SharpOffsetPrinting.com) in Rutland, Vermont. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ENCOUNTER, P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733-0328.



# Self-Knowing as Social Justice

## The Impact of a Gay Professor on Ending Homophobia in Education

Jeff Sapp

**When a gay teacher is authentic in the classroom, students are able to transcend stereotypes and relate to him as a person.**

I went to a Holocaust lecture that was held on campus last night. As I walked into the room where the speaker was, I passed an armed security guard. It is this armed security guard that most clearly connects me to the Jews and the Holocaust. In my experience, you see, only Jews and gays have need of armed guards at their campus events in the year 2001. We had three armed guards at our GLSEN Conference two weekends ago. When we gather, there is always the threat of violence against us. I notice the deafening absence of security guards at every other campus event. They are not at the Literacy Celebration. They are not at the Economic Summit. Only Jews and gays, it seems, are in danger on campus these days.

(Personal Journal, page 6302)

**A**nti-gay bigotry is alive and well in education. The following facts were collected by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN): 26 anti-gay comments (like "faggot" and "dyke") are heard by high school students on a typical day. Fifty-three percent of students report hearing homophobic comments made by school staff; 97% of the time, teachers do not intervene in these incidents. These shocking statistics make me ask myself a scary question as a teacher-educator: Are the pre-service teachers we train at all representative of these statistics? My guess is that they are unless we actively do something about it.

If you came to my home you would find a Pinocchio puppet hanging from my ceiling. He is there to remind me of how incredible it is to finally be Real. I have spent most of my life being unreal and I want to be reminded every day of how incredible it is

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to finally be Real. The sacred Journal was the instrument with which I loved myself to Realness by becoming, like the archetype Pinocchio, a teller of Truth. I had no idea when I began journaling that a personal revolution was about to occur simply because I decided to become a student of my Self. Pinocchio's nose, it seems, was pointing me in the direction of a major truth: Education at its best is always about transformation.

### Personal Story as a Transformative Act

Like most people who begin journaling, it was a crisis that brought me to the blank page. My personal crisis was dealing with my sexual orientation and Coming Out as a gay man. Coming Out was complicated for me because I grew up in the Baptist church and even graduated from Jerry Falwell's Liberty University. I thought if I could just write it all out and look at it, perhaps I could learn something about myself. I started by telling my stories to myself on the blank page. Isak Dinesen said, "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (Keen 1989, 1). I could hardly bear hiding from my sexuality anymore. I didn't know what to do and so I picked up black ink and blank page and began to decipher myself.

I do not know and so I start with a blank page. I do not know and so I pick up an ink pen. I do not know is the one thing I know most. I do not know why knowing that compels me to pick up blank pages and scribble with black ink onto them. I do not know why I have to write so much. And I did not know that somewhere in the liquid white empty pages I would start to know. And understand. I did not know that. (Personal Journal, page 3598)

Each day I wrote myself onto the page in an attempt to deal with my sexuality, I became more and more clear. I had lived my life letting others define me. I was an unhappy wreck and suffered from a terrible bleeding ulcer. I understood the hopelessness that gay and lesbian teenagers feel, the hopelessness that leads to ever-increasing rates of teenage suicide (McConnell-Celi 1993).

I had this sudden moment of revelation: "Everything I know about being gay I've heard from white,

conservative, evangelical, heterosexual males! No wonder I'm messed up. How is it possible for someone who is not me to name and define me?" I immediately made a commitment to begin reading material written by gay people for gay people. Likewise, I realized that I was the greatest authority on my own life. The revolution had begun.

In my writing I am sniffing myself out. I am rooting through the dense forest of pages seeking my scent. Sniff, sniff, sniff. So many things have smeared their goop all over me to hide my authentic humanity. Society. The church. My family's expectations. No wonder it's taken me so long to catch wind of myself. Suddenly I write something so randomly in the path of myself and wham! The hound dog in me catches a whiff! I grow excited and begin to run with it. Ink flying through the pages. The smell getting stronger and stronger. Finally I get it treed. Here in the pages that were wood and bark and leaves before this blank whiteness. My beagles self flips through the pages scent seeking. I discover that I am incense and offer myself up to the Universe as an offering. (Personal Journal, page 3564)

I moved from West Virginia to Los Angeles in 1993 and began teaching at a college in the greater Los Angeles area. As teacher-educators, we were training teachers to work in the urban schools of one of the largest cities in the world. When I entered the urban environment, I brought with me stories of my journey to Realness. I brought with me a love of black ink and blank pages. I brought with me a love of reflection. My first day of class, I told student-teachers about the teacher-as-reflector. I held in my hands my own instrument of transformation. I opened it and read to them of my personal "search for freedom" (Greene 1988) and told them that they could find themselves in the blank page as I had.

When I was a small child in the rural Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia, my childhood friends and I would spend the lazy, hot summer evenings catching fireflies. We ran like banshees collecting them one-by-one-by-one. Soon, after imprisoning several dozen, we'd have nature's flashlight to guide us through the



dark forest to home. Keeping a journal is like that. One-by-one-by-one you set free the celestial moments of your life. And after collecting dozens and dozens of them you begin to see the light—the patterns and themes of your life. Captured in your Journal Jar. Together they bring illumination to your dark journey through the forest and back home to yourself. (Personal Journal, page 1118)

I read to them about social justice.

Sometimes I write in red. I write in red when those who once loved me as a liar don't speak to me anymore now that I speak my Truths. So, I write in red. I wrote in red last Tuesday when Dan died of AIDS. And each letter I wrote in red stood for a thousand-thousand Dans. So I wrote in red and I capitalized all my letters and underlined all my words. There was another gang killing of an innocent child this week. So I wrote in red. I wrote in red the day I heard a teacher speak a mean word to a student. And I wrote in red the day my brother stopped speaking to me because I was gay. I write in red a lot these days. Well ... truth is I actually make it a point to write in red at least once a day now. There is, after all, so much to write about in red. (Personal Journal, page 1127)

And I gave them loving warnings.

But I should warn you before you go on. If you fall in love with ink and blank pages it will change everything you have known. Sooner or later it will be time for you to write your own authentic version of yourself. And the people who are used to doing the editing for you may not like it. That one thing alone will tell you that you are on the right path. When people get nervous. (Personal Journal, page 3564)

Beane and Lipka (1986) have noted that teachers with a clear self-concept function more effectively within the teaching role. Unfortunately, the intense international preoccupation with national curriculum and national standards/assessments dwarf (and often even mock) any attempt at teachers seeking to contemplate their inner lives and its impact on their teaching. In their book, *The Role of Self in Teacher De-*

*velopment*, Lipka and Brinthaupt (1999) remind us that in the absence of functional self-knowledge, teachers lack the ability to overhaul or fine-tune those aspects of themselves that may be blocking teaching effectiveness. As Hamachek (1999) puts it, "one must look 'in here' for answers to effective teaching rather than 'out there.'" Education should

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## *Good teachers know who they are and that knowing affects everything about their teaching.*

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be the process where life and knowledge are inextricably linked in the pursuit of understanding and engaging our Self, each other, and the world around us (Kazanjian and Lawrence 2000). In other words, "we teach who we are" (Palmer 1998) and if you're an educator and don't know yourself intimately then you have no idea, really, what it is you're teaching. More is caught than taught.

I saw that the student-teachers I worked with who were struggling had little or no sense of themselves. They were overcome by their woundedness and often perpetrated it upon the children in their classrooms. They did not have self-esteem, they had "other-esteem." They fed upon their students. They were powerless and looked to their students for power. Over and over, their number one concern was whether or not their students adored them. Their professional portfolio would be disproportionately filled with students' adorations of them. In sharp contrast, I saw student-teachers with a strong sense of themselves able to inspire students from the overflow of self-power they had to freely give those students.

All of my life I have been afraid of the things I have thought and felt. It all becomes too heavy for each of us to bear. I think that's what draws us to art. Art is a way to give Voice to the things we think are unspeakable. When I introduce journaling to a class of students, I can see this fear in their faces. They are afraid, as I was in the beginning, of writing some things in permanent ink. They don't know how liberating it is yet. It takes, I'd say, two journals of writing unedited



for it to begin the Revolution. After two volumes of scribbling your unedited Self onto the blank page that bears witness, you begin to realize that it's not that scary after all. And then those words that you feared, those thoughts that terrified you ... somehow giving them ink and shape causes them to start forming in your body ... rising out of your stomach and into your throat. They form in your mouth like ripe delicious cherries. Not long and you will find yourself eating their rich, sweet fruit right in public. This is what makes the whole thing so amazing. It starts with ink and ends with Voice. (Personal Journal, page 2064)

Having found my Voice, I now knew I wanted to use it strategically to teach for social justice. I have a running joke with my students that at any given moment I may make them stand in a circle, hold hands, and sing Kumba-ya. We always chuckle together at this. It is after the chuckle that I imbed the story that I have just shared with them into the theory and practice of teaching. Starting with the personal and moving to the academic is a way to make curriculum relevant to learners (Jensen 1999). I know that people are suspicious of teachers talking too much about themselves. After all, who didn't have that old teacher in high school that you baited with a story about his experience in World War II so that he'd go on and on about himself and you wouldn't have to do any work in class that day?

The danger in telling our stories is that our ego can get out of control. Dewey (1938) said that "the road of the new education is not an easier one to follow than the old road but a more strenuous and difficult one." I think he knew that his dear Deweyian Midway—the balance between the cognitive and the affective—was a hard-won accomplishment. Palmer (1983) states that this way of knowing is an

act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community.

hooks (1994) refers to this process as "engaged pedagogy." Palmer reiterates what Dewey and Freire have said, that this kind of knowing is "not a soft and sentimental virtue; it is not a fuzzy feeling of ro-

mance." Instead, it is a "tough love" that calls us to involvement, mutuality, and accountability. Consequently, I would say that this communal knowing is what keeps ego in check. It is in relation to others that I can live out (or discover that I am lacking) my ways of knowing. Since the root meaning of "to educate" is "to draw out," I cannot imagine a teaching that does not want and need to hear each others' stories. Freire says that those that are oppressed must see examples of vulnerability from the oppressors so that a contrary conviction can begin to grow in them. I believe that sharing our stories can do just this. Likewise, I believe that it's the responsibility—even the privilege—of the teacher to take the first risk in sharing.

Story had changed my life and, honestly, I just wanted to let student-teachers in on a good thing: that good teachers know who they are and that knowing affects everything about their teaching. It wasn't until I began to journal in search of my own liberation that I began to be a participant in liberatory, emancipatory education. In his book, *Telling Tales Out of School: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals Revisit their School Days*, Kevin Jennings (1998) writes that "our stories are our best weapons in the fight against homophobia." I have discovered that my story does a great deal of educating towards an end to homophobia in education.

### The Problem of Homophobia in Education

Certainly I saw an opportunity to make a dent in the institutional homophobia that permeates schools. In his new book, *Homophobia: A History* (2000), Byrne Fone notes that although gay and lesbian culture is seen everywhere now ... including prime time television, it doesn't mean homophobia has ended. "Indeed, it stands as the last acceptable prejudice" (p. 411).

As an act of social justice, I simply wanted to use my new-found Voice. I wanted to speak about reflection and how it had changed my life. I wanted to be identified as my authentic self, one aspect of which was my gay identity. I wanted to break the silence that some gay/lesbian people feel and that gay/lesbian educators particularly feel. I wanted to end some stereotypes and educate. I wanted to model that my journey to my Real Self had drastically changed who I was and, thus, how I taught.



Little did I know that I was entering my Voice into a legacy and joining colleagues who had set the precedent 20 years earlier. Gay and lesbian professors met in New York City in 1973 for the first conference of the Gay Academic Union (D'Emilio 1992, 127). They wrote in their statement of purpose words I would honor 20 years after their ink had dried:

As gay men and women and as scholars, we believe we must work for liberation as a means for change in our lives and in the communities in which we find ourselves. We choose to do this collectively for we know that no individual, alone, can liberate herself or himself from society's oppression.... We assert the interconnection between personal liberation and social change. We seek simultaneously to foster our self-awareness as individuals and, by applying our professional skills, to become the agency for a critical examination of the gay experience that will challenge those generalizations supporting the current oppression.... Our hope is that by pooling our experiences and sharing our expertise, we will be able to begin the arduous job of challenging the sexist myths that now dominate public discourse and influence private association.

Morey (1984) defines homophobia as "the fear and intolerance of homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbian women and gay men." Sexual minorities are among the most despised groups in the United States today. Homophobia operates on many levels, and if we are to work towards an end of it then it behooves us to have a keen understanding of its intricacies. The California Teachers Association/National Education Association's High Risk Program Committee published a handbook titled *Gay & Lesbian Youth: Breaking the Silence* (1997) and it states that homophobia operates on at least four distinct but interrelated levels.

- *Personal homophobia* refers to a personal belief system (a prejudice) that sexual minorities either deserve to be pitied as unfortunate beings who are powerless to control their desires or should be hated; that they are psychologically disturbed, genetically defective, unfortunate misfits; that their existence contradicts the "laws" of nature;

that they are spiritually immoral, infected pariahs, disgusting—to put it quite simply, that they are generally inferior to heterosexuals.

- *Interpersonal homophobia* is manifested when a personal bias or prejudice affects relations among individuals, transforming prejudice into its active component, discrimination. Examples of interpersonal homophobia are name-calling or "joke" telling intended to insult or defame individuals or groups; verbal and physical harassment and intimidation as well as more extreme forms of violence; the withholding of support, rejection, abandonment by friends and other peers, coworkers, and family members, etc.
- *Institutional homophobia* refers to the ways in which government, businesses, and educational, religious, and professional organizations systematically discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or identity. The U. S. military, for instance, has a longstanding policy excluding lesbians, gays, and bisexuals from service. In most instances, rights gained through marriage, including spousal benefits and child custody considerations, are not extended to sexual minorities. Homosexual acts are outlawed in a number of states. Although agreement concerning same-sex relationships and sexuality does not exist across the various religious communities, and while some denominations are rethinking their negative stands on homosexuality and bisexuality, others preach against such behaviors and as a matter of policy exclude people from many aspects of religious life simply on the basis of sexual identity.
- *Cultural homophobia* refers to the social norms or codes of behavior that, although not expressly written into law or policy, nonetheless work within a society to legitimize oppression. It results in attempts either to exclude images of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people from the media or from history or to represent these groups in negative stereotypical terms.



Examples are not difficult to find of each of these oppressive forms of homophobia. An example of *interpersonal homophobia* happens when we say nothing after hearing an anti-gay remark. If we are silent about any of this, then we are contributing to the problem. I'll even take a further step. A hate crime is defined as "physical and verbal abuse against individuals or groups because of their race, color, national origin, religion, political beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, or economic condition." Consequently, if you hear it and say nothing, I feel you are legally and morally guilty of participation in a hate crime.

In the Spring of 1997, my university distributed a survey to assess the campus climate. Some of the comments anonymously made by students are violent examples of *personal homophobia*. "I feel that there is an extreme number of homosexuals on this cam-

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***E*ducation typically divorces the self from knowing and, in doing so, creates a power struggle where people only have two choices: to be a person who forces their distortions on others or to be a person who has succumbed to others' distortions of themselves.**

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pus. I feel that they should have their own dorms and should not be allowed to be matched up with heterosexual males." "To improve this campus, the gay, lesbian, and homosexual issues need to stop. It's almost as if a normal heterosexual male or female is a minority at this school, and I'm sorry but this is sick! It makes me feel uncomfortable and sick to my stomach." "Crack down on gays and lesbians."

An example of *interpersonal homophobia* happens every year on our campus during Gay Pride Week. The posters announcing the event always "mysteriously" disappear. As a further example, only twice have I received negative comments on my students'

evaluations at the end of each semester. They were both about my being gay. One student stated, "I felt a little intimidated when I did not agree with some of his views regarding the 'gay agenda.'"

*Institutional homophobia* is, perhaps, the most difficult of all of them because it is embedded in the very framework of society and organizations. I have teacher friends, both homosexual and heterosexual allies, who are working to end homophobia in their school. There is very little that supports them administratively. Whenever their administrator wishes to meet with them for anything at all, they take a union representative because they feel so vulnerable. They've learned not to meet with an administrator alone because of the homophobic statements and threats.

A clear example of *cultural homophobia* is recorded by Rob Linne (2001) in *Thinking Queer: Sexuality, Culture, and Education*. Linne points out in his chapter titled "Choosing Alternatives to the Well of Loneliness" that even in gay and lesbian adolescent literature, young queer characters are often punished with violence, even death. Consequently, the message is clear: If you come out and try being authentic, something terrible is going to happen to you. Adrienne Rich once stated that

when those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, 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 into a mirror and saw nothing. (Maher and Tetreault 1994)

Didn't you know that Plato was gay? Or Richard the Lion-Hearted? What about Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, or Bessie Smith? As the old saying goes, "History has set the record a little too straight!"

It's not just queer people who pay the price for homophobia. Everyone suffers because homophobia hurts everyone. In his book, *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*, Blumenfeld (1992) notes many ways that homophobia affects homosexual and heterosexuals alike. It locks people into rigid gender-based



roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression. Homophobic conditioning compromises the integrity of heterosexual people by pressuring them to treat others badly. It inhibits one's ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one's own sex. Watch any sitcom on TV and you'll see two heterosexual males embrace at some point and immediately pull away from each other dramatically, fearing that each will think the other is gay. It limits family relationships (my own brother stopped speaking to me when I Came Out ten years ago). It is one cause of premature sexual involvement because young people often feel pressured to become heterosexually active to prove to peers that they are "normal." It can be used to target people who are perceived by others to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual but who are in actuality heterosexual. I read an example recently where two Scottish men—Robert Dimelon, 20, and Robert Wilson, 19—were found guilty of an attack on Alistair MacIntosh, 25, and his younger brother, Neil, 18. The perpetrators said they beat the men up because they thought there were a gay couple. In reality, the two brothers were out celebrating Alistair's bachelor party the night before he was to be married (queer-anti-racist@egroups.com, October 20, 2000). This seems to have been, by the way, a major factor in what sent Andy Williams to Santee High School with a gun. The small-framed heterosexual Williams was teased constantly about being a "fag." Homophobia prevents heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by sexual minorities—theoretical insights, social and spiritual visions and options, contributions in the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed to every single facet of society. Homophobia diverts energy from more constructive endeavors. Lastly, it inhibits appreciation for other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. Therefore, all of us are diminished when any one of us is demeaned.

One of the reasons I love Paulo Freire (1997) so much is that he gave me a paradigm for activism. He states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that the oppressors are not going to work for liberation. Why should they? They have all the power. Instead, it is the work of those oppressed to liberate themselves. Unfortunately, history has shown us that when those who are

oppressed seek to liberate themselves, they often become even worse oppressors than those who had oppressed them. It is there that Freire gave me my greatest gift. He goes on to say that it is the single responsibility of the oppressed to not only liberate themselves, but to do it in such a way as to liberate the oppressors too.

### The Impact of Being a Gay Teacher-Educator

McConnell-Celi (1993) states that "lesbian and gay adolescents have one of the highest suicide rates, one of the highest dropout rates, and one of the highest substance abuse rates in the country." One out of ten teenagers attempts suicide. A third of these do so because of concern about being homosexual. That means that in every statistical classroom across the country there is one young person in danger of dying for lack of information and support concerning his or her sexuality. Other GLSEN statistics tell of equally horrifying days spent in a public school classroom. Eighty percent of gay and lesbian youth report severe social isolation; 19% of gay/lesbian youth report suffering physical attacks based on their sexual orientation; 20% of all hate crimes against lesbian/gay people are committed by teenagers. If, as I stated earlier, 97% of teachers say nothing to these overt acts of violence, would my being an Out gay professor of teacher education create a different reality for future teachers?

I began to wonder what impact my personal transformation might have on my students. My original intent for this article was to ask former students if an Out gay professor had any impact on their current teaching experience. I emailed former students this question.

Tina speaks of her shock that she had a gay professor:

I still remember that first night of class and someone asked how your winter break was. You mentioned that you had visited West Virginia and something about "ever since I Came Out." I felt shock immediately—a gay professor!! I could not believe it (and you were open about it). I remember feeling disgust—the idea of two men together repulsed me. However, as time went on, I saw you as a person and a good educator and I did not care. I developed respect



for you and soon admired you for being honest with yourself as well as with your students.

Carlos shares his concern about having a gay professor:

Initially I might have had reservations about the nature of your class because of your gay orientation. I lost any reservations within weeks because I learned so much information about education and about you.

Many students, like Willow, talked about how my being gay had little impact upon them except that it continued to deconstruct societal stereotypes of what is meant by being gay:

On a personal level it was good to get to know someone who was gay on a more intimate level and keep reinforcing the idea that stereotypes of someone who is gay are just those ... stereotypes.

Consequently, my being an Out gay professor who is training teachers is an act of social justice because of the way homophobia permeates society and education. It always amazes me that queer friends see me as a bit "radical." I honestly don't see it. I'm committed to deconstructing the advantage of being heterosexual. Thus, when my colleague and his wife kiss hello in our office, I say out loud, "You people are always throwing your sexuality in our faces." When a baby shower is thrown at work, I simply ask "What is the equivalent celebration for me?" Sometimes I walk to lunch with a close colleague and we hold hands. I tell her that I want to "play heterosexual" and watch people respond to us as "a cute couple." She knows that when I held hands with my boyfriend on this same block, that we had a hate-crime committed against us.

Why would I not do the same acts in my teaching? About every professor of education that I know of who has children has, at one time or another, used their own children as an example in courses. I do it as well, except that I talk about "my boyfriend's niece and nephew." Why is this politicized when I do it and not when they do it? Clear and simple, it's homophobic. When students in courses mention someone in history or literature that I know is queer, I casually insert in that they were gay or lesbian. It seems imper-

ative that by modeling my work for social justice, I am showing a model of action to pre-service teachers.

Yet another way that being an Out gay professor is an act of social justice are the many times that young gay and lesbian professionals are in my courses. Their fear is tangible in regards to entering the teaching profession. They honestly believe that they are doomed to live a divided life because of their choice of profession. They are always a bit in shock to see a different vision—one undivided and whole.

I have had endless conversations with colleagues about my being gay and the impact my being Out has on students and colleagues. I now believe that my being Out is a way to bring and make manifest my body in the classroom and in the academy. Queer Theory and the history of gays and lesbians in the academy seem to validate this. In 1970 there was not one openly gay or lesbian college professor in America (D'Emillio 1992, 133). D'Emillio writes, especially, about gay white males coming Out in the academy as a way of deconstructing white male heterosexual privilege (p. 135). A colleague of mine, Suzi, does the same thing as an American-born Chinese woman. While teaching a class multicultural education, she asks her class if the reality that she is a Chinese woman will make the course any different. Some rush to say, "No, it doesn't make a difference because it's your ideology that is taught, not your ethnicity." I disagree. It does matter who we are physically. hooks writes that

those of us who are trying to critique biases in the classroom have been compelled to return to the body to speak about ourselves as subjects in history. We are all subjects in history. We must return ourselves to a state of embodiment in order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally orchestrated in the classroom. By recognizing subjectivity and the limits of identity we disrupt that objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination. (hooks 1994, 140)

Be clear on this: The erasure of the body is about power. Keeping gays and lesbians erased is what feeds homophobia. Consequently, many gays and lesbians "pass" to feel safe and gay and lesbian children kill themselves because they do not see themselves in the world around them.



I still find this the most amazing indictment about many schools today—that they put *seeming* before *being*. I just finished reading a set of papers where pre-service teachers went and interviewed children. One of the typical questions they asked children of all ages was “What is a good student?” Even the first graders had already mastered the art of *seeming*. They replied, “Someone who sits quietly, sits straight, and has their hands folded on their desk and does what the teacher says.” Dewey said that “the non-social character of the traditional school is seen in the fact that it erected silence into one of its prime virtues” (Dewey 1938). I agree with Freire (1997) that “innumerable cultures of silence still exist; there are numbed, hungry, and compliant populations everywhere.”

Surprising to me, though, was that most of the responses students emailed me were not about the effects of my being Out. Instead, it was my personal “search for freedom” that seemed to have left the larger impact. Mary says, “I am not sure if my educational experience was really in any way affected by your being gay. It was strongly influenced by who you are.” Carlos stated:

You know what I really gained from you? It was seeing you model everything. It was your showing me and my peers about you—the Jeff Sapp who taught my class, the Jeff Sapp—the person. Who you were. Where you were from. What you were about. Before this I wouldn't tell my students anything about me. If I modeled poetry writing, vignette writing and journal writing, I would make up the entry/experience and I would tell them that. After Sapp, I opened up and related every one of my “modelings” to my life. To what I was about. Where I was from. Me. This is the greatest gift you gave me. You modeled for me how I could open up to my students and make myself more of a person and not just a figure in front of a classroom setting.

Indeed, it was the sharing of my “search for freedom” that deconstructed the traditional power paradigm of teacher and student in the classroom. Students saw my sharing of my sexual orientation as the sharing of an intimacy. One student wrote:

One way that your being gay might have affected your role as a professor was that it was something very personal that you shared with us. It was like a confidence you trusted us with (not meaning that it was a secret or anything). It was a way of bringing in your personal life to the course.

Education typically divorces the self from knowing and, in doing so, creates a power struggle where people only have two choices: to be a person who forces their distortions on others or to be a person who has succumbed to others' distortions of themselves (Palmer 1983).

Donna demonstrated the theme of the deconstruction of power when she stated that

I am mildly embarrassed to say that it was quite late in the term before I even realized you were gay. Being a good Jewish mother, my first reaction was, “How do I go about introducing my wonderful gay professor Jeff to my beloved gay cousin Joel?”

Donna didn't see her relationship with me in traditional teacher-student parameters. Instead, she saw me as someone she would want as a member of her family.

### It's Not About Me Anymore

I have a blunt and, I think, powerful statement that I make to my students when I'm teaching them about cooperative learning. Some of my students do not like the strategy of cooperative learning for whatever reason. I show them research that validates it as an effective strategy that definitely meets the needs of some of our children. Then I take a long pause ... look them straight in the eyes and say, “Get over it because it's not about you anymore. It's about the children you'll be living with—and some of them *do* learn best with cooperative learning.” It's a powerful moment for them, perhaps because I'm so blunt. In the same regard, I often get “accused” of having a “gay agenda.” I don't. I simply understand that “it's not about me anymore.”

The teacher's “search for freedom” is only the model. It just so happened that my search for my Self had to do with my sexual orientation. Yours may not. Rest assured, though, you *do* have a search. I do,



however, offer my story as a model. I am talking about transformation and transcendence as a cornerstone of good teaching. What I really want to do is redirect students' attention away from my voice and to each others' voices. I am deliberate about this. I often begin each class session with what is known as a Gratitude Walk (Jensen 1999). Students take a ten-minute walk with each other and share with each other the "GLP" of the Gratitude Walk. What are you Grateful for in your life right now? What are you Learning (in class or in life)? What is a Promise you can make to yourself today? The Gratitude Walk becomes one of the best loved practices in our learning community because, as they walk with a different member each time, they are invited to become a real part of each others' lives.

We teach people, not content. If we see ourselves as the holders of an objective truth that needs to be deposited into our empty bank students, we are working from an unbridled ego. The humanist, revolutionary educator's "effort must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this she/he must be partner of the students in her/his relations with them" (Freire 1997). Power in the form of knowledge is not the property of any one individual. Students know when a teacher works from ego and power. Myss (1993, 12) states that

when an individual is focused upon the acquisition of any form of external power, it is indicative of what is absent internally in that person. The stronger the obsession, the greater the lack of authentic power.

In his book, *The Seat of the Soul*, Gary Zukav (1989, 26) says that authentic power is aligning "our thoughts, emotion, and actions with the highest part of ourselves." Sadly, most schooling does not model for students what authentic power is. Rather, as hooks (1994, 16) states,

the objectification of the teacher within bourgeois educational structure seems to denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports compartmentalization.

In sharp contrast, holistic educators agree with Martin Buber (1958, 69) that "in the beginning is the rela-

tion." I honestly believe that this is what students are responding to in my teaching—my sheer tenacity and commitment to authenticity.

The appearance of what Talburt and Steinberg (2000) call "queer thinking" is relatively new to education. Our Voices are still in an early stage of development even though, I must admit, the political hour feels very late. "There is an urgency to this work—people are still dying, being bashed, being discriminated against, still suffering unnecessarily in a myriad of ways, public and private" (Talburt and Steinberg 2000). Consequently, this demands that we summon our courage, achieve some kind of solidarity, and press ahead. The truth is that we have a tendency to regard teaching and activism as separate spheres. I do not think that is the case. Teaching is about consciousness-raising, pure and simple. Indeed, there are lots of actions that schools can take that are legislative in nature. Still, though, our greater act is humanizing ourselves through being Out, authentic, and narrators of our own stories.

I think we are afraid. Of each other. Of ourselves. Of coming together in vulnerability. I recently sat in a meeting where we were developing a new MAT (Masters in Teaching) program. Some of my colleagues were concerned that people who had only been teaching for a few months were going to be getting a Masters degree. "What can they offer in reflective practice and research with such limited experience," they said. I considered this Deweyan/Freirian heresy. I told them as much. Dewey assumed "that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience."

The problem in education is that the focus is always outward. These huge books contain the realities that we deem important and anything inside the teacher or the students is suspect. Plain and simple, we need teachers who have done "inner work." How can we expect to teach transformation when we do not even understand what is meant by the word (Palmer 1998)? Thich Nhat Hahn believed and called for healers, teachers, therapists, and those in the helping professions to first heal themselves. He said, "if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people" (hooks 1994, 15). "The transformation of teaching must begin in the transformed heart of the



teacher. Only in the heart searched and transformed by truth will new teaching techniques and strategies for institutional change find grounding" (Palmer 1983). I am calling not only for the "teacher as reflector" of their practice, but for the "teacher as reflector" of themselves.

For things to change, I must change. This is not California New Age mumbo-jumbo. We simply teach who we are. A wounded person teaches woundedness. A person in search of her freedom teaches others how to search for their freedom. You can't teach liberation. You have to *be* liberation.

If professors are wounded, damaged individuals, people who are not self-actualized then they will seek asylum in the academy rather than seek to make the academy a place of challenge, dialectical interchange, and growth" (hooks 1994, 165).

I spent thirty-some years teaching from my unknown self. I was teaching fear, voicelessness, and conformity. The enormous energy that I expended trying to "pass" as heterosexual was wasted energy. It was energy that could have made me a much more dynamic educator. The fear that I lived with each and every day had to have affected my students as much as it did me. They certainly must have felt how incongruent I was. This diminished my reliability. My inauthenticness made me enormously "less than." A teacher who is paralyzed with fear, who is voiceless, who is disempowered and living as a liar creates these dynamics as their curriculum.

On the other hand, I have a different curriculum today. I live a curriculum that says that this is how to find your Voice, that this is how to use your Voice strategically for social justice, and that transcendence is not only possible—it is an imperative and natural outcome of being a learner.

Dewey, like the existentialist thinkers, didn't think that the self was complete. He said that the self was "something in continuous formation through choices of action" (Dewey 1916). We create ourselves by going beyond what exists and bringing something new into being (Sartre 1956). We must always be birthing ourselves. "Education as growth and maturity should be an ever-present process" (Dewey 1938). Freire spoke about an education that affirms

people as being in the process of becoming, "unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (Freire 1997). Indeed, he even stated that "the joy of being human is our unfinishedness."

Education can be enhanced, but it's not going to be enhanced by endless political reforms. Palmer (1998, 6) states that

to educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world. How can schools perform their mission without encouraging the guides to scout out that inner terrain?

I believe that the way to seriously work for the transformation of schooling is to vigilantly work for the transformation of Self.

Becoming authentic, or as Greene so aptly stated it, "searching for my freedom," completely changed my paradigm of Being and, thus, teaching. The transformation of education will not occur by politicians demanding longer days, more tests, and some abstract thing titled "higher standards." The transformation of teaching will occur when teachers who know themselves are able to intimately know their students. I have a postcard with a quote from the poet Marge Piercy hanging in my home. It sums up all of life for me, but certainly what I've been trying to communicate here about working towards an end to homophobia. She writes:

Attention is love, what we must give children, mothers, fathers, our friends, the news, the woes of others. What we want to change we curse and then pick up a tool. Bless whatever you can with eyes and hands and tongue. If you can't bless it, get ready to make it anew.

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