



INVESTIGATING TRANSGENDER AND GENDER EXPANSIVE EDUCATION RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE

Edited by Wayne Martino and Wendy Cumming-Potvin



Investigating Transgender and Gender Expansive Education Research, Policy and Practice

This book addresses an emerging and vital field of scholarship, which deals with transgender- and gender-expansive-informed education, policy and practice.

The collection provides a framework for thinking about the relevance of Transgender Studies for the field of education and specifically for K-12 schooling contexts. It argues for the need to engage transgender-informed epistemologies and provides insight into trans-affirmative education research, policy contexts and practices with the view to generating knowledge about how the experiences of transgender and non-binary youth, gender non-conformity and gender-creative expression are being addressed in the education system. Topics addressed range from trans-informed policy analysis and enactment across various contexts to addressing central concerns and polemics related to the policing and regulation of students' gender identities and expression, with respect to washroom space in schools and the use of gender-neutral pronouns. The book is timely and pertinent, especially given that transphobia and addressing gender justice in the education system have been identified as significant human rights issues which require urgent intervention.

Overall, this collection points to both the productive potentialities of this emerging body of research, and the limitations and challenges that need to continue to be addressed in the realization of a commitment to enacting a critical trans politics in education. This book was originally published as a special issue of *Gender and Education*.

Wayne Martino is Professor of Equity and Social Justice Education in the Faculty of Education and an affiliate member of the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research at the University of Western Ontario, Canada. He is currently Principal Investigator on the research project entitled: *Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth in Schools*.

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Wayne Martino and Wendy Cumming-Potvin

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Lindsay Herriot, David P. Burns and Betty Yeung

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Wendy Cumming-Potvin and Wayne Martino

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Can policies help schools affirm gender diversity? A policy archaeology of transgender-inclusive policies in California schools

Elizabeth J. Meyer and Harper Keenan

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Chapter 5

What's involved in 'the work'? Understanding administrators' roles in bringing trans-affirming policies into practice

Bethy Leonardi and Sara Staley

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Problematizing the cisgendering of school washroom space: interrogating the politics of recognition of transgender and gender non-conforming youth

Jennifer Ingrey

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The de/politicization of pronouns: implications of the No Big Deal Campaign for gender-expansive educational policy and practice

Lee Airton

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1 Introduction

Transgender and gender expansive education research, policy and practice: reflecting on epistemological and ontological possibilities of bodily becoming

Wayne Martino and Wendy Cumming-Potvin

Introduction

This special edition addresses an emerging and vital field of scholarship, which deals with transgender and gender expansive informed education, policy and practice. It is timely and pertinent, especially given that the need to address gender justice in the education system, and specifically transphobia, has been identified as a significant human rights issue, which requires urgent intervention (Greytak, Kosciw, and Diaz 2009; Ullman 2014; Taylor and Peter 2011; Wyss 2004). The primary objective of the proposed special edition is to investigate trans specific education research, policy contexts and practices, with the view to generating knowledge about how the experiences of transgender youth, gender non-conformity and gender creative expression are being addressed in the education system (Blackburn 2007; Cumming-Potvin and Martino 2018; DePalma 2013; Ehrensaft 2016; Luecke 2011; Martino and Cumming-Potvin 2016; Martino et al., in press; Ryan, Patraw, and Bednat 2013). Such research is important given, as Green (2010) reports, that (i) 'little is known about the type or frequency of formal education being conducted on gender diverse identities', and (ii) 'there is a significant paucity in the pedagogical literature, both theoretical and practical' in terms of education that deals with addressing transphobia and gender expression in the education system (4). In addition, while there is evidence of trans specific education policies, there is very little detailed or extended analysis of such policies, and limited research that has investigated the effects of these policies, or that has addressed trans-affirmative and gender expansive pedagogical practices in the classroom.

This special edition covers such matters as those pertaining to the enactment of trans affirmative policies across a number of different contexts and educational jurisdictions, providing analytic insights into their specific contingencies and interpretive repertoires governing their enactment and reception. There is also a focus on some empirical research, which attends to how these policies are understood and being taken up in schools, as well that which includes the voices of trans, non-binary and genderqueer youth and scholars that continue to foreground the limits of ensuring gender democratization with respect to washroom/bathroom/toilet access and challenges posed by those seeking gender neutral pronoun recognition. In this respect, the papers included in this special edition are envisaged as making a contribution to the emerging literature in the

field which addresses how questions of trans informed gender justice are being understood, grappled with and enacted (Bartholomaeus and Riggs 2017; Forhard-Dourlent 2018; Human Rights Campaign and Gender Spectrum 2014; Ingrey 2012; Jones 2016; Martino and Cumming-Potvin 2017; Mayo 2017; Meyer and Leonardi 2018; Robinson et al. 2014; Schindel 2008; Sinclair and Gilbert 2018; Smith and Payne 2016; Stiegler 2016; Ullman 2017). However, while acknowledging the necessity of the space that we have opened up for generating trans informed knowledge generation and insights into the enactment of gender democratization at both the policy and practice level, we are conscious of the limits of our efforts. With these limits in mind we want to address some epistemological tensions which we believe may serve as a critical focus for engaging with the field and with the papers that are included as part of this special edition:

The necessity of transgender studies informed understandings of embodiment

While there has been growing and significant research into addressing sexual diversity and schooling (Atkinson and DePalma 2009; Britzman 1998; Epstein 1994; Letts and Sears 1999; Rasmussen 2006; Renold 2005; Robinson 2008), a focus on transgender personhood is only more recently starting to gain much needed attention in the field of education. However, until fairly recently, the 'T' in LGBT studies in education has not received equal attention or has simply been erased in studies employing this acronym (Greytak, Kosciw, and Boesen 2013). In turn, there have been tensions that continue to be generated by queer and feminist engagement with transgender informed understandings of embodiment, which have implications for thinking through the relevance of such debates for generating knowledge about the pedagogical and curricular terms of gender democratization in education systems and schools (Malatino 2015). There is also an emerging and increasing interest in the need to generate informed knowledge and understandings about how transgender, gender diverse, genderqueer and non-binary students are being supported, as well as how more gender complex and creative education is being enacted in school communities (Ehrensaft 2016; Pyne 2014; Rands 2009), especially in light of the proliferation of discourses and representations of transgender and gender diverse people in popular culture and specifically on-line (Horak 2014; Raun 2010).

There is an epistemological need, however, to attend to decolonizing frameworks in education as they pertain specifically to enacting and addressing gender democratization in schools and in the policy domain, particularly with respect to the administration of addressing trans inclusivity that relies on a fundamental discourse of accommodation and liberal notions of human rights (Morgensen 2016; Spade 2011). Concomitant with such an epistemological necessity is also the need for a continued focus on what Stryker (2006) refers to as the politics and ethics of trans 'desubjugation' as 'absolutely essential to critical inquiry' (13). Such a practice involves a committed focus to creating spaces for the embodied experiences and perspectives of transgender, genderqueer and non-binary to be articulated in ways that allow for their diversity to be acknowledged, and which speak to the institutionalization of whiteness in determining which bodies matter in generating trans- and non-binary informed understandings of the limits of settler colonialist understandings of gender diversity with its logics of whitewashing

and erasure of race (Namaste 2009; Snorton and Haritaworn 2013; Stryker and Aizura 2013).

There is also a need, we believe for a necessary focus, epistemologically speaking, with respect to prioritizing transgender studies and the perspectives and insights that it offers us, as scholars working in the field of gender and education (Martino 2016; Namaste 2000; Rubin 1998; Stryker 2006). Such a commitment requires directing necessary attention to the institutionalized regimes of cisnormativity and cisgenderism and their harmful impact, which affect all individuals with respect to the constraints that they pose for embracing more creative and independent gender expansive understandings and practices (Lennon and Mistler 2014; Malatino 2015; Pyne 2014; Serano 2007). In this respect, both 'minoritizing' approaches, which attend to transgender and non-binary embodied experiences of livability and 'and of their relationships to discourses and institutions that act upon and through them' (Stryker 2006, 13), and 'universalizing' approaches, which focus on interrogating 'the pervasive nature of cisgenderism' (Lennon and Mistler 2014, 63) and its impact on everyone, need to be considered in tandem as a basis for addressing gender complexity in trans informed policy, research and pedagogical practices (Bartholomaeus and Riggs 2017).¹ As white, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender scholars we take this necessity for critical engagement with the normalization of the practice of gender assigned at birth and its effects very seriously, while simultaneously being aware of the need to embrace trans desubjugation. In addition and as Spade (2011) points out, such approaches need to be expanded to embrace 'racial and economic justice-centered trans resistance [as] ... part of this work ... [where] trans people are participants in a range of formations doing this work under many different banners' (160).

The anti-normative limits of queer theory

However, a sustained engagement with transgender studies also requires some critical consideration of the antinormative limits of queer theory (Wiegman and Wilson 2015) in its capacity to attend to the complexities of embodied understandings and experiences of gender in ontological and phenomenological terms that speak to the realities of gender democratization as it pertains to the politics of recognition, with all of its implications for the livability of trans personhood. As Rubin (1998) points out, the lived experiences of transgender people – what they know about 'becoming legibly gendered subjects' (265) – need to be centered in generating trans informed knowledge and understandings, and in this regard, analysis must not just concern itself with 'cultural inscription' in terms of the norms governing the surgical demands involving bodily transformation, but attend to the 'productive, creative work of the subject struggling to articulate itself within received categories' (266) (see Connell 2012). As Butler (2004) herself points out, 'categorization has its place and cannot be reduced to forms of anatomical essentialism':

Similarly, the transsexual desire to become a man or a woman is not to be dismissed as a simple desire to conform to established identity categories. As Kate Bornstein points out, it can be a desire for transformation itself, a pursuit of identity as a transformative exercise, an example of desire itself as a transformative activity. But even if there are, in each of these cases, desires for stable identity at work, it seems crucial to realize that a livable life does require various degrees of stability. In the same way that a life for which there are no categories of recognition exist is not a livable life, so a life for which those categories constitute unlivable constraint is not an acceptable option. (8)