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**Title:** Critical Imaginaries of Empathy in Teaching and Learning About Diversity in Teacher Education

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**Biography:**

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**Abstract**

'Difficult' or potentially discomforting diversity topics and critical, unsettling pedagogies often induce resistances or charges of 'irrelevance' in teacher education contexts. In teaching with these topics and pedagogies, there is often a significant emphasis on fostering and utilising the process of *empathy* in productive ways to change attitudes and reduce social injustices. Drawing on a selection of illustrative accounts from three qualitative studies in schools in Ireland, interwoven with media commentary and some personal catalytic reflections, this paper explores (a) how an emphasis on empathy is not without its limits and restrictive effects in teacher education and (b) the generative possibilities yielded by situating empathy within a queer pedagogy of emotion. This paper's close attention to and illustration of the limits of empathy within the context of teaching about gender and sexuality diversity opens a new consideration of empathy within a queer pedagogy of emotion and considers the broader potential of this for teaching about diversity in teacher education. Ultimately, this paper advances an argument for a constant watchfulness about how we are responding to diversity dilemmas in teacher education on the premise that such attention can yield new pedagogical imaginaries and possibilities.

**Keywords:** Empathy; Teacher Education; Diversity; Queer Pedagogy; LGBT

## Introduction

The status of knowledges in teacher education has long been evaluated in utilitarian terms; assessing its usefulness and applicability in particular situations in school contexts (Ní Chróinín & O'Sullivan, 2014). The neoliberalization of education has played a significant role in this, positioning universities as for-profit businesses that are often forced to prioritise economic over intellectual interests (Giroux 2004). In this model, students become positioned as paying customers and utilitarian discourses gain traction, defining and transmitting 'the permissible boundaries to pedagogical practices' while constraining possibilities (Doherty et al., 2013, p. 518; Popkewitz & Pereyra, 1993; Allen & Rasmussen 2015). And so, teacher education

students often perceive foundation studies content, such as the sociology of diversity, as overly theoretical and distant from practice and so neither explicitly useful or applicable at school (Loughran, 2014). In light of these and other dynamics, 'difficult' and potentially discomforting diversity topics such as gender and sexuality diversity take on a particular hue in many teacher education contexts. Furthermore, critical, unsettling pedagogies, such as queer pedagogy, which interrogates the binary logics of normativity, sit in tension with neoliberal projects of diversity that are premised on a quest for sameness and normalization (Gray & Harris, 2015). In this vein, such 'difficult' topics and pedagogies are often seen as 'irrelevant' to the everyday business of being a teacher (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Rasmussen & Allen, 2015) and teacher educators who embark upon teaching with these topics and pedagogies are often evaluated as 'biased' and even met with hostility (Gray & Harris, 2015; Allen, 2015).

As a teacher educator preparing to teach such potentially discomforting topics or pedagogies, I have observed myself anticipating students' charges of irrelevance and designing course content and pedagogical methods accordingly. One approach I have taken is to establish an emphasis on empathy in my teaching. For example, I have prefaced certain topics and pedagogies with the code of teacher professional conduct, adopting this as a legitimising frame to explain the responsibility on student-teachers to enact 'empathy in practice'. My orientation towards the process of empathy as an anticipatory response to resistance is not unique. In teacher education, there is very often a significant emphasis on fostering and utilising the process of empathy in productive ways to change attitudes and reduce social injustices. For example, in situations of resistance to 'difficult' diversity topics, Zembylas (2012, p. 122) advocates for a kind of 'strategic empathy' as a starting point for building 'new alliances' across lines of difference.

And so, this paper takes as its starting point the idea that, in anticipation of student-teacher resistance and charges of irrelevance, we craft specific and strategic approaches to teaching with 'difficult' and potentially discomforting diversity topics and pedagogies. Asserting that the emphasis on *empathy* is an example of one such approach and that the workings of power through empathy merits further inquiry, this paper explores (a) how an emphasis on empathy is not without its limits and restrictive effects in teacher education and (b) the generative possibilities yielded by situating empathy within a queer pedagogy of emotion in teacher education. Of course, this paper is not an argument against empathy. Nor is it a quest for *the* model method of teaching about diversity. Rather, drawing on a selection of illustrative accounts from three qualitative studies in Ireland, interwoven with media

commentary and some personal catalytic reflections, this paper's close attention to and illustration of the limits of empathy within the context of teaching about gender and sexuality diversity opens a new consideration of empathy within a queer pedagogy of emotion and considers the broader potential of this for teaching about diversity in teacher education.

This paper is organised in the following way. First, I trace the emergence of queer pedagogy in teacher education and explore what is meant by empathy in the context of teaching about diversity from a sociological perspective. The methodological details of the studies drawn upon in this paper will be presented before then moving on to illustrate how discourses of empathy can function with limiting effects. Finally, I discuss the possibilities of situating empathy within a queer pedagogy of emotion in teacher education and what this might offer more broadly for teaching about diversity in teacher education.

## Queer Pedagogy and the Place of Empathy in Teaching about Diversity

Queer theory is more easily defined by what it is not than what it is (Giffney, 2016); 'it can only be glimpsed, not clearly seen or captured, for then it would not be queer' (Allen, 2015, p.773). Emerging from post-structural gender and sexuality theory, queer theory is an anti-assimilationist, anti-normative method for troubling 'the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' (Halperin, 1997). Deborah Britzman's (1995) seminal text *Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight,* marks the surfacing of queer theory in pedagogical contexts. For Britzman (1995), queer theory provoked a rethinking of the very grounds of knowledge and pedagogy in education. It held promise as a method for destabilizing the assumed fixity and normalcy of identity categories and for questioning the very architecture of legitimacy. And so, queer pedagogy emerged as a pedagogy of discomfort; one that 'is about disruption and opening up not closure and satisfaction' (Kumashiro, 2002) and its potential lies in its capacity to undo and destabilise rather than include (Blackburn et al., 2016). In this way, queer pedagogy is not confined to learning about gender and sexual difference (Warner, 1993). Rather, it is at once philosophy and method, working to unsettle assumptions about what is considered 'normal', refusing to know in advance and maintaining a kind of 'radical openness' in learning (Allen & Rasmussen, 2015).

Queer pedagogy has not been without its constraints in education contexts. In conventional understandings of the learning process 'learning is experienced as pleasurable when the learner feels a sense of satisfaction at having grasped something valuable' (Allen,

2015, p.769). Queer pedagogy's commitment to troubling, unsettling and refusing solution-oriented thinking can deny the kind of satisfaction often experienced by students in more traditional learning models. These tensions mingle with powerful neoliberal discourses with the result that the potentiality of queer pedagogy is significantly curbed. For instance, queer theorizing is often presumed to be concerned with sexual freedom (Rasmussen & Allen, 2015) and following this line of thinking, there is often a 'double remedy' approach to teaching about diversity whereby students are told stories of subjection and overcoming (Britzman, 1995, p. 158). However, such approaches can actually produce 'new forms of exclusivity' that re-entrench the tolerant normal and tolerated subaltern (Britzman, 1995, p.160). Furthermore, these approaches often reduce institutionalised inequalities to concerns with individual practices and beliefs (Gray, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2012; Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004). In this way, curricula that at first appear inclusive mcan actually foreclose 'the more radical qualities of narratives of social difference' (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004, p.81).

So, queer pedagogy most certainly has its constraints and it often departs from the kind of work that was and is imagined for queer theory (Whitlock, 2010). But, as Allen (2015) argues, exploring the limits of queer pedagogy - what is possible for it to achieve but also the limits of its thought - has the potential to open up new possibilities. Such an examination of limits allows us to 'see the boundaries…in order to queer them' (Allen, 2015, p.765). In this vein, Quinlivan (2012) invites close attention to the 'high emotionality' present in queer pedagogical situations and, with this in mind, I now turn to think about empathy; what is meant by the term and what shape it has taken in the context of teaching about diversity in teacher education.

This paper's primary concern with the discursive and social workings and effects of empathy necessitates situating what is meant by the term within the sociology of empathy. There isn't consensus on the relationship between 'empathy' and 'sympathy' (Ruiz-Junco, 2017). Some explain sympathy as a cognitive process and empathy as a more emotionally engaged experience of the plight of the other (Shott, 1979) while others reverse these definitions (Clark, 1997; Ruusuvuori, 2005). Charles H. Cooley (1922) did not use the term empathy in his social theory of emotion, he used the word sympathy, but his theory of sympathy is considered to be the basis for the sociology of empathy. For Cooley, empathy has three main features (Ruiz-Junco, 2017). Firstly, 'empathic imagination' involves the process of coming to understand the other through imagination of the plight of the other. Secondly, empathy is learned and performed in social interactions with others' gestures, expressions, tone etc.

Finally, Cooley explains that 'instrumental empathic action' serves varied ends. Empathy can lead to an increase in the need to reduce social injustices but empathy is also a form of power. He called this power 'sympathetic influence', explaining that 'a person of definite character and purpose who comprehends our way of though is sure to exert power over us' (Cooley, 1922 [1962] p.142 cited in Ruiz-Junco, 2017, p. 418). Given this paper's chief concern with the power-laden dimensions of empathy, Cooley's (1922) theory is instructive here. In particular, his consideration of power facilitates close attention to how empathy works as part of an emotional capitalism, facilitating powerful institutions to promote empathy pathways that often actually result in the re-entrenchment of inequalities (Ruiz-Junco, 2017). Cooley (1922) alerts us to the idea that, while empathy can build new relations of potential, it can at the same time, work to exacerbate social injustices.

Empathy has been a core process in teaching about issues of difference and social justice in higher education (Zembylas & Boler, 2003; Zembylas, 2007; Zembylas, 2012). It has been presumed that learning about the 'other' will bring about empathy that can be transformative in schools (Britzman, 1995; Zembylas, 2017). It has also been espoused as a strategic response to resistance in higher education contexts. For example, Zembylas (2012, p. 114) articulates strategic empathy as

> the use of empathetic emotions in both critical and strategic ways…it refers to the willingness of the teacher to make himself/herself strategically skeptic (working sometimes against his/her own emotions) in order to empathize with the troubled knowledge students carry with them, even when this troubled knowledge is disturbing to other students or to the teacher.

Articulating this as the reconciliatory perspective of empathy, Zembylas (2012) argues that this strategic empathy facilitates an emotional encounter that brings 'villain' and 'victim' together to find commonality in humanness, to recognize 'the other as sufferer too; as an emotional being'. The idea is that deep emotional exploration of multiple stories of troubled knowledge facilitate new pathways for empathic engagement. An important aspect here for Zembylas (2012) is Boler's (2004) distinction between passive and active empathy. While passive empathy is 'a benign state of empathising with the oppressed', active empathy 'leads to taking action to overcome emotional injury and oppression' (Zembylas, 2012, p. 120). While advocating for this strategic, reconciliatory empathy, Zembylas (2012, p.123), at the same time, acknowledges that we need to be cognizant of the boundaries and limits of this kind of teaching.

And so, this paper is undergirded by a sociology of emotion that pays close attention to the workings of power through empathy (Ruiz-Junco 2017; Cooley 1922) and builds on work

underway on empathy as a strategic pedagogical tool in higher education contexts (Zembylas 2012). Following Allen's (2015) call for consideration of the limits of queer pedagogies in order to reveal their possibilities and Quinlivan's (2012, p.520) invitation to 'work with queer emotional provocations in greater depth as part of the pedagogical process', this paper explores the limits and possibilities of empathy within the context of teaching about gender and sexuality diversity in teacher education on the basis that such a critique yields new pedagogical potential.

## Methodology

This paper is underpinned by a queer, feminist, post-structural epistemology (Scott, 1988; Butler, 1990). Adopting this perspective challenges the notion of a unified sexual subject or fixed identity and disrupts processes of normalisation that are tethered by binaries such as heterosexual/homosexual. At the same time, following Butler (2013), I hold on — momentarily — to identities and binaries in ways that help think through how certain attachments and investments make life liveable. In this sense, this paper exists at the intersections of modernism and post-modernism, feminism and queer studies.

Shaped by these philosophical foundations, this paper weaves together several layers of illustrative data. Firstly, the primary data sources I draw upon are three separate qualitative studies conducted between 2015 and 2017. Ethical approval was granted by my University's ethics board prior to conducting each of these studies.

*Study 1* explored ten student-teachers' perspectives on and experiences of participating in the gender and sexuality diversity component of a 'Diversity in Education' module co-ordinated and taught by me in 2015. This module adopted a sociological, intersectional approach to teaching about various overlapping domains of diversity in education contexts. For ethical reasons, interviews were conducted by a research assistant. The ten individual interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and audio recording were transcribed verbatim.

*Study 2* investigated how 46 parents, 12 teachers and 6 principals understood and approached homophobia and transphobia in primary school settings (Neary et al. 2016). Six schools participated – three denominational (Den.) and three multidenominational (MD). Five were co-educational and one was a single-sex boys' school. In each school, the principal acted as a research gate-keeper, communicating with teachers and parents and sending an open invitation to take part in the study. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers

and principals and six focus groups were held with parents. Parents were accessed via the principal as gate-keeper of the schools.

*Study 3* inquired into how gender identity and gender norms in primary schools were understood and experienced by teachers, principals and the parents of transgender children (2017). The parents of eleven transgender and gender variant children aged between 5 and 12, who accessed the support services of the Transgender Equality Network of Ireland (TENI), volunteered to take part in this study. Four children had been assigned the gender identity 'boy' at birth but have always identified more closely and/or presented as girls (Ages 6, 6, 10, 13). Seven had been assigned the gender identity 'girl' at birth but have always identified more closely as a boy (Ages 5, 7, 8, 8, 9, 12, 12). Five children attended Catholic schools, two attended Church of Ireland schools and four attended multi-denominational schools. In the parent cohort, eleven women and one man took part (two of the parents involved were a couple). Seven primary school educators who accessed the support services of TENI also took part in the study. Five were in multi-denominational schools while two were in Catholic schools. In the educator cohort, five were women, two were men.

Analysis of interview and focus group data in all three studies involved initial listening back to audio recordings, several readings of transcripts and writing of memos. Ideas were inductively clustered into categories and then themes were refined. All identifying information was removed from the data and the names and place-names that appear in this paper are pseudonyms. For the most part, the illustrative accounts drawn upon in this paper speak to the meta-theme of 'teacher knowledge', a theme that emerged in each of the three studies. In this paper, these accounts are also supported and contextualised by commentary in the international and Irish media to draw connections between the affective and discursive flows circulating in and across overlapping social fields. Finally, I layer into the discussion some personally catalytic reflections related to the workings of empathy in teaching about diversity. Neither the media data nor the personal data drawn upon in this study are a result of formal textual or auto-ethnographic analyses. Rather, following the notion that the approach to 'data' must be reimagined and not thought as 'brute data waiting to be coded, labelled with other brute words' (St Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p.715), this paper layers various data sources together, attending to 'relations within assemblages, and the kinds of affective flows that occur between these relations' (Fox & Alldred, 2015, p.402). In other words, this paper attempts to grapple with the varying interconnected and overlapping matter of the assemblage in which this paper is

situated: public discourse, celebrity culture, me the researcher, me the teacher educator, student-teachers, educators in the field, children, pedagogy, curriculum, architecture, feelings.

**The Limits of an Emphasis on Empathy in Teaching About Diversity**

In this section, I set about an empirical illustration of some of the limits of the process of empathy in teaching about gender and sexuality diversity in teacher education. The aim here is to explore some of the ways that power works through empathy on the basis that attending to these limits has the potential to open up new pedagogical possibilities.

The first limit of the emphasis on empathy as a goal in teacher education is the necessity to construct a particular kind of subject to be empathised with. The following two quotes are instructive here. The first is from a student-teacher in Study 1:

> Myself and the girl beside me [in the lecture theatre] were just talking away about sexuality and behind us there were these people and they were saying 'this is so irrelevant, it's not related to education at all, we should be learning about…ability or…'…And I get a little bit riled up about the whole thing and I just turned around and I said 'really, do you think that that's true, you don't think that this is in any way linked to education?' And the person said that 'well, no, we won't be teaching anything about sexuality'. And then I mentioned RSE and I mentioned suicide in teenagers who identify as LGBT and the person was like 'whoa'…So when I mentioned that, they were kind of like, 'oh, okay' and they were like 'this obviously affects you personally?'

The second is from a primary school teacher in Study 2 (Neary et al. 2016):

> it's so important the way they train teachers…to use the right people, and life stories…real life stories and that will make people who maybe might have otherwise been prejudiced, maybe to put them in the shoes of those people and how they suffered.

In both examples here, empathy is fostered through a focus on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* victim who has suffered. As teacher educators, these quotes encourage us to conjure these victims and their stories, fore-fronting their suffering so that those who don't see the relevance of learning about sexuality can empathise with such individual pain. Such discourses are an illustration of what Britzman and Gilbert (2004, p.84) call 'the time of difficulty'; a time when teacher education responds to gender and sexuality diversity 'only as a problem of fighting discrimination and rescuing disparaged identities' potentially repeating the hostility by equating LGBT identities with aggression'. Such narratives are newly amplified in a post *Marriage Equality Time* (Neary et al. forthcoming) whereby new melancholic subjects of empathy (or sympathy) are continually required to ensure that teaching about gender and

sexuality diversity remains on educational agendas. Furthermore, this form of empathy echoes what Cooley (1922) refers to as the 'symbolic influence' power of empathy whereby a tolerant-tolerated relation is maintained (Ruiz-Junco 2017; Gray 2018) and the empathy recipient remains at the mercy of the empathiser.

A second limit of employing empathy as a goal in teaching about gender and sexuality diversity is its reliance on personal connections with LGBT people. The last sentence of the student-teacher quote earlier ends on: 'oh okay….this obviously affects you personally?' The assumption here is that one must have a personal connection with an LGBT individual family member or friend in order to be able to really understand or teach about gender and sexuality diversity. In fact, such discourses are echoed in the literature whereby the potential of a teacher educator coming out to their students as a pedagogical tool to conjure a personal connection with an LGBT person is debated (Barker & Reavey, 2009).

A series of quotes from the media facilitate thinking through the limits of an empathy that relies on this kind of personal connection. First, to George Hook, a high profile tv and radio presenter in Ireland. On his radio show he insinuated that some women who are victims of sexual assault might share some of the blame. His commentary caused a media storm and eventually he apologised publicly, saying: "Everybody has the right to enjoy themselves without fear of being attacked and as a society we have a duty to our daughters and granddaughters to protect that right". This attention to women relatives echoed also across the public statements made by Hollywood celebrities as the #Metoo revelations began to unfold. The following quotes are taken from a Huffington Post article about public responses to revelations about Harvey Weinstein:

> But now, as the father of four daughters, this is the kind of sexual predation that keeps me up at night. This is the great fear for all of us….We have to be vigilant and we have to help protect and call this stuff out, because we have our sisters and our daughters and our mothers (Matt Damon, Actor).
>
> protecting our sisters, friends, co-workers and daughters (Ben Affleck, Actor)

In each of these quotes, emotional connections to daughters, sisters, mothers are conjured. They attempt to (re)humanise the seemingly distant phenomenon of sexual assault and empathise with women affected by this by relying upon an imaginary of women we know and love being harmed. However, as the Neary of the article points out, Obama condemned Weinstein's behaviour without needing to mention his daughters and the article concludes with: 'Decency and respect. You don't need a daughter to understand that'.

Such discourses of empathy appear to be born out of personal investments and motivations. They advance narratives of possession. And, in the case of George Hook, it is interesting to note how they appear almost in the same breath as victim/survivor-blaming. Flippant attitudes to the sexual assault of particular women are overcome by imagining such behaviour being done to loved ones. Of course, such empathic moves could be read as strategically useful for beginning to establish what Zembylas (2012) calls 'new affective alliances'. Yet what kind of transformations are signalled by these examples? At best, we might see such imaginaries as part of what Boler (2004) terms a 'passive empathy' – the kind that warrants no 'measurable change or good to others or oneself'. At worst, we can see how such discourses contribute to hierarchies of empathy whereby certain known and loved women will always be more deserving (Ruiz-Junco 2017). Again, my attempt in inquiring into these examples is not to argue against the process of empathy. Rather, I am trying to complicate the picture of empathy and to think in depth about the limits of empathy on the premise that such thinking yields new pedagogical potential for teaching about diversity in teacher education.

Another limit of empathy as a goal in teaching about diversity in teacher education is the presumption that more knowledge about minority identities will garner empathy. In the two studies I've done in primary schools in Ireland, a lack of knowledge and training related to gender identity was the constant mantra from teachers, principals and parents. As illustrated by the Education and Family Support Officer involved in Study 3 (Neary et al., 2018), the idea is that staff will empathise with transgender children and their families if they have more knowledge about their everyday lives:

> the people I'm really speaking to are the teachers who would be very resistant to it … you can see them in the room. I'm trying to talk about what it's like for a family that's managing this and just put forward a few concepts or ideas that they might not have thought about before and you can really see their face turning "oh yeah, never thought about it that way". So you're just trying to maybe peak their interest. And to get their empathy.

The acquisition of this 'new knowledge' was described positively by the teachers in the study and there were some small changes in the architecture of gender at school as a result. However, some parents really struggled with the idea that changes in school practices were interpreted by other parents, children and staff as being about accommodating their individual child as opposed to being a good practice in and of itself. Britzman (1995) and others have pointed out how such calls for more knowledge about LGBT people are made under the assumption that such knowledge will be instructive and productive in attitudinal change. However, as the

moment above illustrates, the great value attributed to the 'application' aspect of knowledge acquisition in teacher education coupled with the reality that schooling contexts very often have a largely reactive and individualising approach to LGBT issues (Neary et al., 2016) undoubtedly constrains the potentiality of empathy as they are reliant upon a 'real life' transgender child at school. The problem here lies in how this 'strange estranged story of difference requires the presence of those already deemed subaltern' (Britzman, 1995, p.159) in order to bring about attitudinal change. Furthermore, such approaches can detract from the institutionalised workings of inequality (Schmidt et al 2012).

The discussion so far has centred on the limits of setting empathy as a goal or intended outcome for student-teachers in learning about diversity in teacher education. Now, I want to turn to think briefly about how empathy is employed in education contexts as a pedagogical method. To do this, I want to think about the potential effects of using Zembylas's (2012) previously discussed tactic of 'strategic empathy' in situations of open resistance related to gender and sexuality. A recent experience is instructive here. Following a long and difficult campaign, in May 2018, Ireland voted in a referendum to remove the 8th amendment from its constitution. The 8th amendment prohibited women in Ireland from having an abortion on any grounds and criminalised women who travelled out of the country for an abortion. In the weeks leading up to the referendum, I was involved in grass-roots door-to-door canvassing. During this activity, I found myself using strategic empathy as a tactic. For example, when met with resistance, I strategically feigned empathy with fears that abortion would become 'social' or a 'free for all' or that this was a 'slippery slope' to promiscuity. Such a strategy allowed conversations to develop about other aspects of the issue, usually the hard 'deserving' cases that had the potential to swing a soft 'No' towards a 'Yes' vote. These momentary tactical compromises were pragmatic and, I think, in several cases facilitated a softening or even changing of position. However, there is no escaping how these tactics condoned and even (re)produced misogynist and classed narratives of 'the fallen woman'. I can see how Zembylas's (2012, p.119) method of strategic empathy gives necessary credence and attention to the emotionality of resistance in the bodies of those present and 'not simply to question the formation of hegemonies in social and education arrangements'. However, my worry is that using this as a tactic for gaining ground in the face of resistance or questions of relevance from student-teachers has the potential to reproduce and even condone homophobic and heterosexist narratives. Furthermore, what is the impact of using such an approach in a classroom discussion

for those present whose very bodies and lives have suddenly become the focus of a public debate?

The limits of empathy discussed above reveal how power can work through empathy in pedagogical situations to reproduce and exacerbate social injustices and exclusions. They illustrate how a focus on empathy can reproduce problematic effects such as the tolerant-tolerated relation, a victimised 'other' at risk, a hierarchy of those deserving of empathy and a focus on the individual that often detracts from the institutionalised workings of inequality. These limits raise significant questions for teacher education about how we maintain a focus on empathy and emotion without reproducing such effects. How might teacher educators deal with utilitarian questions of relevance and resistance whilst allowing a space for exploring the knowledges that the bodies present carry within themselves? How might we facilitate engagement with our similarities of humanness without detracting from the social relations of power and inequality? How might we do this without reducing minority subjects to narratives of difficulty and victimhood or hierarchies of empathy recipients? Responding to these questions raised by the limits of empathy discussed thus far in this paper, the following section tentatively sets forth a queer pedagogy of emotion; a pedagogical imaginary that maintains a focus on empathy and emotion in teaching about diversity.

## New Pedagogical Imaginaries: A Queer Pedagogy of Emotion in Teacher Education

Queer theory holds pedagogical promise for teaching about diversity. It offers much hope in how it forefronts the fragmented nature of subjectivity and identity, critiques normativity and assimilation, grapples with questions of temporality and affect, maintains a radical openness to the what-is-yet-come, acknowledges the messiness of social change and embraces ambivalence. Notwithstanding the aforementioned limits of strategic empathy, Zembylas's (2012) work provides a compelling illustration of the power of empathy in teaching about diversity. As he argues, employing critical methods of strategic empathy facilitates teachers and students to 'become able to see common patterns in their emotional lives, to realize how common humanity is made, and what its consequences are for positioning themselves in interconnected ways' (Zembylas, 2012, p.122). In line with queer theory's and queer pedagogy's embracing of ambivalence, I am suggesting that a focus on the ambivalences of emotion - the idea that multiple and often contradictory emotions circulate within and across bodies, relations and spaces – might build productively on Zembylas's (2012) thinking here

and offer new and generative possibilities for what empathy might look like in teaching about diversity in teacher education. Could ambivalent emotion, rather than empathy or sympathy with the 'other', have the potential to build new affective alliances in unpredictable ways in teacher education contexts? Could an emphasis on ambivalent emotion simultaneously facilitate an interrogation of the multiple and intersectional ways that institutionalised inequality affect lives without reducing identities and groups to deficit positionalities or simplified solutions?

In order to offer up some cursory thoughts about what such a queer pedagogy of emotion might look like in the practice of teacher education, I want to draw on a series of quotes from Study 3 and illustrate how they might feature in a teacher education situation of learning about gender identity. The first is a quote from Elaine, a teacher who was frustrated with and worried about the fact that Tadhg, a child in her class who had just moved to the school, wanted to keep his birth assigned gender identity a secret. Tadhg, supported by his parents, had chosen not to come out but it was a country town and a small group of girls appeared to know that Tadhg had been previously in the single-sex girls' school. Elaine and the principal, Declan, described Tadhg and the progress he had made at their school:

> Elaine: he's a real boy he has all the boys antics and Tadhg would have gone through, the resource teacher he had in the Sisters did a lot of role playing to be like a boy. So he's very boyish. He's chunky and he walks with the hands in the pocket.
>
> Declan: You will not pick him out.
>
> …
>
> …Elaine: Tadhg is so happy. I was only talking to mam couple of weeks ago and she said "oh my God he's so settled". Academically he has shot up. I mean if you read his report, we read his report the other day…psychological report … I'm going who is this child! …the doctors were saying "oh my God he's so settled and so happy". And it's great. But I still have this little thing in my head… (Elaine, teacher).

But Elaine was particularly perturbed about Tadhg's 'secret':

> I could discuss transgenderism no bother if I didn't have Tadhg in my class. If it's a bit like racism if you didn't have a black child in your class or a traveller or whatever. But you don't do it when you have a secret in your room. So we were caught between "deal with it but actually don't deal with it". Because even the few times when I had to deal with issues that came up [transphobic comments from some children]…I'd have to say to them [privately] "'you know what you said about Tadhg? Well don't say what you said…I couldn't even say the topic (Elaine, teacher).

She was also worried for other children:

> I have a massive issue with a girl fancying Tadhg because that's not right. Because they don't know he's not … he's a transgender boy but they don't know he's not a boy …I would have a huge thing with a girl fancying a boy because in 6th class they do meet outside the school, kiss or whatever…if she was my daughter that could have a huge effect on a young girl…that's where bullying could start very quickly.

Tadhg's parents have supported his decision saying:

> the teacher was absolutely petrified. She didn't know how to handle this and the teacher wanted him to come out and Tadhg didn't want to come out' (Geraldine)…'the teacher was putting pressure on us for him to come out and tell everyone and just kind of have it out on the open. Whereas like Tadhg didn't want that. So we weren't going to force him to come out… it was really Tadhg's decision and d'you know what fair play to him. He stuck to his guns and he's made it work (John)

In a queer pedagogy of emotion, a collection of quotes such as this might be a starting point for generative teaching and learning about gender and sexuality. The story told through these quotes surfaces multiple, ambivalent emotions within and across the bodies, relations and spaces: The happiness of Tadhg; the protective fear of Elaine for Tadhg; the protective fear of Elaine for other children because of Tadhg; the pride of Tadhg's parents; the pride of Elaine in Tadhg. After explicitly naming these and other emotions in this way, student-teachers and teacher educators might then be given the opportunity to layer our own often simultaneous emotional identifications with and resistances to the various emotions present in these quotes.

This mapping of the emotions circulating in the pedagogical moment then might provide an opportunity to grapple with how emotions condition certain resistances, affinities, identifications, decisions, orientations and progressive solutions. For instance, noting how Zembylas (2012) was careful to distinguish between and emphasise an 'active' as opposed to 'passive' empathy, how does the call to 'act' or 'action' related to gender and sexuality diversity get mobilised towards certain ends in schooling contexts? The attention to ambivalent emotion such as is present in the assemblages of quotes above also provides queer opportunities to explore normativity; how power, resistance and emotionality are entangled; the perils of classification and categorisation; the problem with simplified solutions; the subtleties of homophobia and heterosexism; the materiality of the body; the politics of recognition; agentic acts of reverse-discourse and the institutionalisation of gender norms.

Following Loughran (2014) this might then be enhanced by exposing this queer pedagogy to scrutiny with student-teachers. For example, a 'sideline' activity (Morell & Schepige, 2012, p.169) could tease through the teacher educator's pedagogical decisions to use this series of quotes – explicitly naming the queer pedagogy of emotion frame and the intention in trying to 'imagine a different present, where the work of teacher education is not to resolve social problems…[but] a time to think, to be curious and to make new relations' (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004, p.93).

Grappling with the multiple layers of ambivalent emotions circulating in a pedagogical encounter such as this is just one way of enacting what I am tentatively calling a queer pedagogy of emotion. In this pedagogical imaginary, empathy remains central. But it is not the kind of empathy that attempts to foster affective alliances across coherent identities, groups, beliefs or practices in order to transform attitudes. Rather, in these pedagogical situations, we might be moved to find commonality in the feelings of the 'other' or the intensities of affect circulating; feelings and affects that might be attached to very different individual attitudes, circumstances, bodies and lives. In other words, we might be encouraged, not to empathise with the story or plight of the other but rather the intensity of the feelings of the other, feelings that are experienced for different reasons by everyone. Such commonalities of feeling are fleeting and unpredictable but they might nonetheless be entry points for new conversations and new kinds of alliances in diversity. Such a vision of empathy grapples with issues of diversity and difference in the most complicated way and stays with the messiness of social change. Such a pedagogical approach would not avoid or seek to avoid resistance or charges of irrelevance from student-teachers in teacher education contexts. Neither would it assume that a solution is possible or even desirable. Rather, it would be a generative starting point that might go some way towards what Britzman and Gilbert (2004, p.92) imagine for teaching queerly about diversity in teacher education:

> What if we were audacious enough to consider the disjunctions, ambivalence and conflicts of gayness in broad daylight? Indeed, what if the status of gayness in teacher education found its logic not in the narratives of progress or historical rupture, or even in an anxious prediction of what will happen, but in these "loose ends?"

## Conclusion

This paper took as its starting point the idea that, for various reasons, teacher educators devise strategic methods for approaching 'difficult' and potentially discomforting diversity topics in teacher education and that the emphasis on empathy is one such approach. In this vein, this paper has been an examination of the limits of empathy in teaching about diversity in teacher education contexts, highlighting how empathy is not ipso facto transformative or progressive but rather has unpredictable effects that are themselves limiting and constraining. The tendency towards constructing a particular kind of subject to be empathised/sympathised with; the problematic reliance on personal connection; the presumption that more knowledge about minority identities will garner empathy and the strategic use of empathy to build alliances all have restrictive effects. Though, to point out these limits is not to argue for a move away from the centrality of emotion or affect in learning about diversity in teacher education contexts. Rather, it further emphasises the necessity to attend to emotion in pedagogical encounters. Close attention to the limits of empathy in this paper has raised important questions that have yielded a pedagogical imaginary of what a queer pedagogy of emotion might offer for teaching about diversity in teacher education. Therein, I have suggested that the (often unintended) individualising and victimising effects of a focus on empathy might be ameliorated by bringing the ambivalences of emotion and intensity of feeling to the fore in teaching about diversity in teacher education contexts. Such a queer pedagogy of emotion offers the opportunity to maintain the necessary centrality of empathy and emotion in teaching about diversity without presuming to know in advance or searching for an end point solution to dilemmas that arise in teaching about diversity and difference. Ultimately, this paper's exploration of the workings of power through empathy in teaching about gender and sexuality diversity in teacher education has underlined the need for a constant watchfulness about how we are responding to diversity dilemmas in teacher education contexts on the premise that such attention can yield new pedagogical imaginaries and possibilities.

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