
Democracy & Education

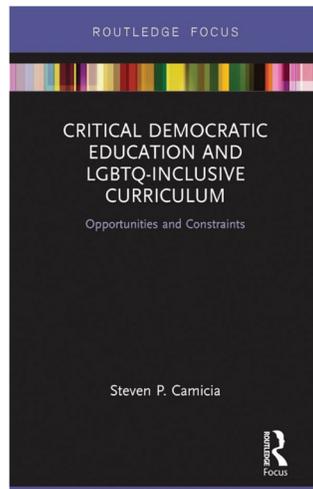
Critical Democratic Education and LGBTQ+-Inclusive Curriculum.

A Book Review of *Critical Democratic Education and
LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum: Opportunities and Constraints*

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IN MY WORK with teachers, administrators, and policymakers, a common need for a practical, current, and socially just guide for LGBTQAI+-inclusive practices is regularly expressed. This is a complex task, as books on LGBTQAI+-inclusive practices tend to be contextually based in the current cultural and political landscape, which is evolving so quickly that, in the words of Camicia (2016) himself, “by the time a book goes to print, the statistics will become dated” (p. 2). This is clear even in the title of his book, *Critical Democratic Education and LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum: Opportunities and Constraints*, where the already potentially outdated acronym “LGBTQ” is used. With the ever-evolving language, acronyms will continue to date themselves, but for the remainder of this review, I will borrow the language of Berila (2016) who “will sometimes refer to this community with the alphabetical acronym (LGBTQAI+) and other times will use the word queer as an umbrella term queer,” recognizing that both are flawed, as categories inevitably create exclusion (p. 6).

That being said, with the aim of providing “educators and policymakers with a framework for understanding how to increase inclusion” and creating more democratic and socially just classrooms for LGBTQAI+ students, Camicia’s (2016) book certainly delivers on its promise by presenting practical, contextual, and democratically minded information in an accessible and usable way (p. vi). The book has a self-awareness to it, recognizing that we are at a moment where there is a real gap between the public discourse on LGBTQAI+ issues and the typical public educational practices (p. ix). The book even goes so far as to use this gap as a



potential justification for the work of including LGBTQAI+ content in curriculum, suggesting that if “local and National laws outside of school policies are becoming more inclusive, . . . How is it that communities are able to justify the exclusion of gender identities and sexual identities from the curriculum” (p. 1)? While this rationale reads slightly utilitarian in a more purely academic context, it is the very type of argument that works to justify this still-controversial content in the context of

educating teachers and, in particular, administrators and policymakers. In fact, the book poses an important question in the light of increasing public policy recognition by asking, “What does school resistance to these shifts tell us about the legitimacy of public education (p. 1)?”

With the aim of promoting the democratic education values of inclusion equity and social justice using a queer theoretical framework to identify and deconstruct normalizing forces, Camicia (2016) sets the reader up for a deep analysis of educational practice, policy, and curriculum using Utah and California as concrete illustrations of democratic inclusive curriculum (pp. vi–vii). The state examples are intended to be considered a snapshot and not monolithically representative of the diversity of

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cultural contexts in each state (p. 6). The book ends with an epilogue “discussing a rationale for using autoethnography within curriculum in order to increase inclusion,” which opens up excellent possibilities for future research (p. ix).

In chapter two, Camicia (2016) employs a unique approach by combining a democratic pedagogical framework with a queer methodology with resists categories and troubles normative knowledge production, as well as recognizes the instability of categorization as categories function to both include and exclude (p. 14). Camicia moves inclusion and recognition past aesthetic caring toward authentic caring by arguing for a transformative approach to how we conceptualize curriculum (pp. 5, 9). This is a refreshing take as traditional models of diversity and inclusion look to “add” as opposed to “trouble,” and using “queer as a critique of all things normative,” Camicia begins to move us past a superficial inclusion toward a critique of the structures that privilege straightness and cisness and simultaneously stifle queerness (Berila, 2016, p. 6; Stengel & Weems, 2010, p. 507).

Camicia (2016) deftly connects queer theory to democratic education by arguing that since we have LGBTQAI+ students, a democratic assumption would be “that those influenced by curriculum should have a voice in curriculum” (p. 13). Using the framework of democratic education in conjunction with queer theory, Camicia therefore recognizes that curricular inclusion must be intersectional and within “historical and contemporary contact social inequalities” as well as troubling “the presumed heterosexuality of the audience/world” (p. 14; Mayo, 2007, p. 170). This is further evidenced by Camicia’s excellent guiding question exploring curricular possibilities: “What might a democratic, queer third space look like in a classroom and curriculum” (p. 18)?

One particularly queer move by Camicia (2016) is to divide curricular exclusion into two lenses, external exclusion and internal exclusion. External exclusion in this context highlights a lack of inclusivity in formalized decision-making in reference to curriculum and policy. This plays out in two ways, the first being the exclusion of LGBTQAI+ voices in policy and curriculum decision-making and the second being the exclusion of these perspectives as reflected by curriculum (pp. 18–19). While Camicia does a strong job of addressing external exclusion related to the second point, there seems to be a lack of discussion in the book about external exclusion in terms of LGBTQAI+ voices in developing curriculum and policy.

Camicia’s (2016) discussion of internal exclusion reads particularly queer in that internal exclusion “functions through Norms, discourse, language and meaning” (p. 19). Here, Camicia moves the conversation past policymaking and toward discursive fields, the often-invisible structures in schools and districts that serve to police, or straighten (p. 21). Noted queer and feminist theorist Sarah Ahmed (2006) has pointed out that “heterosexual genders form themselves through the renunciation of the *possibility* of homosexuality, as a foreclosure *which produces a field of heterosexual objects* at the same time as it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 557). These invisible normative discourses create a cisgender and heterosexual field that is made available, while at the same time

there is a taboo domain that becomes queer (Ahmed, 2006, p. 558; Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 259). In responding to these “straight” fields and taboo domains, Camicia calls for an “ethics of recognition” in which that which is queer might be introduced into discursive fields of straightness (p. 23).

Chapters three and four provide richer and more concrete examples of these discursive fields as the author uses Utah and California as contexts for examining policy, curriculum, and the experiences of students and teachers. Particularly noteworthy in these two chapters are explorations of district and state policies, as well as important legal distinctions that impact the work of curricular diversification. Camicia (2016) highlights this distinction when discussing attempts to ban books in Utah schools. District courts have been consistent in upholding the rights of libraries to offer books in their shelves unencumbered by censorship. The distinction that these courts have made, however, is that a book being used specifically for instruction purposes is not guaranteed the same legal protections of a book that simply sits in the shelves. These legal precedents mean that while libraries are protected from censorship, teachers using instructional materials are not (pp. 35–38).

Camicia (2016) also uses these chapters to critically interrogate the intersection between LGBTQAI+-inclusive policies and curriculum standards and the lived reality of how educators are, in fact, the gatekeepers of implementation of these standards (p. 41). With this notion of educators as gatekeepers in mind, one piece that might have benefitted from greater exploration was that of LGBTQAI+-identified teachers. In both chapters, together, there was really only one narrative of an LGBTQAI+-identified teacher, and this teacher’s difficulties were briefly highlighted (p. 30). One might wonder where the narratives of queer administrators, policymakers, and curriculum coaches are. The lack of inclusion of narratives from out queer personnel, or even a mention that these were difficult to find, might have been a useful exploration, given the recognition the author gives that those who are a part of the curriculum should be reflected in the curriculum. In fact, Greteman (2014) has suggested that queers moving from “institutionalized” to “becoming part of institutions and helping to write their own historical relationship to such institutions” are actively *doing* as queer theory (p. 419). In short, it seems one powerful way to approach this work queerly is to explore the lack of visible queer folks creating and implementing educational policy, curriculum, and praxis.

The final critical point that I would make about the book is not really a failure of the book, rather perhaps a failure of clarity about the book’s aim. Camicia (2016) frequently cites curricular examples, intersections, and resources, but most often these resources are exclusively applicable to the social studies (pp. 6, 22–25, 53–58). Given that Camicia’s academic background is in social studies education, this is not surprising or even necessarily a flaw, but it seems a bit limiting to be presenting a queer exploration of inclusive educational practices and limiting the curricular examples to the social studies. Mathematics, science, English, and even physical education have myriad queer curricular opportunities, and it seems valuable to remember that the responsibility for

democratic education does not rest entirely within the social studies (Kumashiro, 2002, pp. 60, 62; Larsson, 2014, p. 136).

Camicia (2016) goes on in chapter five to highlight the importance of discourse around power relations, normality, objectivity, efficiency, and standardization, as well as further exploring the importance of developing this work in an intersectional manner (pp. 66–67; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013, p. 426; Mayo, 2007, p. 164). Here, Camicia redoubles the queer theoretical approach by suggesting that “people who are marginalized by these discourses can disrupt them by creating counter-narratives that challenge oppressive narratives” (pp. 79–81). Here, the author extends external exclusion in an important way by recognizing how queer discourse can disrupt hegemonic narratives. What still seems lacking is explicit discussion of the external exclusion that keeps LGBTQAI+ individuals out of decision-making positions, including teachers, administrators, and high-level policymakers. Camicia does, however, suggest in the epilogue the importance of autoethnography as a tool to examine how discursive fields regulate speech, thoughts, and actions. From the perspective as a researcher and educator, this is possibly the most powerful moment in the book and certainly suggests spaces to be explored in the future, considering the possibilities of autoethnographies of LGBTQAI+ teachers, administrators, and policymakers (pp. 85–90).

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