POLITICS OF MINORITY INTEREST /
POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE AND ANTINORMATIVITY:
"POSITIVE CHANGE," AND BUILDING "QUEER-FRIENDLY" SCHOOLS IN
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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Abstract

This project examines “positive change” with regard to queer/LGBTQ+ education-activism in Vancouver, British Columbia directed at building what has been described as “queer-friendly schools” through the development and implementation of policy, as well as activist work connected to those efforts. I employ elements of autoethnography and participatory research by documenting and analyzing my education-activist work in this context and that of others with whom I have done this work. I situate this project within the broader context of the education system and queer/LGBTQ+ education-activist efforts in British Columbia.

In the process, I problematize what is meant by or capable of activism and “positive change.” As demonstrated in the literature review, various understandings of sexuality, gender, activism, educational leadership, and “positive change” are available to inform queer/LGBTQ+ education-activism. This thesis examines how these understandings sit in tension with the practicalities, limitations, and contradictions of activist engagement at the school district level of a complex, politicized public school system.

My engagement with the literature, documentation of the practical work, and exploration of a number of guiding questions with the project’s participants comprise the bulk of this project.
# Table of contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................ ii

Table of Contents ....................................................................................... iii

Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................. 1
   Why this project and why these questions ........................................... 4
   Terminology and lenses ..................................................................... 6
   Looking ahead ....................................................................................... 14

Chapter 2: Literature review .................................................................... 16
   Predominant takes on queer/LGBTITQetc. activism ...................... 16
   “Alternative” takes ............................................................................ 23
   Literature describing the Canadian and local contexts ............... 28
   Educational change literature related to 
   queer/LGBTITQetc. issues, and the problem of 
   predominant educational leadership discourse .......................... 30
   Looking ahead ....................................................................................... 42

Chapter 3: Methodology .......................................................................... 43
   Selection and definition of research tradition .................................. 43
   Participant interviews, relations, and representations .................. 50
   Data analysis ......................................................................................... 58

Chapter 4: Entry points and initial implementation .............................. 61
   Window: December 2002 — September 2003 ............................... 62
   Four recent legal cases ....................................................................... 65
   Window: October 2003 — May 2004 ............................................... 70
   1999 – 2004 from Jane’s point of view ........................................... 72
   “Queer-friendly schools” and “positive change”: Initial 
   considerations ..................................................................................... 79
   Window: Training for administrators and counselors .................. 82
   Discussion of the VSB policy and data ............................................. 84

Chapter 5: Implementation and reflections as a consultant .................. 90
   Window: January 2004 – Fall 2005 ................................................. 90
   Fall 2005 – Summer 2006 from Jody’s point of view ..................... 93
   Window: June 2006 ........................................................................... 108
   Fall 2005 – Summer 2006 from Jane’s point of view .................... 109
   The settlement between the provincial government and
Chapter 1: Introduction

Representation of queer/LGBTQetc. identities and discussion of queer/LGBTQetc. issues in public schools remain contentious issues in the province of British Columbia (Anderson, 1998; Austin, 1997; Bolan, 1998; Carter, 2004; Eustace, 2006; Poole, 1996; Smith, 2004; Spencer, 1997; Steffenhagen, 2003). Recent and ongoing legal cases centering on banned books, curriculum inclusive of queer/LGBTQetc. identities, homophobic harassment, and school districts’ legal obligations to proactively address homophobia have made these topics pertinent for educational policy makers, educators, and the general public (MacDougall & Clarke, 2004; Rayside, 2008). There is a significant range of opinion, however, about how queer/LGBTQetc. issues should be addressed in public schools, and what the notion of queer/LGBTQetc. issues in education entails (Hill, 2004; Kumashiro, 2008; Lugg, 2006; Rofes, 2005).

This thesis examines “positive change” with regard to queer/LGBTQetc. education-activism being done in Vancouver, British Columbia to build what has been described as “queer-friendly schools” (quoted in Perelle, 2004, March 24). This “positive change” was sought through the development and initial phase of implementing the Vancouver School Board’s 2004 “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex, Two-Spirit, and Questioning” policy, which this project describes, as well as work connected to those efforts.

By “education-activism,” I am referring to work that is personal, political, and pedagogical – with the view to producing “change” within the context of the education system, and perhaps, as a consequence, in society at large. It is work that Grace and
Wells (2007) identify as requiring a sustained set of commitments, significant time, localized effort, and a variety of strategies. I am not implying that all education is activism, that all activists working in the education field are “educators” by profession or training, or that all “change” is “positive change.” I am also not implying that the participants in this study view the “positive change” goals of queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activism to be exactly the same.

However, by linking “positive change” to the building of “queer-friendly schools,” the education-activism described in this project includes efforts that contest the limits of who is included in and excluded from what Gaskell (2001) calls the “public” in British Columbia public schools. It also includes efforts to transform the public domain of public education as a site where all members of the school community, including those who identify as or are perceived to be queer/LGBTITQetc., can participate equitably, meaningfully, and safely. Additionally, the “positive change” sought here involves a shift away from binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, and away from the essentializing practices associated with these. By “essentializing practices,” I mean exclusionary practices which assume that identities to be self-evident and fixed (Butler, 1990; Salih, 2002). I view these practices to be closely associated with (though not necessarily the same as) modern liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights and equal opportunity (see Rawls, 2005) that predominantly rely upon similar self-evident and fixed conceptualizations of identity.

Education-activism seeking “positive change” is work in which I have been directly involved for the past number of years — as a member of the public, as an employee of the Vancouver School Board (both as a classroom teacher and a consultant),
as a representative of my union’s local, and as president of that local. This thesis explores the activism enacted by educators and others in Vancouver working in and around what are varyingly referred to, but not limited to, as “queer” and/or “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “transgender,” “transsexual,” “intersex,” “two-spirit,” and “questioning” (i.e.: queer/LGBTITQetc.) issues within the public school system. I situate this discussion within the broader political and discursive contexts of the education system and queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist efforts in British Columbia. I explore some of the formal or informal philosophical underpinnings to this activism in hopes of becoming “unsettled,” as Schick (2004, p. 243) puts it, with regard to what we know of ourselves and this activism.

This qualitative research project employs elements of autoethnography, a writing practice involving personalized accounts where one draws upon one’s own experiences to extend an understanding of a context or discipline, connecting the personal to the cultural (see Berry, 2006; Coffey, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000). In addition, this thesis also employs elements of participatory research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) via interviews, discussions, and draft reviews providing a counterpoint to the account(s) I put forth. Both individuals participating are similarly engaged in queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist work within the local school system. Jane Bouey is a former Vancouver School Board trustee (and parent), and Jody Polukoshko is a teacher colleague with whom I have worked in a variety of capacities – including queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist work in this context. Both have opted to allow me to use their real names.

Work on this thesis proceeded with the following guiding questions in mind:
• How might one define and view “positive change” with regard to queer/LGBTQ+ issues in the context of the local school system in Vancouver?

• Through what processes has “positive change” occurred or been attempted?

• How does one begin, doing education-activist work at a school district level, to move away from an essentialist politics of minority interest towards a politics of difference and antinormativity?

I am not assuming these questions to be fully answerable, yet I am pursuing them nonetheless in order to inform future education-activist practice both in this context and elsewhere. My engagement with the literature, documentation of the practical work, and exploration of the guiding questions above with the project’s participants comprises the bulk of this project.

**Why this project, and why these questions?**

Nowhere else in Canada has a group of educators and individuals from the broader community been able to work *in conjunction* with the authorities of a school district to such a degree to specifically address heteronormativity, transphobia, and homophobia within school settings and related workspaces – not only for students, but also for the workers and other adults in the system. The efforts to strategically and pro-actively build “queer-friendly schools” (quoted in Perelle, 2004, March 24) in Vancouver initially came in response to a set of recommendations made in 2002 to the board of trustees of the day by youth who were either in a secondary school or alternate program, or had recently graduated or otherwise left the system. These recommendations not only sought action on behalf of the board addressing blatant incidences of transphobia and homophobia, but also confronting heterosexism that is pervasive in the education system as a whole. As Khayatt (2006) points out, schools are institutions that both reinforce and,
at the same time, reflect mainstream normative genders and sexualities. What came to be in Vancouver was, in part, a deliberate challenge to the traditional, heterosexist reinforcing and reflecting that Khayatt describes as the norm in educational settings. As I have been party to this work, along with the participants and others, this research presents an opportunity to document and problematize this work as an insider, with insiders.

Scholars, educators, and activists who are committed to social justice need to examine all forms of stigmatizing policies and politics that shape life in public schools (Lugg, 2006). This need is particularly acute in the areas of sexuality and gender (Grace, Hill, Johnson, & Lewis, 2004; Sears, 2005a). While there is a growing body of work related to the general topic of queer/LGBTQ etc. education-activism, none have looked at the local context in Vancouver in detail – and where studies have occurred, they have focused on youth welfare (see McCreary Centre Society, 1999, 2007), or on the results of court cases (see Carter, 2004; MacDougall & Clarke, 2004) without the involvement of the appellants. In response, this project focuses not on individual classroom practice, court cases alone, or local manifestations of at-risk youth, but instead on the work and perceptions of some of the individuals engaged in the political terrain of the broader public school system to enact queer/LGBTQ etc. education-activism within the context of Vancouver and the province of British Columbia as a whole.

Discussion of educational change in relation to queer/LGBTQ etc. issues also tends to rely upon essentializing understandings of queer/LGBTQ etc. subjects. Rasmussen, Rofes, and Talburt (2004) note that this tendency dominates gay and lesbian politics, and has influenced educational practice and research to focus on discourses of identity, tolerance, safety, and equity. With the ability and willingness of a public
education system to respond to queer/LGBTITQetc. issues limited as it is in the current political context, however, what capacity is there to manoeuvre and adapt education-activism practices to be mindful of this criticism? Through the guiding questions listed earlier, I seek to explore the unresolved tension between antiessentialist concerns and the practicalities of queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist work within the specificities of the Vancouver context.

As discussed in the literature review, educational “change” is also usually associated with “educational leaders” – which, due to the hierarchical tradition of the public school system coupled with patriarchal attitudes, is linked for the most part to school-based administrators. This is reflected in both the literature on educational “change” and educational leadership. Kumashiro (2002) is a notable exception, in that his enactors of “change” are secondary school students and others not normatively thought of as “leaders.” Kumashiro (2002) does not include teachers as participants in his study, however. In contrast, my project includes two individuals who have held a variety of unusual positions as “teachers,” as well as a former school board trustee – an elected role that infrequently appears as a participant in or subject of education literature, despite the central decision-making power granted that role in all Canadian provinces.

**Terminology and lenses**

**AN EXPLANATION, SOME CONUNDRUMS**

Because this project speaks to issues that include, but are not limited to, a diverse range of identities and persons who deploy diverse identities in diverse contexts, I have opted to use an intentionally cumbersome and aesthetically unpleasing label (i.e.: *queer/LGBTITQetc.*) in most circumstances when addressing gender/sexual-identities,
outside of direct quotes from other sources. This is not without problems – not the least of which is its reliance, however skeptical, on individual letters standing in for some, but not all, Western constructions of gender/sexual-identities. The reader is invited to read/re-author as inclined.

My original intention was to print quotation marks around markers of sexual orientation, gender identity, and biological sex. While I acknowledge the implications of daily living for those who identify or are identified in certain ways that are stigmatized, my earlier intention to use quotation marks gratuitously was meant to call attention to the artificiality and textuality of these same, gratuitously-deployed identity-markers so that neither myself nor my audience interacts casually with these terms or assumes their pre-discursivity. However, I have decided upon a different course of action because of the three following considerations. First, it is the combination of the verb to be with gender/sexual-identity markers (as opposed to to do) that solidifies the terms, and assists in occluding the ways in that they are performatively established. Second, as a practical consideration, I recognize that there is a whole host of other identity markers (many of which are gendered and sexualized) that could “benefit” from a similar use of quotation marks – effectively mooting the use of quotation marks in that manner. Finally, by using quotation marks around sexual/gender-identity markers (or even a conjugated to be) risks being dismissive of people’s choices and agency, however limited, in naming themselves. I would not want that to be perceived as my intention.

My use of identification terms (particularly those dealing with sexual/gender identities and gender) is informed by Butler (1990, 2004a, 2004b) who theorizes the performative production of gender, and affirms the instability and indeterminacy of all
gendered and sexed positions — and how they are produced by regulatory practices, for us and often by us, that generate what seem to be a coherent innateness. I argue that Butler’s project, in part, is to combat forms of essentialism that claim that gender is a truth that is “there,” interior to the body, as a core or as an internal essence that we cannot deny and is treated as a given. Butler takes up Foucault (1980) by contending that identity is an effect produced by relations of power, complicit in naturalizing the very structures operating to create and maintain it. Our representation of identities as foundational disguises the formation of those identities by the very assertion of that foundation. Recognizing inclusively what is intelligibly and acceptably human, and allowing for an expansive conceptualization of the “real” is a central principle for my own activist work and that of the project’s participants.

Butler (1990, 2004a, 2004b) lends to my argument here that a key function of education-activist work seeking “positive change” must be to disrupt any static notion of subjectivity that is exclusionary, so that subjectivity can be reasserted and represented in ways that are not. However, this raises questions; that is, if the subject is not a given (but rather a linguistic effect continually in formation) are there opportunities for subjectivity to be reasserted or represented in ways that are at odds with those that are purported to be foundational? The degree of choice or flexibility one has in “doing” one’s identities is debatable. What exclusions do we create in attempting to produce “positive change” — despite the best intentions to be as “inclusive” and broadly authorizing as possible? The deployment of gender/sexual-identity terminology is problematic for precisely the reason that any use, even use associated with “positive change” risks reifying, intentionally or not, what it means to be queer/LGBTTTQetc. — shaping, minimizing, and excluding
possible future uses of queer/LGBT/TQQetc. as a consequence. It is precisely this tension between the compromises of identity-markers and the urgency of certain situations that provides the nagging doubt in the back of my mind regardless of which effort I make to build “queer-friendly schools.”

In “Changing the Subject,” Butler (2004a) cautions that the assertion of identity may sometimes be appropriate to advance political aims — but that becoming visible, becoming sayable, must never become the sum and total of politics’ end goal. One must continue to query the conditions of sayability, speakability, visibility, and whether one wants a place within them — and if wanting a place means wanting to be assimilated, or if wanting a place could mean wanting to question how political structures work to delimit what visibility will be and what sayability will be. I acknowledge that my use of “queer/LGBT/TQQetc.” calls attention to, but does not completely resolve these difficulties, that relate to the third guiding question of this project.

QUEER / RESPECTING TERMINOLOGY AS USED IN SOURCES

I have only ever laid claim to “gay” half-heartedly — beginning with Is-this-me?/this-is-not-me as a teenager. It became a loose banner under which to organize politically during the mid-1990s, and to socialize. But even moving in with someone for the first time was announced with a determined ambiguity — not around the fact that I was in a romantic and sexual relationship with another man, but around what the co-habitation, and romantic and sexual relationship meant/(dictated/excluded/privileged).

My personal preference for gender/sexual-identity self-positionality, if I must use one at all, is the more spacious “queer.” Kumashiro’s (2002) characterization of queer notes that, like fag and dyke, queer has not only derogated and regulated people who feel
attraction for members of their “same” gender, but also people who exhibit (physical and behavioural) traits that society deems appropriate only for those of the “opposite” sex. Kumashiro notes too that queer is used positively (in a mostly essentialist sense) as a catchall for a variety of gender/sexual-identities, or in an act of reclamation of a heretofore epithetical term. For others, however, not only is queer a (re)reappropriation of a term that has been used historically in an abusive manner, but since the late 1980s queer has been also deployed by some in resistance to straightforward definition and rejection of normative gender/sexual-identities. Important to note, too, is that it is not only straight but also gay, as an increasingly normative subject-position, that sits in tension with the queer. While the limited and essentialist sense mentioned above assumes the existence of “the subject,” queer as used by Butler (2004b) and Sedgwick (1990, 1994, 2003), affirms the indeterminacy and instability of gender/sexual-identities. Queer is, as Sedgwick (1994) argues, “a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant” (p. xii) – that calls into question the very process of normative identity formation. It is in this sense that I apply queer as a self-identifier on most occasions (though I cannot account for how it is applied to me by others).

Gender/sexual-identities, from this perspective (as matters of doing rather than being) complicate what it means, in the case of this project for example, to “include” people who “are” queer or to support or advocate for people who “are” any of these things, or to be able to define coherently what is meant by “queer issues” or “queer/LGBTTTITQetc. issues.”

Because of the variety of sources I am using, terms of sexual/gender-identities will be used differently in my text depending upon the context and the source. At times,
this project’s participants use “queer” as a short umbrella term inclusive of all (or some) of those who are “part” of the queer/LGBTQetc. community, and at other times in a more indeterminate sense. Several of my printed sources also use the term “queer” as an umbrella term (e.g.: GALE-BC, 2004), while others (e.g.: Kumashiro, 2002, 2004; Hill, 2004; Schick, 2004) deploy the term to denote anyone who falls outside of the heterosexual norm or is queerly non-normative in one way or another. This project’s participants and I deploy “queer” differently – inconsistently, depending on the context. I will respect their choice of self-identification and while being attentive to when and where particular terms are used.

FOUCAULT: THE MATRIX OF INDIVIDUALIZATION

In addition to Butler, I will also refer to Foucault (1994) in examining the relation between subjectification and “change,” as well as the process and implications of “positive change” in this context. The overarching goal of his work, Foucault argues, is the chronicling of the different modes in (Western) culture by which human beings are made subjects. That is: the modes of inquiry given the status of sciences while turning subjects into objects of inquiry (e.g.: through grammar and linguistics, through analysis of wealth and economics, or by being alive in natural history or biology); the practices in which subjects are categorized and divided from others or within themselves (e.g.: the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the model citizens, etc.); and, the ways in which one turns oneself into a subject (e.g.: how human beings have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of “sexuality”).

While placed in these relations of production and signification, Foucault evinces, the human subject is equally placed in power relations that are very complex and also
contribute to the formation of the subject. In order to explore and come to an understanding of these power relations, which are never one-sided, Foucault (1994) holds that one should “investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (p. 329, my emphasis). The form of power that is immediate in everyday life, he posits, categorizes the individual, marks the individual by her/his own individuality, attaches her/him to her/his own identity, and then imposes a law of truth on her/him that she/he must recognize and others must recognize in her/him as well. Struggles against subjectification, against that which ties the individual to her/himself and submits her/him to others in this way, must occur alongside struggles against domination and against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from what they have produced.

Subjectification, Foucault asserts, is the result of the totalizing and pastoral power of the modern state. The modern state is not an entity developed above individuals, ignorant of what they are or their existence; on the contrary, Foucault continues, the modern state is a sophisticated structure in which individuals are integrated under one condition where individuality is shaped and submitted to a set of very specific patterns: “a modern matrix of individualization” (p. 334). Foucault concludes that the political, ethical, social, and philosophical problem of the present day is not only “to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions” (p. 336). Rather, one must also refuse the type of imposed individualization linked to the state by promoting new forms of subjectivity.

This relates to concerns raised by this project’s participants in our work – which seeks to broaden understandings of the human and the livable life, and yet does so in a network of power relations and logic that is intimately linked to a matrix of
individualization and the state's institutions (i.e.: a state-"controlled" public school system). Specifically, Foucault's points prompt me to question the limitations and potential negative consequences of education-activism pursued with the sanction of and within the bureaucracy of a large school district. This project will explore the tensions, paradoxes, and limitations involved.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF THEORETICAL LENSES

In the pursuit of social and political transformation (i.e.: "change"), I recognize that people must individually and collectively work for this transformation to be enacted. "Something besides theory must take place," Butler (2004a) states, "such as interventions at social and political levels that involve actions, sustained labour, and institutionalized practice, which are not quite the same as the exercise of theory" (pp. 204-205). In all of these practices, theory is presupposed. In the very act of social transformation, activists are "lay philosophers, presupposing a vision of the world, of what is right, of what is just, of what is abhorrent, of what human action is and can be, of what constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions of life" (Butler, 2004a, p. 205). Likewise, for Foucault and Deleuze (1977), it is important that theory exist for a purpose – specifically, in the realm of this project, for the purpose of intensifying struggle. Theory is "an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power" (p. 208), they assert, and it must be useful and it must function. From this point of view, theory should deliberately be constructed not as a system but as an instrument, a logic of the specificity of power relations and the struggles involved; furthermore, any struggle for power can only be carried out incrementally on the basis of reflection and on the historic specifications of a given situation.
Relying primarily upon Kumashiro (2002), who will be discussed in the literature review and methodology chapter, I deploy theory in this project both as a series of lenses through which to analyze the context and the narratives offered by my participants and myself, and as a tool-kit – with the understanding that activist knowledge production, in practice, is necessarily current, mobile, contingent and creative in ways unanticipated by theory (Shaw, 2003; Dempsey & Rowe, 2004). This project’s participants and I agree that activist interventions at social and political levels involve actions, sustained labour, and institutionalized practices. These are not quite the same as the exercise of theory and may, in the immediacy of the moment, conflict with theory when theory might not seem functional within a given context.

Looking ahead

In sum, this project involves queer/LGBTQTQetc. education-activist work within the context of the Vancouver public school system, with the work of Butler (1990, 2004a, 2004b), Foucault (1994), and Kumashiro (2002, 2004) as the primary lenses used to view this work. Chapter two examines related education literature. Chapter three outlines the methodology used in this project. Chapter four begins to incorporate and analyze the autoethnographic elements and participant interviews as part of the discussion of the local context, including recent legal decisions, education system governance, policy creation, and the contradictory positions held by individuals operating as activists within this framework. Chapter five focuses on how the participants and I worked towards “positive change” within this particular context, encountered and produced resistance, and achieved some qualified successes.
In chapter six I conclude by reflecting upon the limitations of our work addressing queer/LGBTQ+ etc. education issues in the Vancouver context, and by proposing ways in which education-activists working at the school district level might disrupt (or might have disrupted) static notions of subjectivity that are exclusionary.
Chapter 2: Literature review

In this literature review I discuss material published within the past two decades related to queer/LGBTQITetc. issues in education, educational leadership, and “change.” I begin with what I am terming the predominant approaches to queer/LGBTQITetc. issues in education, with a focus on education-activist work at the school level. The second section includes a discussion of what I am terming “alternative” takes on queer/LGBTQITetc. issues in education settings, with a focus on Kumashiro (2002, 2004). I am aware that by positioning the literature as “predominant” or as “alternative,” I am setting up a binary. The irony in my othering is understood, and I view the imperfect divisions I have created here as provisional and contingent — and not intended to disparage. The third section reviews examples of the limited amount of existing literature addressing the local context, some of which will be referred to more thoroughly in the third chapter. The final section addresses notions of leadership and social change in education settings, their relation to queer/LGBTQITetc. issues, and the silences involved.

Predominant takes on queer/LGBTQITetc. education-activism

An overview

Three recent Canadian-focused texts about homophobia in school settings reflect the predominant attitudes and approaches to seeking “positive change” around queer/LGBTQITetc. issues. To begin, Marchildon (2006) holds that Canadian schools are factories where too often homophobia and transphobia are manufactured, and that by refusing to address these problems, adults risk grave consequences. Adults, he asserts, should not fear describing social “reality” in all of its diversity, in a clear fashion,
respectfully and without judgment. This work “repose sur le leadership” (p. 12) in the education system (which he constructs as school counsellors, school administration, and employees of provincial ministries of education), and also through quantifiable action by teachers in schools. For the most part, he argues, teachers and school leadership (which, by the use of “and” between the two words, he deems mutually exclusive) have chosen to ignore their responsibilities in this regard.

Walton (2004) draws parallel conclusions, stating that while attention paid to school safety and culture has intensified in Canada, the issue of homophobia tends to be absent from public discussion, anti-bullying programs, and safe schools policies. Achievements in this area have occurred only after a significant period of time, Walton argues, and under very particular circumstances — often because court decisions have compelled school districts to act. Provincial expectations for public schools with regard to these issues remain undefined; however, it is from the level of the provincial government that, Walton implies, change should be instigated. Extending this argument, Walton (2006a) expresses concerns that teachers, administrators, and trustees, “are ill equipped” to develop schooling environments that “challenge homophobic violence” and “educate on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth and family issues” to foster safety (p. 118). What constitutes his notion of “safe” in schools is left undefined and unproblematized. Walton does not provide examples of what he terms “effective strategies for facilitating social justice in school” (p. 119), directing readers instead to outside sources. He does, however, state that “subject areas such as art, history, and English are disciplines where gays and lesbians have made significant contributions” (p. 119).
123) and therefore these individuals and their sexualities should be highlighted by teachers.

In sum, Marchildon (2006) and Walton (2004; 2006a) argue for a three pronged-approach of safety, inclusion, and representation at the classroom level, school level, school district level, and provincial level. As I stated in the opening of this section, these approaches have currency in the local context in which this project is based, and are, for some, the nucleus of the means to achieve “positive change” with regard to queer/LGBTITQetc. education issues.

The approach and recommendations above are similar to those made by many others over the past twenty years (see Bickmore, 1999; Lipkin, 1996; Mallon, 1996; McKay, 1998; Prince, 1996; Ridky, 1996; Sears, 1994; Thurlow, 2001; Walling, 2005; Uribe & Harbeck, 1991). Asher (2005), for example, states that schools must “integrate curricular materials, ranging from posters, to biographies of famous people, to first-person narratives of queer students / parents / families, to statistical data and education policies regarding harassment against queer students” (p. 228). The purpose of such curricula, Asher argues, is specifically to “engender dialogue” so that youth can learn about the particular struggles encountered by queer/LGBTITQetc. students, learn how to combat homophobia, and thereby become “allies.” McCaughtry, Dillon, Jones, and Smigell (2005) reiterate a similar list of suggestions, acknowledging, however, that there is difficulty in actualizing this work. Teachers, they argue, are often “fearful of the repercussions of dealing with issues of sexuality explicitly may be more comfortable with implicit messages of acceptance” (p. 438). Here they identify a commonly problem cited by queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activists attempting to achieve “positive change.” It
is unclear in the texts discussed above, however, how exactly a paradigm of representation and inclusion, *when it is used*, improves the situation. Again, I highlight these suggestions here because of their predominance in the literature, and their prevalence as approaches that I have seen in the local context as means to achieve "positive change."

**Considerations**

In response to this range of recommendations, Gilbert (2004) points out that there are few studies that evaluate the effects of such interventions. Sears (2005b) concurs, noting that there is "meager evidence" of integration of queer-related content, knowledgeable and comfortable educators, or inclusive and queer pedagogy even occurring in schools – and in the places where they *do* occur, "the positive impact" (p. xxiv) of such integration on students’ knowledge and attitudes has been minimal. Sears states that "the connection between acquisition of knowledge and incumbent changes in attitudes and behaviours is even more tenuous" (p. xxiv). The qualitative and quantitative research that does exist related to the outcomes of progress based around efforts to combat homophobia and heterosexism, Sears states, is inconclusive or in its infancy. Regardless, many of the same interventions or recommendations persist (Savin-Williams, 2005).

While I have no intention of dismissing any of the above interventions or recommendations entirely, in my view the predominant public and professional discussion about queer/LGBTITQetc. issues in education is problematic because it frames individuals in terms of oppression and victimization, and because it risks
reinforcing oppressive, essentializing power structures rather than dismantling them (see Harwood, 2004; Johnson & Henderson, 2005).

This discursive framing of queer/LGBTQetc. education-activism parallels a broader framing that has overtaken dominant gay and lesbian political activism in the West, one that is obsessed with acceptability and is driven to mainstream and normalize as a strategy for gaining entry into civil society (Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt, 2004; Yoshino, 2006). The emphasis on acceptability constrains analysis of cultural identities and conflicts, and serves effectively as a barrier to transformative practices in and out of schools. This logic of visibility speaks a language intelligible to policy, and follows a narrative structure intelligible to liberal politics – namely, a representational visibility through teachers' bodies and curricular images that will move students from ignorance to knowledge and tolerance, and that will enhance self-esteem for queer youth. What this approach does is to allow youth (the sole benefactors and focus of “positive change” in the predominant literature) “to identify with and insert themselves into individual narratives” (Talburt, 2004b, p. 33, emphasis mine). Or be inserted, perhaps? Visibility often leads to identity rather than to any deconstructive consciousness (Edelman, 2004; Roof, 1996), and the logic of visibility exists within the logic of the heterosexual matrix through forms of support and tolerance that are merely symbolic and reproductive, and therefore on its own does not challenge the power relations that produce identities. I argue that the silence on the discursive construction of these identities (“truths”) and of queer/LGBTQetc. calls into question the very recommendations predicated upon those constructs and makes any attempt at “positive change” problematic.
To be clear, in no way do I wish to minimize the negative experiences endured by some students, staff, and parents in the Canadian school system. What is imposed upon and/or lived by some marginalized people in some contexts is not to be lightly dismissed; nor is the marginalization faced in contexts where groups or individuals are not served by the privileges they do have. My concerns, however, are with the predominant takes on queer/LGBTTITQetc. education issues — which, I argue, either explicitly espouse essentialist views of human sexuality explicitly or may not explicitly be essentialist but do not call attention to the contingency of the identity-markers being used (regardless of whether or not the particular author of the work does so in other texts).

In either case, I argue, such takes risk “reify[ing] the present hegemonic ideologies” (Szalacha, 2005, p. 83). This contributes to a reproductive loop where, until a crisis that significantly shifts the discursive terrain, the at-risk mono-identified queer youth-victim requiring adult intervention remains the singular widely-accepted trope and beneficiary of “positive change” — solidifying what it means to “be” that queer youth, and reifying what “we” (adults with agency) are to “do” (custodially) for “them” (who are entirely without agency or privilege) and only for “them.” I am concerned too that approaches to addressing queer/LGBTTITQetc. education issues that do not draw attention to the discursivity and “contingent foundations” (Butler, 1992) of all sexual/gender identities (while perhaps appropriate for some audiences or as a first stage in a fuller approach, as I myself have espoused previously) ultimately gird the heterosexual matrix rather than abolishing it.
A NOTE ON SILENCES

It should also be noted before proceeding that, for the most part, attention paid to issues around gender identity, trans- and intersex-issues does not factor into much of the material mentioned above – nor in much of what is to come later in the literature review. Writers may speak of “LGBT youth,” or mention “transgender” or “transsexual” in the same breath as “lesbian,” “gay,” and “bisexual” on occasion – but the distribution of attention is not equitable, and the recommendations made are not necessarily inclusive of what might (or might not) be appropriate or sought by trans-identifying or intersex youth. In the area of queer/LGBTITQetc. scholarship, work ostensibly taking trans-identified people as one of the objects of study under queer/LGBTITQetc. banners, has routinely obscured trans identities in the service of lesbian and gay identities and agendas (Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998). The research on trans-identified and intersex youth in schools, in Canada or elsewhere, is limited (in the case of trans-identified youth) to non-existent (in the case of intersex youth).

This literature is also mostly silent on: the two-spirit/berdache-identifying (see Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997) youth in the North American education systems; the youth in North American schools identifying in some contexts as tongzhi, hijra or other non-Western conceptions of sexual/gender identity; the discursive colonization involved with the use of Western conceptions of sexual/gender identity (see Chou, 2000; Dikotter, 1995; Eng, 2000; Khayatt, 2005, 2006; Kumashiro, 2003; Sanders, 2006); and, to a lesser degree (see Savin-Williams, 2005), youth who do not identify along sexual/gender-identity lines regardless of their erotic desires and their experience(s)/choice(s) in expressing those desires and the positionality of their erotic partner(s). These silences
apply as well to other members of North American school communities (e.g.: parents, teachers, staff, administrators, volunteers) who do not adhere to Western, normative conceptualizations of sexual/gender-identity.

"Alternative" takes

INTRODUCING THE "ALTERNATIVE" TAKES

In considering the work of activists and theorists who are attempting to improve school communities for marginalized queer/LGBTTITQetc. and other members of school community, one can locate “alternative” arguments that may be useful for building upon or reconfiguring “best practice.” I acknowledge that studying and looking for “best practice” is problematic, as Glatter and Kidd (2003) and Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) have argued, for the idea of “best practice” in educational settings assumes a prescription formula applicable in most situations. Schools and school communities are ever changing, complex and unpredictable; therefore, Glatter and Kidd (2003) and Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) argue, it is difficult to suggest a best practice that would be applicable on a large scale or in multiple contexts. Correspondingly, Kumashiro (2004) emphasizes the “need to problematize any effort to predetermine what it means to be a ‘good’ teacher” (p. 14) and activist, and that even more “progressive” definitions of good teaching and activism are “partial and contradictory, are momentary and situated, and thus, are always in need of being rethought” (p. 14-15). No practice is always and fully unproblematic. The “alternative” texts and pedagogical approaches I am presenting here, are not labeled as such to imply a binary opposite superiority to the texts previously mentioned; rather, they explore non-dominant, and (to a varying degree) non-essentialist pedagogical and activist approaches that have the potential to be useful for education-
activists addressing these issues — even if that usefulness, for the time being, may only to provoke a reconsideration of this activist work.

AN OVERVIEW

There have been arguments made for a pedagogy that is critical of binaries that construct marginality, privilege, and the social structures that legitimize and maintain them. This pedagogy is one that does not reference an individualized, other-centred discourse, but rather takes into account the assumptions that produce the identities of all students. Britzman (1995), Carlson (1998), and Schick (2004), for example, advocate in principle for an approach that challenges the foci of safety and securing civil rights, and challenges heterosexuality as the norm because it requires an other (i.e.: homosexuality) as abnormal; the foremost concern of queer/LGBTQ+ etc. activist-educators, they maintain, should be the radical deconstruction of normalcy, and these concerns should not be limited to teaching for, about, to, or as queer subjects. Szalacha (2004) concedes, however, that this paradigm “does not easily lend itself to the development of practical skills necessary for classroom teachers and teacher educators” (p. 69). The practical part of this work is also left open to speculation — though implicit in these suggestions for seeking “positive change” is that the work is done within the individual classrooms, by individual educators. Youndell (2006) reaches similar conclusions, without providing examples of practice, and is confident that “change” can occur across school spaces by dislodging the familiar links that serve to marginalize.

Looking towards classroom-based practice of queer pedagogy, Luhmann (1998), Sumara and Davis (1998), Franck (2005b), and Winans (2006) provide select examples from their classroom experience. The first of these, for example, argues for a pedagogy
that exceeds the incorporation of queer/LGBTQT+ etc. content into curricula and the worry over finding teaching strategies that make this content more palatable to students. In place of incorporation and palatability, such an approach inquires into how textual positions are taken up by the reading or learning subject. Similarly, Sumara and Davis (1998) argue for, and provide examples of, a pedagogy that attempts to interpret the complex relations among knowledges, desires, and identities by seeking to render visible the always known but usually invisible desires and pleasures that circulate, calling into question heterosexuality as a stable category (instead of focusing on queer/LGBTQT+ etc. identities). This pedagogical approach also understands and interprets differences among persons rather than among categories of persons. Again, though, an extended foray into practical application of this work is not provided by these academics, and remains, as pedagogy, classroom- and student-focused — as opposed to work across the education system as a broad field.

KUMASHIRO, PARTIALITY, AND CRISIS

Kumashiro (2002, 2004) draws upon questions, concerns, and suggestions similar to those made in the two preceding paragraphs — providing a (partial) solution to questions about broader application by providing examples of addressing normalization and “common sense” as part of education-activist work. Kumashiro (2002) offers a few examples of how those reusages and redeployments might look for activists, while in the follow-up volume, Kumashiro (2004), elaborates on these discussions by giving specific examples in various secondary school subject areas. He posits that the success of any approach is limited by the fact that we resist looking beyond our everyday assumptions and practices, and argues for an approach that disrupts harmful citational practices as a
means to address oppression. Social change, he argues, is dependent upon changes in the meanings and effects of different identities and identification. By moving the emphasis from exposure to and empathy for the Other into thought work that challenges the way that the Other is produced as a concept, we have the potential to disrupt how the Other is reproduced within a given context and the broader society.

Working against oppression, Kumashiro (2002) warns, cannot be about advocating strategies that are always able to produce the desired effect; rather, strategies to bring about change must be situated, embrace unknowability, and involve multiple ways of reading. He advocates, therefore, the practice of educating that changes students and society, which has two aspects that I will describe here. A curriculum of partiality, Kumashiro (2002) argues, involves recognizing the partiality of all texts, learning to read texts critically by reading for silences and the effects of those silences on the “meaning” of a given text, and examining our desire to read in particular ways and resistance to read in other ways. This is done with the understanding that some reading practices are more desirable because they are more complicit with oppression. A pedagogy of crisis, he continues, acknowledges that confronting partiality and our own complicity in oppression can be emotionally discomforting and disorienting. The achievement of “change,” Kumashiro argues, requires learning through crisis in order to recognize and challenge the oppression that plays out daily in the learners’ lives. This process involves questioning what is valued or desired as “knowledge” or “standards” within schools, questioning what constitutes “good” teaching and learning, and questioning if teaching, learning, or activism is ever “complete.” It is this crisis that calls on learners to make some change. One of this project’s participants and I, in our own ways, have attempted to
employ a curriculum of partiality and a pedagogy of crisis in various classroom situations, and value its potential in work with individual students and in individual classrooms.

Though Meyer (2007) argues that Kumashiro’s approach is “what a queer and truly liberatory pedagogy is about” (p. 28), and while I find it most helpful and encouraging, there are ways in which Kumashiro’s (2000, 2002, 2004) approach might be problematized – which is something he invites, acknowledging that all forms of antioppressive work (including the predominant takes on education-activism as well as the one he proposes) have pros and cons. For instance, Kumashiro’s depiction of education-activism is mostly one where individual teachers and groups of learners work in isolation. Thus, determining what constitutes “positive change” rests with self-selected individuals, and it is unclear how effective these efforts might be for teachers without the theoretical background, or for those coming from a more socially conservative point of view. Kumashiro (2002) seems to dismiss the latter category entirely, but I view such teachers as very much a part of public school culture – and that they could deploy a pedagogy of crisis quite oppressively. More specific to my project here, though, is a question: while the work of Kumashiro (2002, 2004) is classroom-based, is it transferable to aspects of the school system outside of the classroom? There is deep-rooted oppression within the entire public education system, the complexities and scale of which are usually beyond the day-to-day field of reference and activism-horizon of most educators – even those committed to queer/LGBT/TITQetc. or broader antioppression work.

This is not to suggest that these educators are powerless within the education system beyond their classrooms, or that they need to work on larger education-
institutional fronts in order for their activism to “count.” Nor is this meant to suggest that institutions are monolithic and all-powerful. But the tools and paradigms used by education-activists fighting oppression in the larger political arena may look different from the ones they would use in their classrooms or schools. The variables would be greater, and the outcomes, if any, may be less predictable and certainly more unknowable.

Because of the “situated” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 68) nature of education that changes students and society, is it at all transferable to activist work being done at a school district or provincial level? I will return to Kumashiro in discussion of the guiding questions, and as I read for silences and partiality within the data and this project itself.

**Literature describing the Canadian and local contexts**

Broad overviews of the Canadian context are few, and the production of such overviews has presented difficulties because of the variation between each province (and territory) because of the regional nature of the school systems. Presently, there is no thorough, up-to-date literature on queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activism in Canada. What exists is brief. Grace (2005), for example, provides a short depiction of the Canadian context, as do Rayside (2008), Warner (2002) and Sears (2005b) – though the latter’s characterization inflates successes in places and is factually incorrect in others⁶.

There is also little published academic material about queer/LGBTITQetc. issues in education that specifically describe or address the local context in Vancouver. Smith (2004), Carter (2004), and MacDougall and Clarke (2004) are typical examples of this limited amount of material written about the local context in that they focus on the Surrey School Board’s decision to ban books featuring same-sex families and the ensuing

Relying upon secondary sources, Walton (2006b) likewise describes British Columbia’s “dubious history” (p. 97) in addressing school-based homophobic harassment. As elsewhere, Walton argues that the tension around homophobia in schools and related court battles would perhaps be alleviated if school districts were forced by the province to adopt policies and implement programs to challenge homophobia and “foster LGBT friendly atmospheres” (p. 98). He cites the Vancouver School Board’s and Greater Victoria School Board’s trustees and administrators for being exceptions to those taking a generic and reactionary approach. I draw attention to this specific point because, contrary to Walton’s characterization of the situation, the impetus and main agents enacting “leadership on a politically potent issue” in both Greater Victoria and Vancouver were not “trustees and administrators.” As will be discussed with this project’s participants later, it was a core group of youth (supported in a coalition with other youth, teachers, parents, nongovernmental organizations, teacher unions and other labour groups within the school system, and members of the broader community) who took “leadership on a politically potent issue” and nudged the trustees and administrators of the day towards approval of both the Greater Victoria and Vancouver policies.
Walton’s characterization is indicative of another body of education literature that also typically overlooks grassroots initiatives, and marginalizes non-management members of school communities and the public by turning over the mantle of change-agent and educational leader to those in administrative roles. I discuss this in the next section, as it is central to this project’s concerns.

Educational change literature related to queer/LGBT/TITQ/etc. issues, and the problem of predominant educational leadership discourse

First thoughts

As in other jurisdictions, there are many layers to the British Columbia education system — not only involving schools and school boards, but also the Ministry of Education and related government branches, parent advocacy groups, administrator professional associations, trustee provincial associations, the provincial teachers’ union and its locals based in each school district, professional qualifications and regulatory bodies, community agencies, youth groups, ad hoc coalitions, and many other parties. All of these play a role in how educational “change” transpires. While educational leadership and educational change have been theorized by Fullan (2001) and others (Gardner, 1990; Leithwood, Jantizi, & Steinbach, 1999; Marsh, 2000), few studies detail the specifics of educational change and educational leadership with regard to queer/LGBT/TITQ/etc. issues (MacGillivray, 2004, 2005). Is it because the demands of an applied field such as educational leadership always outstrip the available knowledge base (Lindle & Mawhinney, 2003)? Could it be because educational administration has traditionally been fiercely homophobic regarding these issues (Lugg, 2005; Rottmann, 2006)? Is it because school administrators (who, as I discuss below, are usually automatically equated with
leader and change agent) who “identify as LGBT themselves continue to face great professional risk, and as such, few claim their identities openly” (Blount, 2005b, p. 15)? Or, are there other factors?

Sears (2005b) reports that there is a minimal amount of research specifically focusing on the history of educational policies discriminating against sexual/gender minority teachers, efforts to deny licensing or removing these teachers from the profession, and the self-imposed silencing of these teachers. Limited too is the amount of educational change literature on the impact of policies related to queer/LGBTTITQetc. youth and issues education, legal issues and school board policies, school districts’ efforts to implement these policies, and factors that queer/LGBTTITQetc. teachers feel are important in their self-disclosure and school activism. When this work is published, it is almost exclusively liberal discourse (Sears, 2005b), and takes a narrow view of “change” and leadership, as per the literature below — and in contrast to the work in which this project’s participants and I have taken part.

WHERE THE LEADER = ADMINISTRATOR: EXAMPLES AND CRITICISM

Educational leadership and educational change literature relies upon an equation where “educational leader” is predominantly made to equal school administrator or district management. Ahnee-Benham and Napier (2002) point out that “educational leadership theories share an ideology grounded in Western (i.e.: primarily Anglo-Saxon) traditions and socio-cultural norms that have excluded women and diverse peoples” (p. 133). Models of leadership, no matter how distributed, implicitly involve control of others either through direct use of power, or through relationships used to influence and subtly change thinking. Ahnee-Benham and Napier are critical too of educational
leadership literature, which they argue does not often conceive of leadership outside of the school-system hierarchy as it presently exists in North American public schools. The words “principal,” “vice-principal,” “administrator,” “superintendent,” “management,” or quasi-administrative roles such as “department head” are linked to the term “leadership” almost without exception – even when the discussion pertains to social change.

For example, Shields, Larocque, and Oberg (2002) address the need for educational leaders to be involved in social change, but frame this need in a dilemma: that while educational leaders (i.e.: principals) are required to “enforce policies and practices aimed at educating all students,” they are simultaneously “overwhelmed by appeals to reform the curriculum [and] attend to the special interests and needs of various minority groups” (p. 117). Walker and Quong (1998) reverse the dilemma by arguing that normative discourses “of what makes a good school, a successful leader, or an effective teacher are underpinned by conceptions of order and sameness” (p. 89, emphasis mine) and “contrast sharply with the reality of schools” (p. 89) which are increasingly diverse. Either way, the characterization, here, is that school leaders (administrators) are continuously pulled toward conformity and uniformity, even as they are called on to adopt new approaches to schooling that value difference. Note too that “successful leader” and “effective teacher” are mutually exclusive in this statement, as per Marchildon (2006) at the beginning of this chapter.

Similarly, in literature supportive of the pursuit of “authentic school leadership” practices – that is, “practices that extend beyond the usual procedural context of organizational management” (Begley, 2001, p. 354) – this mutual exclusivity continues. In Begley’s characterization, authentic leadership is a hopeful, open-ended, visionary
element of "effective principal practices" (p. 354, my emphasis). Likewise, while Hallinger and Heck (1999) are critical of researchers who look for direct links between traditional leadership "action" and school outcomes, and argue that school leaders (i.e.: administrators) do not make effective schools, they still promote a model where the administrator (the de facto leader) works with staff to foster development of a school culture in which staff find meaning and motivation. Even where participants being led under "transformational leadership" intrinsically-motivated conditions "outperform" their counterparts exposed to more "transactional leadership" extrinsically-motivated styles, leadership remains predicated on a superior-subordinate dichotomy geared towards sustaining strong (economic) growth (Crawford, 2002; Jung, 2000). No wonder, then, the rapid spread of high-stakes accountability policies (Opfer, 2006) that are working their way into Canadian public education culture after already having contributed to the present "educational nightmare haunted by right-wing reactionaries and business-enamored politicians" (Pinar, 2004, p. 22) in the United States.

The continued potency of the belief in the (straight, white, male) administrator as leader (Lugg, 2006) lends well to additional layers being applied to the increasingly corporate-model panopticon that is public education that will provide motivation for teachers and students to outperform their counterparts, be effective, help them find meaning and successfully reach measurable outcomes while new curriculum is being enforced – even, I argue, curriculum with mildly antioppressive aims such as the Social Justice 12 curriculum from the British Columbia Ministry of Education released in 2007, as well as the widespread use of "Social Responsibility Performance Standards," which
have become co-opted as data for government-driven “school growth plans” in this province.

Larson and Murtadha (2002) critique these traditional approaches to educational leadership research. They argue that there has been “an enduring allegiance to theories of leadership oriented toward maintaining stability through universal theories and hierarchical visions of schooling has maintained inequity in education” (p. 137). There is indication that the educational leadership field is making efforts to focus more and more on what leadership is for – as opposed to what it is, or how it is done, and by whom. Furman (2002), for example, acknowledges that traditional work in this field assumed a functionalist or value-neutral stand toward the “goodness” of the system as-is, ignored the importance of local context, and overemphasized the individual heroic leader as change agent. Furman calls upon her colleagues in the educational leadership field to shift the central focus of educational leadership to achieve more “positive ends” (n.p.). Furthermore, if leadership is constructed and distributed within school communities, she asks, why are she and her colleagues focusing only on the leadership skills of individuals in administrative roles? This project serves, in part, as a response to Furman’s question.

**Leadership and Its Relation to Educational Change**

Putting discussion of the who and whom of leadership aside for now – not ignoring these concerns, but provisionally accepting a paradox in order to move forward – I now turn to texts that discuss “best practice” in educational leadership, asking if it is possible to identify it and learn from it. Of these, Bolam (1997) is the most skeptical, arguing that in educational leadership where there is “a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives, which at best provide illumination and insight but which provide few
guidelines for action” (pp. 275-6), it is difficult to base leadership decisions on a “best practice.” Glatter and Kydd (2003) posit that adopting the rhetoric of “best practice” runs the risk of widening the gap between espoused theories and theories in use. In conditions of complexity and ambiguity, they argue, the style of leadership needed focuses on incremental approaches and longer-term sustainable improvement – not a fast-paced “destructive ‘rhetoric of excess’ that typically accompanies reform efforts” (p. 234). In sum, “best practice” is completely subjective and impossible to determine, as well as being a much overused descriptive that is meaningless.

Fullan (2001), who is widely cited and argues against what he views as typical reform efforts, agrees with those favouring an incremental approach to educational change that proceeds by developing capacity across staffs and securing internal commitment to solve complex problems. With school administrators in mind he argues that “moral purpose” (p. 2) to leadership is critical to long-term organization success, that in conditions of complexity such as education systems, change cannot be directed along a linear path, and that deep and sustained change depends on many, not just on an “extraordinary” (p. 2) few. He asserts that leaders must “be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups - especially with people different than themselves” (p. 5), and must foster knowledge-building and vision-sharing among those they lead. Leaders, he continues, must resist short term gains and off-the-shelf solutions at the expense of deeper reform where “the gains are steady but not necessarily dramatic” (p. 63), and must strive for a sense of coherence, with energy, enthusiasm, and hopefulness.
Fullan’s approach is similar to Hargreaves and Fink (2000) who posit that change/reform efforts in school systems are possible and will endure when they have depth (social and emotional understanding with a focus on deep learning – “not just superficial performance results” (p.33), length (efforts consciously aimed towards sustaining change over time, whereby the system is recultured, not just restructured), and breadth (where the change/reform model is extended by viewing the wider policy context as integral to school and district reform). It is likely, however, that while Fullan (2001) and Hargreaves and Fink (2000) believe that educational “change” is possible, it is with more normative, widely-sanctioned changes in mind than those proposed by Kumashiro (2002, 2004) and others in the previous section. I have provided space for Fullan in this literature not only because of his pervasiveness in the literature, but because of how widely his work is used in the local context for school- and district-based “change” and leadership initiatives. I am skeptical of his advice, however, in relation to “positive change” directed at queer/LGBTITQetc. issues for a number of reasons.

While it is conceivable that the “best practices” as presented by Fullan (2001) and Hargreaves and Fink (2000) could be applied successfully to more essentialist education-activist efforts, I have doubts about their compatibility with more antiessentialist discourses and more overt discourses of sexuality and desire within the educational field. After all, there is a history, as Lugg (2006) points out, of “state-sponsored stigma” whereby “both queer and non-queer public school administrators have functioned as sexuality and gender police” (p. 35). But more to the point: can the queer, as per Butler (2004b), ever “strive for [the] coherence” (Fullan, 2001, p. 11, my emphasis) deemed
necessary for “best practice”? If not, then the entire field of educational leadership seems to be paradoxical and antithetical to queer-education projects.

Also, it must be asked how far adults are prepared for or capable of going in support of “positive change,” even incremental, with regard to queer/LGBTTITQetc. education issues. Pinar (2004) argues that “[m]any teachers seem ill-prepared to exercise the limited academic freedom they enjoy, let alone press against its limits” (p. 230). For Grace, Hill, Johnson, and Lewis (2004), “many LGBT teachers [themselves] are not ready to be – and might not want to be – Queer” (p. 317), and there is much cultural work for social change that remains to be done, including grassroots work in schools and school districts. However, they maintain, approaches that press against the limits are seldom interrogated for the real life impacts they have on society or in the everyday realities of people. This suggests that one must acknowledge and confront the material conditions that make one’s citation as queer/LGBTTITQetc. subversive in the material world against the legal, political, social and economic discourses in which the queer is often placed under erasure – a point of particular importance in the domain of education. For example, acknowledging and confronting the material world for queer/LGBTTITQetc. teachers, they hold, includes support both personally and professionally in schools as workplaces. This project’s participants and I have been mindful of these concerns, and addressing these concerns has been part of our work that will be discussed in the data chapters.

LITERATURE ABOUT YOUTH AS EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

While this project focuses on adults involved in seeking “positive change” within the education system, space should be provided to discussion of youth as educational
leaders and change agents because part of my work and the work of this project’s participants has involved collaborating with youth – which also should not be seen as an essentialized, self-evident category. I am employing the term here because, as Rofes (2005), Miceli (2005) and Franck (2005a) argue, individuals deemed to be “youth” should also be viewed as potential and/or active educational leaders, and yet their efforts are predominantly diminished by the adults in the system.

Addressing previous research, Franck notes three major trends having an impact on queer/LGBTTTITQetc. youth leadership/activism: namely, that youth are coming out at a younger age, that now many high school students are themselves education-activists confronting discrimination as they avail themselves of the legal system, and that new and accessible communication technologies have had a major impact on this work. Miceli (2005) credits much of this trend to the “GSA movement” (p. 8) in the United States. The steady pace of slow incremental change related to the status of “LGBT teenagers”lx, he argues, has been “accelerated by lawsuits, which, with their victories, brought powerful and standardizing mechanisms for social change” (p. 26). In his characterization of the situation, political activism, alliances, and community building are now becoming the defining “developmental experiences in the lives of a significant portion of gay teens” (p. 13)x. Curran (2005) agrees, noting that social changes reflecting agency among queer youth have mostly occurred in youth settings. Curran goes on to define agency, in a manner different than how it is used latter in this thesis, as the ability of individuals “to have control over their lives, to make choices, and to actively pursue their interests and desires” (p. 34), a control not often “given” to queer/LGBTTTITQetc. youth within the fields of education, health, and welfare in North America.
This is debatable, as is his sum-and-total conceptualization of queer/LGBTQetc. youth being the ability to live “more expansively as queers,” be “more open and less self-regulating in terms of how they talk, walk, move, and dress,” and the self-recognition of queer/LGBTQetc. youth “that they have skills, knowledge, and experiences that are valuable to other young queers” (p. 34, my emphasis). I question whether agency is something that is “given,” and am concerned with Curran’s and Miceli’s marginalizing insinuation that the agency and leadership of queer/LGBTQetc. youth is limited to aspects of their queerness and of value only to other similarly-positioned youth and is somehow part of a modern developmental stage. I also question Miceli’s estimation of the organizational might of the “GSA movement” as he describes it.

Despite my concerns with Curran and Miceli here, if mainstream education leadership could be reconfigured as described by Ahnee-Benham and Napier (2002) and Furman (2002), I wonder if there would there be space not only for teachers and parents, but for queer/LGBTQetc. youth to be conceived of as generating and wielding their own agency for “positive change” on a number of fronts in the education field?

EDUCATIONAL CHANGE & TEACHERS’ UNIONS

Because of its relevance to the education-activist work being enacted in the local context described in this project (specifically, the direct involvement of myself and my participants in the pursuit of education-activist aims via a variety of vehicles, including union structures), I now discuss literature describing teacher unions’ role in relation to educational leadership and social change.
Pinar (2004) and Kumashiro (2008) are critical of American teacher unions. For instance, Pinar (2004) argues that teacher unions in the United States “have been and continue to be deep disappointments, and not only to teachers, for whom they have, in general, failed to win adequate working conditions, including adequate salaries and appropriate class sizes” (p. 176). By focusing on “traditional union issues” such as salaries, he argues, American teachers’ unions have ignored pressing professional concerns such as discretion over curriculum content and the means by which its study is assessed, have failed to mobilize America’s teachers, and failed “to persuade the American public that quality public education is worth paying for” (p. 176). Additionally, according to Peterson and Charney (1999), most American teacher unions endorse a “professional unionism” (p. 7) while few emphasize antioppressive work – focusing instead on improving the “quality” of the teaching profession, and only secondarily, or not at all, on the inequities in schools and in society.

In contrast, the struggle for what is conceptualized as an ethical-liberalism form of “social justice” is a common theme among Canadian teacher unions (Peterson & Charney, 1999; Poole, 2002). Poole argues that Canadian teacher unions are less likely to endorse aspects of professional unionism (such as peer review and high-stakes accountability based on standardized test scores), focusing instead on educational quality issues (such as professional development, class size limits, support for students with special needs, and the strengthening of these by including them in collective agreements). In Canada, teacher unions’ emphasis on education quality and advocacy of social justice are linked, for example, to resistance to some educational reforms, particularly standardized testing, on the basis of the inequities they exacerbate (see Emery &
Ohanian, 2004; Kohn, 2000). This is in keeping with work of the broader Canadian labour movement, which has played a significant role in altering the legal and constitutional framework for marginalized groups, and has demonstrated a commitment to fighting discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation (Hunt & Eaton, 2007; Rayside, 2007, 2008).

The social justice model for (some) unions in Canada is linked to a tradition that views unions as part of a broad movement for social change and progress, calling for: participatory union membership; education reform based on serving all children; collaboration with parents and community organizations; and, a concern for broader issues of equity throughout society (Peterson & Charney, 1999). In pursuing these aims, Poole (2002) notes that among Canadian teacher unions, the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation most openly endorses a political platform of social justice, promoting curriculum and sometimes using legal resources to combat racism, poverty, gender bias, and homophobia.

However, neither Peterson and Charney (1999) nor Poole (2002) discuss the merits of this work, nor the controversies and dilemmas within Canadian union organizations to continue with this work with any significance. Hunt and Eaton (2007) do note, though, that while by the second half of the 00s, “Canadian unions could claim to have offered political support for equity in law, prohibited discrimination in their own operations, established GLBT caucuses, pushed locals to bargaining for inclusive benefits programs in collective agreements, and attempted to confront prejudicial and hostile cultures in their own organizations” (p. 152), there remains too little research at the local level to know about the spread and depth of these initiatives. Additionally, as Rayside
(2007) notes, while Canadian labour has "taken a leadership role internationally in recognizing sexual diversity" and is presently including "strong equity commitments for transgender people," Canadian labour's record on other diversity issues "is not as good" (p. 215). My personal experience has demonstrated to me that segments of the public school teaching population in British Columbia and certain of their elected union representatives would prefer a de-emphasis of social justice initiatives by their union and a softening in resistance against conservative agendas that undermine teaching and public education. The situation is more complex than how Peterson and Charney (1999) and Poole (2002) depict it.

Looking ahead

While I appreciate Kumashiro's work for providing starting points, even when practical pedagogical tools are offered, it is not clear how educator-activists might work together towards common goals and how that might vary from context to context. How might an education that changes students and society approach described by Kumashiro (2002, 2004) be used to inform education-activist work being done at the school district level, or across the province in working with teachers' unions, ad hoc groups, and the government -- especially if solutions, if possible, are less about addressing specific "minority issues" and more about determining how to trouble our conceptions of queer/LGBTQ+ etc. education-activism practices? This discussion will continue in the subsequent chapters through the exploration of the guiding questions. I will return to (and in some cases, elaborate upon) sections of this literature review in later chapters as a means to contextualize and contrast the work in which this project's participants and I have been engaged.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Selection and definition of research tradition

This qualitative research project employs elements of autoethnography, a writing practice involving personalized accounts where one draws upon one’s own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000; Payne, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997). In addition, the project uses elements of participatory research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) via interviews, discussions, and draft reviews to provide a counterpoint to the account(s) I put forth.

Autoethnographic elements

To “do” any form of ethnography is to engage in a process of knowledge production that centers on and “studies” both the practices and points of view of people within an organized set of social relationships (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000). In other words, it fosters an examination into how people are implicated in the regulation and alteration of the terms of how they live together, and how they (re)imagine the possible and the desirable for themselves and for others. However, Simon and Dippo (1986) warn that one’s knowledge production in research should avoid “the will to truth” (Foucault, 1981, p. 56). In response to warnings such as these, Bochner and Ellis (1996) posit that traditional ethnography’s attachment to the correspondence theory of truth, the idea that one can describe objects in the world apart from and independently of one’s activity as a language user, is an illusion that has been shattered over the past three decades of academic thought. “Truth,” “knowledge,” and “reality” should be understood in consideration of the contingencies of language and human experience. Knowledge
production, they argue, is a form of textual production – where hard fact and truth are acknowledged to be the products of an artificial (but not arbitrary) process.

As a reaction to these concerns, and because I have played a direct role in the education-activist work being described in this project, I am drawn to autoethnography as a methodology for this project. Autoethnography’s use of personal narratives and creative nonfiction to allow the researcher’s experiences to inspire critical reflection, to encourage a different way of reading, and to openly acknowledge my “truth” as a context-based product also lends well to the exploration of this project’s guiding questions.

One aim of autoethnographic accounts is to increase the understanding of how the reader has been constructed traditionally by social science texts as passive and unengaged (Berry, 2006) — or, I would argue, as someone who has been a participant/subject in several research projects, how the participant/subject is, as a consequence of traditional participant/subject constructions, rendered a caricature subservient to the researcher’s analysis. As Bochner and Ellis (1996) point out, autoethnographers often struggle with the dilemma of how to position themselves within their research projects to reveal aspects of their own tacit world, challenge their own assumptions, locate themselves through the eyes of the other, and observe themselves observing. Reed-Danahay (1997), similarly, defines autoethnography as a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, where the self is placed within a social context. Autoethnographers may vary their emphasis on graphy (i.e.: the research process), ethnos (i.e.: culture), or auto (i.e.: the self). Whatever the specific focus, autoethnographers employ their own experiences to reflexively examine more deeply interactions in a given context – challenging accepted
views about silent authorship or the minimal inclusion of researcher voice in a project’s presentation of findings.

This is manifested in a number of ways. Payne (1996), by way of example, offers two “stories” told in tandem: a personal narrative of his experience working in a factory in the early 1970s; and, a theoretical discussion woven around his contemplation of that experience. The first is an attempt to write from the site of his body, detailing what it was doing, what was done to it, and where it was. The second, the theoretical text, he argues is also a story, but one told through his analytical exploration of the themes and ideological critiques of contemporary scholarship. In the process, theory “renarrates” the site of his body “in an ideological universe” (p. 50). I use a similar model, deploying personal narratives and reflections in tandem with a theoretical discussion around my contemplation of those narratives, reflections, and the broader political sphere.

In most instances, the personal narratives I offer in this project are not immediately accompanied by analysis – rather, they are followed by data from the participant interviews before moving into the “more analytical” sections of each chapter. This is not to imply that there will always be a clear distinction between the personal narratives and the theoretical discussion, or that the theoretical discussion is not also a form of narration subject to theoretical discussion or analysis. Nor is this to suggest that all analytical possibilities have been exhausted by this author as the reader will understandably reauthor portions of the text within the context of the whole of this project and within the whole of the broader context. It has been argued that analysis sometimes becomes an unnecessary diversion from the emotional experience of the story (Ellis, 2002) and may imply that the story is not enough on its own. I sympathize with
that argument, and see the value in leaving personal narratives as an artifact for play, for renarration by the reader, for emotional response, for alternate voicing, or for consideration as part of the project as a whole. Kumashiro (2002), for example, intersperses his chapters with vignettes that are not specifically analyzed, and he follows the final chapter with an additional one-page vignette that gives the "final word" to one of his project's participants. None of these, however, are outside of analysis in that they are part of the cumulative whole (which is only ever partial and incomplete) of Kumashiro's project, and framed by other portions of the text (e.g. the abstract, quotes, introductory statements, headings, etc.). While I do not included "standalone" vignettes in this project in the same way as Kumashiro (2002), I hope that I have provided sufficient space to allow for responses or personal connection unfettered by additional framing or a single individual's reading(s).

CRITICISMS OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY, AND RESPONSES TO CRITICISMS

Autoethnography's use of the self as the only data source has been questioned (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Sparkes, 2000), and criticized as being narcissistic and self-indulgent (Coffey, 1999). While autoethnography may be at the boundaries of academic research, it is because such accounts do not sit comfortably with the traditional criteria used to judge qualitative research; or, as it has been maintained, the criteria used to judge qualitative research may not be appropriate for autoethnography (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1999; Holt, 2003; Sparkes, 2000). Charges of narcissism and self-indulgence, posit Ellis and Bochner (1996), are merely attempts "to try to reinscribe ethnographic orthodoxy" (p. 24), and serve to further marginalize certain voices. These charges arguably function
to preserve the very types of dominant viewpoints that those using autoethnographic approaches may wish to question (Holt, 2003), which I do.

Social movement literature increasingly recognizes the connections among narrative, autoethnography social activism, and social practice (Jasper, 1998; Sudbury, 2001; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). I will not go as far as Ellis (2002), though, by claiming that the personal is political, and therefore that autoethnography itself moves one “inward toward social change” (p. 399). It does, however, allow one to use one’s own experiences as participants to come to an understanding of the social, and is therefore suitable for this project.

Specifically, I hold that autoethnography is a useful way to examine this project’s education-activism-related experiences – primarily for the reason that “autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized us at the borders” (Tierney, 1998, p. 66). Writing individual experience is writing social experience – people do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum, and therefore autoethnography is not necessarily limited to the self (Holt, 2003; Mykhalovskiy, 1996). Butler (2005) makes a similar point in arguing that “the ‘I’ has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms” (pp. 7-8, my emphasis). I acknowledge that the educator-activist work of which I have been a part of and of which I will speak (i.e.: auto) is embedded in both a set of norms and set of relations (i.e.: ethnos) that involve many other individuals and a variety of factors, including norms, over which I do not have control or influence.
PARTICIPATORY ELEMENTS OF THIS PROJECT

However, because the education-activist work described in this project was not done by one person working in isolation, I have included two other individuals in the research process (i.e.: *graphy*) by: 1) supplying, through interviews, their own personal narratives and interpretations of the educator-activist work around queer/LGBT/TITQ/etc. issues in this particular context through interviews, including their modes of practice and contingent understandings in relation to the guiding questions supplied in chapter one; and, to a lesser degree, 2) where they chose to, commenting on this project as it is being produced and expressing opinions that are different from my own. Including these participatory elements alongside the autoethnographic elements explicitly acknowledges that my personal understanding and "experience" of the given context is fractured and *always incomplete*, and that my modes of practice are not the sum and total of approaches to the issues raised.

This aspect of the *graphy* draws upon participatory research. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), participatory research frequently emerges in situations where individuals, together, want to "make changes thoughtfully − that is, after critical reflection. It emerges when people want to think 'realistically' about where they are now, how things came to be that way, and how (in practice) things may change" (p.573). It does not assume that participants are "naïve" from the point of view of theory.

My intention in including participants in this project is not to convert the participants to the imposed perspective of any social theorist (e.g.: Butler, 2004b; Foucault, 1994) or education theorists (e.g.: Kumashiro, 2002, 2004), but to provide contrasting voices in a project that deploys the I more frequently than in traditional
ethnographic research. Unlike participatory research, such as characterized by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), I am not claiming that this project’s participants have shared ownership or authorship of this project. That being said, this project did emerge from a shared desire to reflect with other individuals on our shared education-activism. While the involvement of others does not resolve the fracturedness and incompleteness of any narrative I myself put forward, their presence as additional narratives and insights (re)presented in this project functions to challenge the authoritarian limitations of autoethnography and to contemplate “positive change” together.

AND NOW I [DON’T] SEE: AN ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION ABOUT “STORIES”

I will avoid, if at all possible, to avoid a modernist account of how I/we were “mistaken” or “uninformed” or “ill-prepared” but have now come to be fully knowledgeable about myself/ourselves and my activist practice. Miller (1998) warns that the educational admonition to “tell your story” often lead to modernist versions of teacher research “in which teachers learn about and then implement new pedagogical approaches and curriculum materials without a hitch” (p. 368). Such outcomes-oriented humanist narratives (with their progress of the self and history to the tune of Amazing Grace’s “I once was blind / but now I see”) misrepresent the non-linear complexity of situations and selfhood where one is inevitably more likely to encounter the unexpected, the unplanned – and even the possibility of failure. This project’s discussion of activism and “positive change” does not presuppose success, nor does it describe work as having being possibly completed.
Participant interviews, relations, and representations

The interviews

The individuals who agreed to participate were/are also engaged in queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist work within the Vancouver School Board. Both identify as women, queer, and white. Jane Bouey is a former school board trustee in her 40s now employed outside of the school system, and Jody Polukoshko is an elementary school teacher in her 30s with whom I recently shared a teacher-consultant position. I am not in a position of authority, employment-related or otherwise, over either of these individuals. I chose these two individuals for a number of reasons, including but not limited to:

- the overlapping of our education-activist work on queer/LGBTITQetc. and other issues;
- the long-term collaboration on education-activist work between the participants and myself prior to this project;
- the dominant presence of administrators in educational change literature;
- the limited amount of literature published queer/LGBTITQetc. education issues in British Columbia has focused on legal-based activism dominated by men and the experiences/viewpoints of those men;
- the experiences both participants have had enacting their activism within education-related institutional settings beyond the classroom;
- the significant amount of experience both participants have had organizing for other causes and with other groups of people across a variety of political terrains;
- their willingness and availability; and,
- my belief that it was important for voices that do not benefit from male privilege to be included in this project.

The two participants were able to partake in a one-on-one open-ended interview conducted in August 2006. The guiding questions listed in the introduction were provided in advance to the participants. Before commencing the interview, I discussed my research goals and the research process. When we began formally, the interview discussions in both cases focused on the participants' perceptions of their activist work, their
understandings of the contexts in which they act, the philosophical stances behind their activist work, the barriers and limitations to their work, frustrations and disappointments, and their sense of best practice (if any) for education-activist work related to queer/LGBTQIA+ etc. issues.

Each interview lasted approximately two hours. I allowed for extra time if requested by the individual participants. I recorded the interviews in digital audio and I transcribed the recordings to the computer. In September 2006, the participants were given an opportunity to review the transcript of their individual interview. The participants added to these and made amendments/corrections as desired. Jane, for instance, clarified in parentheses on the transcript of her August interview that a statement she made about working “closely with them” refers to Coalition of Progressive Electorate trustees; Jody, on the other hand, eliminated five words by underlining them, and inserted italicized replacements in order to clarify a statement. As the interviews were open-ended, the participants also discussed issues with me beyond the scope I had delineated in my guiding questions. For example, in her one-on-one interview, Jody spent some time discussing youth agency and anorexia, though I did not prompt her on these topics; similarly, Jane, because of her involvement in municipal politics, addressed tensions and decision-making processes within civic parties. As I intended the interviews to be open-ended and as I did not consider there to be a boundary to what “is” queer/LGBTQIA+ etc. education-activism, I did not deter them in this, and followed their lead in this regard.

The participants were also offered the opportunity to partake in a group interview in the form of a conversation. The purpose of the group interview was to extend the ideas
put forward by the participants in their individual interviews, and to explore together the nature of the queer/LGBTQ etc. educator-activist work they were engaged in. This group interview took place in February 2007, after several significant personal changes had occurred in each of our lives. The group interview lasted ninety minutes, and took the form of a conversation focusing specifically on the themes of deploying change across institutional structures, and responding to resistance. The audio of this interview was also recorded digitally, and transcribed onto the computer. The draft transcript of the group interview was shared with both participants, and they provided clarifications, minor changes and additions to their individual statements, as per the earlier examples.

Lastly, the participants opted not to use pseudonyms, and signed their consent forms as such – not because of the difficulties in maintaining anonymity in a project focusing closely on a specific context, but because the participants did not and do not believe they would/will be adversely affected by using their real names. Like myself, they have previously spoken about this work, and continue to speak about this work openly in a variety of forms of news media and public venues; and, as individuals, they are well-known both in the school community, and the local queer/LGBTQ etc., feminist, education-activist community(ies) at large because of their on-going efforts. They were informed, and reminded subsequently, that they could substitute a pseudonym for their real name at a later date as the project progressed. They have not done so, and I hope that my treatment and representation of the participants has been perceived as respectful.
As this project makes frequent use of the I, because the autoethnographic elements occur throughout the text, and because, as researcher, I shape the text, space is provided here to discuss the relation of the I to this project\textsuperscript{viii}. While I could put forward my professional identity as an educator as my primary link to this issue, my deployment of queer as self-identity may be just as pertinent – or maybe not. As Talburt (2000) asks of a similar pairing of identities, what does one have to do with the other? The putting together of words such as these, she argues, may be seen as connoting a political agenda at the expense of one that is intellectual; or, it may connote privilege and professional status at the expense of what is viewed as urgent political and material matters. “And yet for others,” she says, “there may be a response of ‘so what?’” (p. 1). Regardless of the response, I have worn various forms of the queer-educator label – and in a way (quite problematically, as will be discussed) it has proven to be inescapable to do so. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is my recent role as one of the two Antihomophobia and Diversity Consultants\textsuperscript{xiv} in Vancouver, British Columbia.

This position that Jody and I shared was created to support the implementation of an action plan accompanying a policy I co-authored that was adopted by the school board trustees in February 2004. The policy addresses advocacy, representation, leadership, curriculum, and confidentiality issues meant to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, two-spirit and questioning members of the school community, as well as children from families with same-sex parents, and members of the school community harassed or discriminated against on the basis of their “real” or “perceived” sexual orientation or gender identity. To the best of my knowledge, no other
school district in Canada has a similar paid position, and only the San Francisco Unified School District in California has an equivalent. The position, action plan, and policy emerged from work in that I, along with a core group of about twelve other teachers, students, trustees, superintendents, parents, support staff, and community activists have been engaged over the past few years. Thus, I am centrally embedded in a simultaneously work-related and activist effort to proactively “create safe and affirming schools” for queer/LGBTITQetc. members of our school community, as well as pushing for a greater amount of attention to be paid to these issues by the provincial Ministry of Education.

In my role as a consultant, I was most often perceived as and assumed to be queer-teacher, gay-teacher, faggot-teacher or some such variant – for several reasons, likely, not the least of which is the common assumption that it is a member of a minority who does the advocacy for that group’s interests (see Gamson, 2000). With that taken into account, and my assertion that neither queer nor educator are self-evident terms with stable meanings, I am nevertheless provisionally advancing both terms as to how I position myself (not “who I ‘am’”) in relation to this project. There are many other labels, identities, privileges, and obstacles attached to my personhood that constitute the I that is I/me as well – subject and object. Of these, there are certain identity labels that carry more saliency and privilege than others in the specific context of which I am a part. My “biological sex”/gender-identity are both performed/read, for the most part, as male. I identify / am identified as white. These discursively-produced categories of whiteness and maleness are granted additional privilege in the context in which I live. Furthermore, these real or perceived categories intersect with my heretofore mentioned sexual identity positionality/placement and profession (as well as my class, (dis)ability, nationality, etc.)
in ways that might be quite complex, messy, and unseen/unseeable in that my understandings of what is "activism," what is "positive change," and what are "queer/LGBT/TIT/etc. issues" are shaped by all of these. Moreover, it is possible, that my queerness, concomitant with my whiteness and maleness and other factors, has also entitled me to privileges and opportunities within the education system that heretofore may have been remote possibilities for others occupying similar positionalities.

To date, my role as a teacher within the education system has gone beyond what is usually thought of as "the teacher" – of which I am able to narrate to a point, and only as discrete, ungeneralizable situations that may of be no other use than as stories. That being said, how does the "insider" person perform research on her/his "own" group, let alone represent individuals from the "same" group through the process of research? If it is possible, how does one go about defamiliarizing oneself with what is now seemingly common and familiar so that one can then re-"understand" it and depict it, not faithfully (which is an impossibility) but respectfully?

Rather than assuming a singular insider or outsider position, I prefer to acknowledge the shifting aspects of social life that create particular knowers and particular communities on an on-going basis, and that contribute to the numerous dimensions through which we can relate to others regardless of community affiliation or positionality. Outsidersness and insiderness are not static, fixed positions; rather, they are ever-shifting, tenuous, and permeable (Naples, 1996; and see Butler, 2004b, p.108). Claiming unproblematic insider/outsider binary researcher positioning (e.g.: "I am part of this group I am researching" or "I am not part of this group I am researching") may be read as an attempt to stabilize and make coherent what is discursively produced.
Researchers, then, can be neither insider nor outsider; they are instead temporarily and precariously positioned within a socially constructed continuum characterized by a high level of fluidity (Naples, 1996; O'Connor, 2004).

In the particular case of this project, does it matter if someone who “is” queer/LGBT/TITQ/etc. includes people in a study that “are” queer/LGBT/TITQ/etc. – especially when our identities are more complex and subtle than what single signifiers allow, and especially when these categories as unstable? Instead of assuming that identities and experiences are givens – or as Talburt (2000) puts it: “[i]nstead of placing the individual as origin” (p. 13) – I will concentrate on the subjectivity and agency of the I and this project’s other participants “as they are formed through discourses and actions” (p. 13). Or, putting it another way, the project queries how the subject is constituted as an object of concern, how the subject responds to the discourse in which it finds itself, and how those discourses contribute to the creation of the subject’s voice and experience (Chang, 2005). In considering identity and experience as textual rather than a “reality”-based given, my focus will not be on my co-participants’ “experience” or the correctness of their “experience” or actions, but on how their experiences and actions are produced in the social, cultural, linguistic, and institutional discourses in which they find themselves.

On a related point, Chang (2005) argues that researchers cannot validate the meanings of a social action with complete certainty as language is over-populated with other people’s intentions. This particularly relates to my use of the participant interviews, as texts, which are replete with intentions of the speaker-author who voiced the words, the researcher-author who elicited the words and transcribed them into write-ups, the
researcher/writer/analyst-author who manipulates the printed form and attempts to make (non)sense of them, and finally, the reader-author who could be any number of people — including the "original" speaker-author or researcher-author who is re-experiencing and re-intentioning the text at a later date or in a different context.

The bulk of the autoethnographic element of this project occurs in windows, interspersed in chapters three, four and five. I am choosing the term windows semi-ironically in that they should not be regarded as transparent, pellucid, or even factual accounts of what "was." Windows are usually closed, usually dirty and can easily be broken. However, when opened, windows are but space with a frame — and while they will be over-populated with my intentions, the reader will no doubt bring hers/his. A vignette, by virtue of its name, assumes itself to be rooted in a foundational "reality."

As well, I will make use of published interviews and editorial columns available in the public domain and through media sources that quote me, as well as this project’s participants, on a variety of occasions — playing again with notions of authorship, representation, and intentionality, and calling into question my ability to know myself. Other windows and quotations have been generated specifically for this project. Of these, the participant interviews also provide another source for the I, as the open-ended format provided a more conversational tone where the I had greater presence than there would be in a more formal question/answer format.

Working from multiple angles and multiple I’s, as well as making use of genre shifts, allows a capturing of more of the intricacies and paradoxes of the lived experience and understandings of the co-participants — keeping in mind that lived experience can only be understood as a social construction born out of particular ideological
configurations and circulating norms in subjectivation (Scott, 1992; Butler, 2005; Ruffolo, 2007). Accepting lived experience uncritically as a narrative of truth and foundation for knowledge-making separates the personal from the political, Scott argues – thereby fixing identity, denying politics, and negating possibilities beyond how the participants view their experience. The words of my participants, the speaker-authors, are also fashioned and understood as social constructions born out of particular ideological configurations.

While I usually present the words or narratives of the participants in the form of block quotations, the reader-author should not assume that I do this in order to signify the validity of my interpretations of the accuracy of what the participants were “really” saying. I acknowledge that my articulations of the speaker-authors words are only a partial recounting of the speaking events that occurred in August 2006 and that block quotations are not particularly musical. However, I do not follow Kumashiro’s (2002) approach of representing the everyday speech of his interview-participants in the form of poetry for its “closer resemblance to speech” (p. 21). By fashioning a textual (re)representation out of other textual representations (i.e.: observations, interviews, et cetera) that are also based upon textual performatives in the world “out there,” I look forward to the possibility of this project also being viewed as a cultural, textual artifact that might also be used as a springboard for further action and interrogation.

Data analysis

Søndergaard (2002) encourages the researcher to find her/his own way, recognizing that “there are no recipes for creative analyses,” and that research can be “productive, fun and transgressive” (p. 187) by favouring approaches that examine their
data with inclusive and exclusive discursive practices, storylines, alienation, paradoxes, alternate narratives, erasure, and troubling in mind. Similarly, Zeeman, Poggenpoel, Myburg, and Van Der Lind (2002) encourage researchers to conduct a “playful” analysis of data that: is considerate of texts’ connotations and implications, acknowledges the representation and generation of the subject, and is conscious of its own ideological effects. These statements are in keeping with my earlier comments on autoethnography and the I, and reasons for incorporating participatory elements.

As discussed in the literature review, various understandings of sexuality, gender, activism, social justice, educational leadership, and “positive change” are available to inform queer/LGBTQetc. education-activism. These understandings produce a number of tensions in facing the practicalities, limitations, and contradictions of activism engagement in a large, complex, politicized public school system. The transcribed interviews, the related documents, the actions of the participants, outcomes of “positive change,” and this project itself are all part of the larger text that is the subject of analysis.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the work of Kumashiro (2002, 2004) is used as a lens for viewing this education-activist work within this context, supplemented by Butler (1990, 2004a, 2004b) and Foucault (1994). This involves, as per Kumashiro (2002), “reading beyond” – a method of multiple readings for the partiality of all texts (involving examining silences and the effects of those silences on the “meaning” of a given text, and our complicity with oppression in reading in particular ways) and willingness to go through crisis (involving questioning what is valued or desired as “knowledge” or “standards,” questioning what constitutes “good” teaching and activism, and asking if any of these is ever complete) that are be applied as additional lenses in the
analysis of the data (including the *windows*) in order to recognize and challenge oppression within my own work. Kumashiro's method described above will appear in the fifth and sixth chapters in order to analyze the data and this project itself for silences and oppression — and for possible understanding of those silences and oppression. This too will provide an opportunity to examine connotations and implications, to acknowledge the representation and generation of the subject, and to be conscious of its own ideological effects of that subject.
Chapter 4: Entry points and initial implementation

In this chapter, I concentrate on the entry points of myself and Jane Bouey into queer/LGBTITQ etc. education-activism work within the institutional settings of the Vancouver School Board (VSB). I discuss the creation of policy for the VSB, the context in which this occurred, and the initial phase of implementation of this policy from early 2002 through the spring of 2005. Playing a significant role in this was the VSB’s new LGBTITQ Advisory Committee (later known as the Pride Advisory Committee), on which I served as a representative of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers’ Association (VESTA), and Jane as an publicly-elected trustee. I do so in order to outline the change process and challenges during this initial stage.

By way of explanation, I should note that, as its first task after being created, the advisory committee was to develop district policy responsive to a set of recommendations made in June 2002 to the board of school trustees, which at the time had a Non-Partisan Association (NPA) majority. These recommendations came from an ad hoc group of queer youth and allies named the Outreach Coalition that called upon the VSB to acknowledge and address the homophobia in its schools. The board accepted these recommendations in principle\textsuperscript{xvi}, and sent a letter on 2002 June 25 to all secondary schools stating the VSB’s general support for “the initiatives students and teachers take to establish Gay/Straight Alliances\textsuperscript{xvii} in Vancouver Schools.” No further commitments or actions by the board were made until after the November 2002 trustee elections when, after considering management’s suggestion that a task force be struck to further investigate the issues raised by the Outreach Coalition, the first-ever Coalition of Progressive Electorates (COPE) majority board created\textsuperscript{xviii} an advisory committee for the
purpose of guiding the implementation of the Outreach Coalition’s recommendations. The committee began to meet shortly thereafter.

This chapter is structured in such a way that the events are recounted from several different perspectives, with the autoethnographic and participatory components interspersed with one another: personal narratives from “my” point of view written a few years after the events described took place, quotes from newspaper articles featuring Jane or me from around the time the policy was adopted, field notes I made in 2005, material derived from an interview I conducted with Jane in August 2006, and observations and analysis written during the fall of 2007. The autoethnographic and participatory elements in this chapter serve to set the context and provide historical background, so that the intricacies of the present Vancouver School Board context are easier understood. A discussion of recent related legal cases is also included. All of these provide data for analysis, and a preliminary examination of how both Jane and I define(d) “positive change” and “queer-friendly schools” within the context of Vancouver, as framed by the work that had been done. Mindful that political agency “cannot be isolated from the dynamics of power from which it is wrought” (Butler, 2004b, p. 101), I also discuss some of the power relations within this context.

Window: December 2002 – September 2003

In December 2002, I attended the Vancouver hearings of the provincial government’s Safe Schools Task Force. Traveling from one school district to the next to receive delegations wishing to speak on the issues of bullying and harassment in British Columbia schools, the task force was helmed by Vancouver Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Lorne Mayencourt and two of his colleagues. My main interest in attending the hearings was one of curiosity. Queer/LGBTITQetc. issues in education had been a particular focus of mine for several years, and I was curious as to what presenters might have to say in that regard. Quite a bit, as it turned out, from a variety of youth and adults who spoke not only on the issue of
safe schools but also homophobia as a particular concern. I had not prepared anything to submit to the task force myself, but I was surprised that no one was there to present from VESTA, my local of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), as it was the union's role to represent teachers at such events. I had previously been admonished for undermining the union delegation at a school board meeting during the budget-setting process by making a presentation to trustees on behalf of my school, so I was familiar now with the fact that there were channels to go through with the intent to set priorities collectively and democratically. I appreciated the point, but not the scolding!

Teaching was my first unionized job. I had limited understanding of collective bargaining, teachers' organizing history, or what role these played in the Canadian public education context. In my first couple years of teaching, my direct experience with the union had been limited. A couple of months after the task force hearings, though, I was pleasantly surprised to be handed a fax from VESTA calling for representatives on a new VSB committee formed to address homophobia in Vancouver schools.

"You're out at school," said the colleague who gave the fax to me. "Why don't you do it?" I hesitated at first, but intrigued as I was by this new VSB advisory committee, I applied.

I received notice of my appointment a couple weeks later. The letter explained that, as a representative of the local, I was to report on the advisory committee's work to VESTA for advice and consideration, and to communicate the local's perspective on matters being discussed and decisions being made. The VSB contacted me soon after with dates for what was the advisory committee's first meeting.

The original composition of the advisory committee included representatives from management (an associate superintendent, her administrative assistant, as well as secondary and elementary principals and vice-principals), students, parents, employee groups (VESTA, Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association, and Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 15), and outside groups ranging from the Vancouver Policy Department to a variety of advocacy and support groups. The latter included GALE-BC, Vancouver Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), GAB Youth Services, Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Family Services, Kinnex, and YouthCo. Newly elected COPE trustee Jane Bouey and re-elected COPE trustee Allan Wong also sat on the committee as liaisons to the board.

Some of the committee members I knew of by reputation from their extensive queer/LGBTQetc. advocacy work – in classrooms, in the courts, in the media, through political lobbying, through teacher advocacy, through youth organizing, through support to parents, and by building coalitions and networks of allies. From my perspective, everyone seemed quite generous and open with each other, and I felt no hesitancy in jumping in.
My opinions leaned on remembrances of my own secondary school experiences, on what I had gleaned from other queer/LGBT TitQetc. advocacy I had participated in while in university, on readings of academic and activist literature, and on my perception of the present situation by way of queer/LGBT TitQetc. issues in Vancouver schools. I advocated for a number of things: a clear stance by the board against transphobia and homophobia, and in favour of education practices inclusive of queer/LGBT TitQetc. identities; provision of resources in multiple languages to both secondary and elementary schools to support this work; support for youth to organize; opportunities for all members of the school community to discuss these issues and improve school climate; encouraging adults at every school to be proactive in this area, development of sexual health resources inclusive of MSM and WSW sexual activity.

The list changed as my ideas bumped up against other committee members’ ideas, and as we learned more from the community as we checked-in with people we knew outside of the advisory committee itself. What do you think? Will this work? What’s missing? Do you see yourself in this? Previous work from Winnipeg, Toronto, and San Francisco aimed specifically at homophobia in schools provided some ideas, but we wanted to expand upon those rather than directly copy. We perceived early on, for instance, that trans-discourses had a marginalized role in the public school policy work in these jurisdictions. We knew of trans-identifying staff and students in the system who, during the recent past, had been reasonably supported at school while transitioning genders – often requesting private changing-room space, respect for their choice of pronouns and use of washrooms. Despite the reasonable success of those situations, though, we understood a need for the availability of on-going trans-specific protocol, advocacy, services, and support. The trans-identified individuals participating in the policy-making process, and those in the community we heard from, told us as much as well.

There were also several matters before the courts in British Columbia that demanded attention – in particular, Jubran v. North Vancouver School District No. 44. (2002) clarified the responsibilities of school districts in maintaining safe and inclusive climates.

Most of all, though, we were adamant that there should be an action plan ready for implementation as soon as the policy is adopted, the understanding being that a policy’s worth depends largely upon its use.

As the policy and accompanying action plan took shape (with sections drafted by a subcommittee and then brought back to the whole group), copies of the related documents were sent out into the community and to the various stakeholder groups for input, which was provided readily and copiously for the subsequent monthly meeting.

This meant that I began to regularly attend evening VESTA Executive Committee meetings in order to give updates on the advisory committee’s progress, and to solicit input from those present. VESTA and the BCTF...
had policy supportive of the work being done, and the local’s Status of Women Committee had done work around homophobia in the 1990s – but what was being discussed now at the board level was beyond what had previously been organized. Sexual orientation had been added in the collective agreement as a protected characteristic against discrimination about ten years previously, but no grievance had ever been filed based on that language. So, the consensus of the Executive Committee was that this new work being positive.

Though I did not have a vote at these meetings, I increasingly participated in discussions unrelated to my work as representative on the VSB Pride Advisory Committee, and began to differently understand the union’s role – not only within the our school district, but also in relation to wider labour, civic and provincial politics. This gave me a new vantage point from which to reconsider my understandings of the tensions between being both professionals and public sector employees, the capacity of a collective to work towards a certain aim, the complexities of democratic decision-making, and my responsibilities to participate in that decision-making.

Nothing went without being informed by the understandings of the people in the room with me. They too were part of the context, as now too was I.

Four recent legal cases related to queer/LGBTQetc. issues in education

Notwithstanding the legal challenges in British Columbia and other provinces to laws limiting marriage to two people of the “opposite” sex, there were four on-going or recently concluded human rights legal cases that informed the advisory committee’s work. All of these cases clarified some outstanding “ambiguities” in the application of the province’s School Act, received a significant amount of attention from the media (McLellan, 2002; Mason, 2005; “Vancouver Is a Diverse City,” 2005), and raised the ire of those opposed to the “promotion of non-heterosexual lifestyles” (quoted in Steffenhagen, 2007) in schools.

I realize that by including this discussion here, it would seem that I am prioritizing legal discourse as a solution, or as the final word in situations where disputes have occurred or advocacy may have reached an inevitable conclusion. I return to these
cases during chapter six to consider them in relation to my data, and with regard to concerns about essentialism and the role of the state in reifying identities. That being said, much of the discussion as an advisory committee during the early stage and afterwards reference the four cases discussed here – because of their relation to the work that we were doing, because some members of the advisory committee were directly involved with one or more of these cases, and because the clarification of the “ambiguities” (families’ and teachers’ religious beliefs vs. public schools’ requirement to be secular and inclusive, responsibilities of schools and school districts for the behaviour of their students, obligation to include representation of sexual minorities in curriculum and resources) were being discussed across school communities. I summarize the cases here to further contextualize the advisory committee’s work.

THE BOOK-BANNING CASE

Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36 (2002) addresses the decision made by a British Columbia school board to ban three picture books featuring families with parents of the same sex. The trustees cited community standards and family concerns, despite the inclusion of discussion of families’ differences and similarities in the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs), the mandatory provincial curriculum, which is disseminated in the Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) – the subject-by-subject ministry documents that frame the PLOs with suggested assessment and instructional strategies, recommended resources, and ministry policy.

The Supreme Court of Canada’s eventual decision in this case in favour of the teacher involved and his co-appellantsxxi was based upon whether the Surrey School Board had acted “reasonably” within the bounds of its authority, and whether it had
violated the *School Act of British Columbia*'s clause of secularity\textsuperscript{xxii}. The Supreme Court of Canada clarified that school boards should certainly strive to represent their communities' interests, values, and beliefs. However, in doing so, they may not exclude depictions of lawful family models "simply on the ground that one group of parents finds them morally questionable" (*Chamberlain v. Surrey School District* No. 36, p. 12). When faced with a situation where respecting religious views sits in tension with the onus on the school system to respect the right to freedom from discrimination, the Supreme Court of Canada's decision mandates that inclusion and accommodation prevails over exclusion.

This case was resolved before we began work on the policy in Vancouver. James Chamberlain\textsuperscript{xxiii}, the kindergarten teacher at the centre of the case, chaired GALE-BC and worked with us on the VSB advisory committee.

**THE HOMOPHOBIC HARASSMENT CASE**

*Jubran v. North Vancouver School District No. 44* (2002), later known as *School District No. 44 v. Jubran* (2005), involves a student who filed a complaint against his school district after experiencing repeated and escalating homophobic harassment, both verbal and physical, over a number of years while attending secondary school in North Vancouver, BC. The provincial Human Rights Tribunal originally ruled in Jubran's favour, finding that, while the school district did take some minor steps in response to the on-going harassment on a case-by-case basis, the district failed in its duty to provide an educational environment free from discriminatory harassment for Jubran, and neglected to pro-actively work to prevent future incidences of harassment from occurring. The school board appealed the tribunal's decision to the Supreme Court of British Columbia,
arguing that the tribunal’s decision should be overturned on the basis that Jubran self-identified as heterosexual, and therefore could not be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. The board won its appeal, primarily on that argument. However, in May 2005, the British Columbia Court of Appeals reinstated the Human Rights Tribunal’s earlier decision in favour of Jubran, noting that a person “may be the object of discrimination although he [sic] does not actually have those characteristics” (School District No. 44 v. Jubran, 2005, BCCA, my emphasis). The Supreme Court of Canada would not give the school district leave for a further appeal.

While the final award was in Jubran’s favour, his case had yet to be resolved while we were developing the policy. The advisory committee followed the evolving situation closely, and were supportive of Jubran’s arguments. The potential for new responsibilities arising out of this case were a concern to management, as boards were now being called to account for their students’ behaviour. As an advisory committee, we took the tribunal’s recognition of harassment and discrimination based on perceived characteristics, and incorporated that into the policy – which the trustees accepted as reasonable. We also used the specifics of the Jubran situation as a case study in numerous presentations and workshops, even prior to the legal proceedings being resolved.

THE DISCRIMINATORY COMMENTS CASE

*Kempling v. British Columbia College of Teachers* (2005) involves a teacher who was disciplined by his employer and, subsequently, the British Columbia College of Teachers (the regulator and licensing body for teachers in this province) for making off-duty comments in the form of letters published in his local newspaper against the “homosexual community.” His teaching license was suspended for a period of time,
thereby denying him his regular work (though he did have his own reparative therapy practice outside of his employment as a teacher).

In his complaint against the college, Kempling argued that his published comments were within his rights to speak from a personal and religious point of view. The Court of Appeals, however, did not side with Kempling, finding many of his statements to be founded on stereotypical notions and indicated a willingness to judge individuals on the basis of those stereotypes. Consequently, the Court of Appeals decided that “the conclusion that Kempling’s writings were discriminatory is unassailable”; while his actions might not have been directed at a specific individual, the court found that his published comments served to undermine the “integrity” of the school system and its “core value of non-discrimination” by “denying homosexual students an education environment accepting of them.” Lastly, his actions were deemed to be unbecoming for his profession, as they were, in the court’s opinion, a clear indication that Kempling was committed to fulfilling his public and professional responsibilities in an intolerant and discriminatory manner.

While Kempling has not won further appeals, the matter was still before the Court of Appeals while the advisory committee was working on the policy, and this case helped to clarify the complicated relation between the School Act and individuals’ freedom of expression — providing a framework with which to reconcile the changes we were hoping to see with the personal beliefs of some of the district’s employees.

THE ABSENCE OF QUEER CONTENT CASE

More broadly reaching, Corren & Corren v. BC (Ministry of Education) (No. 3) was filed in 1999, with the appellants arguing that the Ministry of Education violated the
BC Human Rights Code by continuing to discriminate against non-heterosexual students and parents in denying a service that is customarily available to the public — that is, curriculum and supporting materials available inclusive of same-sex families and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Also addressed in the complaint was the ministry’s Alternative Delivery Policy, which was being interpreted by some school districts in a way that allowed parents to have their children excused from sections of the provincial curriculum, or in a way where some schools omitted sections of the curriculum — specifically, opportunities in the existing Personal Planning and Social Studies curriculum to incorporate discussion of non-heterosexual relationships or types of discrimination other than sexism and racism.

At the time we were developing the VSB policy, the Correns had been waiting several years for their complaint to be heard by the BC Human Rights Tribunal, and a settlement had yet to be reached. We were, however, confident that the complaint would eventually be resolved on the side of inclusion.

Window: October 2003 — May 2004

In addition to working on the policy, and following what was happening in the courts, the advisory committee (with a team of youth volunteers from GAB Youth Services and Kinnex) decided to organize what became the VSB’s first Queer-Friendly Schools Conference. Held in October 2003, and attended by a couple hundred teachers and students, the day-long conference began with a plenary followed by a dozen break-out sessions — using video to make change in your school, trans 101, same-sex families and the primary classroom, drag theatre-sports, legal issues and queer youth, censorship in libraries, building capacity in your GSA . . .

The thought was to kick-start the action plan several months before presenting the policy to the trustees. As it was, several trustees attended, and expressed approval of what they saw, particularly in seeing the participation of youth (who had the option of attending several youth-only sessions at the conference). We passed out copies of the draft policy to attendees for their advice, and received helpful critique as well as general encouragement for the direction we were going.
Meanwhile, the last work on writing the policy continued through late 2003, after much going to and fro between partner groups over language. “Queer” was not used in the final version of the policy, despite our frequent use of the term. Naming was a concern of mine, and was raised by youth at the conference as an area of concern – specifically, that adults were the ones deciding who gets named and how. Management representatives on the committee were worried, however, about the palatability of the word “queer” for broader audiences, or the interpretation of the VSB’s intent by those who do not understand the term “queer” in a non-epithetical sense. They had heard, for example, of a principal who took down our Queer-Friendly Schools Conference advertisement from staff room bulletin boards because she understood the word to be denigrating. With that in mind, and given that the terms “intersex,” “transgender,” “transsexual” and “two-spirit” in the draft policy already generated enough head-scratching, the majority of advisory committee members decided to leave the contested word “queer” out. I was not happy with this, but I compromised for the sake of the whole package. It ended up being the only contentious part.

During presentations of the draft policy a few of us made to the board in December 2003 and February 2004, the only open opposition came from NPA trustee John Cheng – who had voted against the Outreach Coalition’s recommendations in the first place, and against the creation of the advisory committee. The other trustees would not second his motions to amend what we were proposing, and were vocal in their support for what we had created.

Thus, in February 2004, the Vancouver School Board of Trustees adopted Policy ACG – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex, Two-Spirit and Questioning and its action plan.

We were tremendously excited that night, though we anticipated some backlash given what had occurred in recent years in other BC school districts: angry crowds in Coquitlam in 1997 when its school board contemplated and eventually added the words “sexual orientation” to its general harassment policy; protestors at the 1997 BCTF Annual General Meeting when the federation was deliberating developing a program to address homophobia and heterosexism in schools; lobbying throughout the past decade by anti-abortion/anti-queer ad hoc groups; hundreds of parents in Surrey supportive of that school board’s decision to ban children’s books featuring same-sex families...

A public backlash did not occur in Vancouver, though – none apparent to us, anyway. The board issued a media release announcing the adoption of the policy, but it did not generate fanfare. The only mainstream media attention the adoption of the policy received was in the form of a short French-language segment for Radio Canada, and a quip in The Vancouver Courier mocking the LGBTTITQ Advisory Committee’s “alphabet soup” of a name. Oh well, we shrugged, there is enough to do within our schools without having to worry about a spectacle!
XtraWest (Vancouver’s “lesbian and gay biweekly”), which heretofore did not cover the education beat on a regular basis, did publish an article featuring trustee Jane Bouey:

On Feb 16, Bouey and her now-fellow trustees voted almost unanimously to add the new policy to the board’s district policy manual, where it will stand alongside existing policies on race relations and multiculturalism. [...] John Cheng, the lone NPA voice on school board, abstained from the vote.

Already, Bouey says, the new policy is having an impact. Administrators who, in the past, have been “less enthusiastic” about such things as gay-straight alliances are starting to change their stance as they see where the board is heading, she says. And teachers are starting to feel more comfortable incorporating gay-friendly references and resources into their classes. [...] And incorporating the queer policy into the district policy manual “gives it legs beyond this board,” she notes. So if the public ever elects a less supportive set of trustees, they will have to actively repeal the policy from the manual if they want to change course on these issues. (Perelle, 2004, March 4, p. 7).

A month after the article appeared, the advisory committee’s work was recognized with the 2004 XtraWest/VanCity Volunteer of the Year award. We celebrated, reflected, and committed ourselves to the implementation work before us.

1999-2004 from Jane’s point of view

At our first interview session in August 2006, Jane described how she saw events unfold leading up to the development of the policy. As noted in the methodology chapter, and at the beginning of this chapter, the autoethnographic and participatory elements in this chapter serve to set the context and provide historical background; thus, I allow for longer windows and interview extracts to allow for these lengthier passages so that the context is easier understood. I subsequently return to the data for analysis. In her interview with me, Jane begins by detailing how she and COPE started to take these issues up in terms of school board politics:

There were some basic points that we had in the 1999 election that [another member of the COPE caucus] and I spent time working on and
developing what our platform was. We developed that on the basis of what we had heard from youth community at various things. It was like the beginning of stuff what was happening regionally. Sort of funny to look back on it now— it seems like such tiny little things that were happening. But we developed a policy and what we were calling for in that election. And I came out publicly as a queer candidate, which I hadn’t been before, and adopted a number of things as what I personally was doing. I had run before, but when I had run before it was primarily around racism and around the rights of special needs students. So I saw this as an expansion and inclusion of something else within a broader framework. There was some stuff happening in the community as well. I know that it was sort around that time that the coalition of groups got together to develop some sort of demands [for] the school board. I wasn’t part of any of those early discussions, but I was aware they were happening, and in communication with them about it. So that worked.

COPE elected three trustees to school board in the ’99 election, and I continued to work really closely with those trustees. Because I had become really involved in those issues, it helped to educate them as well so that it became integral to everything else they were doing.

It was around 2000 that the Outreach Coalition first began to come into the school board to work on these things. And I worked very loosely with them— knowing when they were going to come, spending time with our [COPE] trustees so they knew what sorts of questions to ask. I think that the fact that I had the chance to work closely with them was what helped move things along, and pushed the NPA school board into taking the positions that they did and adopting some of the recommendations, though it took a lot of work. Our trustees had to keep bringing things back to the table; otherwise, I don’t think much would have actually got past. They were needed to keep strengthening things. [The NPA trustees tended towards] wanting to water things down— not saying that they wouldn’t do things, just saying that . . . “You know, those kind of things . . .”

But I will say too that the coalition itself was smart in how they went about it. They always had the youth speak, and that had an incredible [effect]— and in itself helped move a number of the NPA trustees along, and helped educate our people. I guess there’s always that worry about an outside political agenda. But when it’s coming from youth themselves who were close to school age or who were school age talking about their own experiences— that can’t be denied or disproven as some larger political agenda by something “out there.”

Jane argues that “[t]he youth would never have been able to come forward without a supportive adult network to work with”— not in the sense of youth being without their own agency, but in the sense of acknowledging the value of having adult
allies who can help youth navigate through a bureaucracy they may have had no previous experience with. Having youth steering the conversation, Jane continues, was significant given the climate at the time:

I remember [during the run-up to the ’99 election], there was an article in XtraWest where we [as COPE] had brought forward what we wanted to see done, and Ken Denike was responding on behalf of the NPA candidates, and he said “Of course we believe in tolerance” and that just made me so angry, as if tolerance was what we were working for, as if it was sufficient. In some ways, I think, it galvanized my approach to it – it wasn’t sufficient to talk about tolerance.

The youth-led Outreach Coalition articulated the need to look “beyond tolerance,” which was a point that was consistent with COPE’s platform at the time. As to how she made “beyond tolerance” fit into the broader COPE platform, Jane explains:

No, because it was a slow enough evolution that there was no arm twisting involved. By bringing it up once in a while so that it fit in with our focus. Our focus was, and always had been focusing on children who were the most vulnerable: a) focusing on what was best for kids, and b) focusing on helping the most vulnerable kids because when the most vulnerable kids are helped all kids are helped. So there was that perspective. [But i]t managed to fit under a whole number of policy umbrellas so that it wasn’t just a question of the vulnerable – but also a question of celebrating diversity.

When we won in 2002 and had the majority, it was one of the things I had agreement with them on that would be one of the first things that we did in terms of motions to set up the committee, and there was no reluctance on that part – just a question of strategically when to do it. I think we first brought it forward in January . . . so we waited a month! [Laughter] Which seemed to me to be very long!

But . . . it was very interesting. [There] was really, really strong resistance on part of senior management and middle-management to set that advisory committee up – a strong sense that it would be better just to have one over-all diversity committee. It came from a number of angles. Getting to know those people, part of it was primarily a fear of increased workload: having to add what they were already having to do. Partly, an attempt to not expose the Vancouver School Board to negative publicity that might arise by doing such a thing. And thirdly, sort of their, I guess, systemic homophobia, I guess would be how to put it – the fact that they would assume that that would be what would happen. I never experienced any overt homophobia [in my work as a trustee], but I think that it was
there. I'm not talking about any particular individuals, just that it was there. It was also part of the resistance.

Jane describes a tendency to want to dilute, noting that the trustees “had to be really, really firm by saying: ‘We’re doing this.’” She describes, by way of example, rewriting memorandums from management in order “to reflect what the community wanted.” She notes, though, that their own priorities with regard to queer/LGBTITQ etc. issues had “evolved quite a lot” from 1999 until they were elected in the fall of 2002 – primarily because of what they themselves had heard from the community. By Jane’s account, they needed to work with management in the same way that the community had worked with them:

My recollection is that a lot of what we were calling for in '99 did include things like having Safe Contacts in every school, [though black in '99, GSAs weren’t quite so big, so I can’t even remember if we talked about GSAs. I had been pushing for the need to have an advisory committee from the moment that the recommendations of the Outreach Coalition were being adopted.

I talked to James [Chamberlain of GALE-BC], and said that we need to be moving from here to calling for an advisory committee, because otherwise there would be no way of making sure those recommendations would be followed through. They’d just be recommendations. I had gone through that in having all sorts of stuff passed with special needs and it just goes nowhere.

[T]he importance of that advisory committee being made up of the people who were originally part of the coalition to keep the momentum up but also to ensure that . . . sometimes what happens on advisory committees is that you get representatives from organizations that may not be actually all that involved on the ground, and they can come and we get caught up in their own personal agendas . . .

So it was important for me that the core of it remained people who were truly dedicated in working in that area, rather than just sort of advising, or with personal profiles that they wanted to develop. [Laughter] So, that really was key and that helped. That was one of the reasons why the committee had such positive energy because it was made up of people who were used to doing the work, rather than people who were used to telling others what to do. Because the committee members themselves were willing to do so much work, that won over staff that were just blown away by the work that was being done.
I then asked Jane if she felt the broader context influenced the systemic homophobia she detected within the bureaucracy of the Vancouver School Board. Were, for example, VSB trustees or management worried that there would be, for instance, be protestors from the religious right at board meetings, or death threats like the teachers involved in the Surrey book-banning case experienced?

I have no doubt that that was a concern. I found that whole three year period interesting because I kept thinking at some point there would be a huge public reaction about what we were doing. I think it would have been likely that it would have been an imported reaction [from outside of Vancouver. However,] one of the reasons why it didn’t happen wasn’t so much because Vancouver is “so much more sophisticated,” which was [what a] number of people told me. “Well, of course [it wouldn’t be a problem here] . . .”. But I think it was just a strange set of coincidences – that being there was the murder of Jomar Lanot\textsuperscript{11} that came up right during that period of time, and because of community organizing around that, the whole focus came around racism and what is the school board doing about racism – which is another thing that’s so frustrating, because we moved so slowly on that stuff it was really, really painful. And that wasn’t because of political will, but because of “organizational difficulties” at the school board.

It was really, really frustrating. There would be all this media there at our [board] meetings . . . you were there! The advisory committee would come forward with all this stuff around policy which was groundbreaking stuff, and trustees would talk about this, and how great it was, and the media didn’t report about it.

It was good in that we were able to get that work done without being under that incredible glare, and that in itself to really get things done at school level, and do the training, and people being as receptive as they were. If it had been tied to some political grandstanding, there would have been some resistance to it, and it would have been seen as part of some outside political agenda. But the negative side of it is that the vast majority of people don’t know that it happened. And that had a negative impact in the [2005] election.

Jane’s description of these events do not come from the position of educator, she comments, but as someone who initially became interested in public education politics as a parent of a child with special needs and seeing a role for herself to play in that capacity,
but also as a queer-identifying woman who was willing to build a political platform inclusive of queer/LGBTQetc. issues in education and ended up being able to implement that platform. The mechanics and lived experience of developing antihomophobia or broadly queer/LGBTQetc.-related policy are not reflected in Lugg (2006) or other literature related to school policy. Indeed, Jane’s emphasis on community instigation and subsequent direct involvement of community to achieve a change is also something absent from Fullan (2001) and other dominant educational leadership literature. Specifically, I am thinking of literature where the concept of a public constituency making requests that are listened to, respected, and implemented is not really considered. This is important if one understands part of a “queer-friendly” school system to be one that meaningfully engages non-normative individuals by making space within decision-making processes.

In this set of circumstances, as Jane describes them, a number of things occurred first, however – or, to avoid a linear representation, contributed to a context that evolved in a way that allowed for our work to occur as it did. One piece of this complex situation, for example, involved the Outreach Coalition having to organize itself, and successfully accessing the system – a system that arguably contributed to some members of the coalition being minoritized in the first place and, in some cases, allowed them to be treated with excessive inappropriateness for a period of time. Whatever the exact specifics were of this happening (e.g.: an ally among the elected COPE trustees of the time, someone in management who was willing to point them in the right direction, enough of a sense of entitlement that they could put their views forward without assistance), their efforts overlapped with enough of the other efforts. These other efforts
were either in process (e.g.: the one or two GSAs already in existence, the work of GALE-BC provincially, BCTF antihomophobia efforts, the work of individual educators in classrooms, advocacy in the outside community, non-queer/LGBTQetc.-specific counseling support) or in waiting (e.g.: COPE’s platform from 1999, good intentions across the school community that needed “permission” via board policy to develop, resources directed elsewhere that could be put towards these efforts). Then a whole other chain of possibilities was initiated, including a set of bureaucratic processes and involvement of groups and individuals with conflicting commitments and conflicting beliefs that could just have easily led to different results. VESTA, for example, had been boycotting VSB advisory committees for a period at the beginning of the ‘00s, and had only agreed to participate again after the election that saw COPE secure a majority on the school board.

What Jane identifies as being important were the efforts made by trustees, management, and the other stakeholders involved to keep learning from the community, where coalitions are engaged, where concerns by minoritized groups are linked to other efforts to address equity in the system and to a broader platform, and where a plan is put in place with a core group of people willing to see that plan through over a period of time. The initial impact that Jane describes in Perelle (2004, March 4) – that is, administrators changing their stance as they see where the trustees are heading, and the accompanying comfort level improvement among teachers – is somewhat inflated, I think. In my view, there would be no way of assessing that within only a few weeks of the policy being adopted – especially since it take a tremendous amount of time for information to get out to everyone involved in such a large system, or for people to
understand how it involves them. That is work that will never be entirely “complete.” But Jane’s comments to XtraWest, however over-optimistic, did foreshadow what administrators were to tell us months later when their training sessions began, and what we were hearing from school communities from both in and outside Vancouver.

What started in earnest at this point was a parallel track of implementation within the VSB, and use of that momentum to bear pressure outside of the district.

“Queer-friendly schools” and “positive change”: Initial considerations

It can be argued that, for the most part, what is described above is in keeping with the predominant takes on queer/LGBTIQetc. education-activism described in the literature. The VSB policy, in particular, states that the VSB will provide support for “LGBTIQ students and employees” for them to learn and work in a positive, inclusive environment free from discrimination and harassment. It commits the VSB to developing leadership capacity in the district with the view to pro-actively address inclusion for these students and employees, as well as providing on-going training and professional development opportunities for principals, management, counselors, and other teachers in key areas. It encourages the identification of a “Safe Contact Person” in every elementary school, secondary school, and adult education centre, as well as encourages the formation or continued support of Gay-Straight Alliances. The policy refers to the development and/or purchasing of “LGBTQ-inclusive” learning resources in multiple languages for classrooms and school libraries. It declares VSB support for “LGBTQ-identifying” employees who are out in the workplace, and respect for the confidentiality for those who are not. Additionally, it calls upon schools to increase the involvement of youth in the related issues, to increase links between schools and the
queer/LGBTTITQetc. "community," and to increase the links between schools and families with parents in same-sex relationships. On paper, these read largely as being in keeping with predominant takes on queer/LGBTTITQetc. "supports and services" proposed by Sears (1994), MacDougall and Clarke (2004), and Asher (2005), among others.

For the majority of the advisory committee, my understanding is that the main concerns were similar to those identified by Walton (2004) and Marchildon (2006) — namely, homophobic bullying, and schools being ill-equipped to support marginalized students who identify or are identified as queer/LGBTTITQetc. These concerns were reflected in the arguments and recommendations of the Outreach Coalition, in the work previously done by GALE-BC, and other school districts whose work we were expanding upon. It was also, to be honest, how we were largely framing the issues. Thus, a major emphasis, in the policy, in the action plan, and the initial trainings for principals were along the themes of safety, equity, and inclusion. We were given what might have only been a singular opportunity for something unprecedented in the district (and which we were grateful for). We took that opportunity to let principals and vice-principals know what their responsibilities were, to walk them through a policy that would give them "permission" to be proactive in this work, to remind them of the legal obligations of the VSB to be safe and accountable of its students’ actions, and to let them work in groups through scenarios based upon a number of situations that had arisen in Vancouver or other BC school districts involving students, staff, and parents.

I am, however, concerned that the predominant discourses of safety, equity, and inclusion framing queer/LGBTTITQetc. issues in education continues to frame
individuals in terms of oppression and victimization, and tends to reinforce hegemonic power structures rather than dismantling them – normalizing what is different, rather than disrupting the “normal” (Harwood, 2004; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt, 2004; Yoshino, 2006). I argue that this emphasis on acceptability serves effectively as a barrier to transformative practices in and out of schools. While the logic of visibility speaks a language intelligible to policy such as the VSB’s, it often leads to identity rather than to any deconstructive consciousness (Edelman, 2004; Roof, 1996). Furthermore, the logic of visibility exists within the logic of the heterosexual matrix through forms of support and tolerance that are merely symbolic and reproductive, and therefore on its own does not challenge the power relations that produce identities (Butler, 2004b). What I will continue to argue in this thesis’s examination of the “change” process within this context is that the silence on the discursive construction of queer/LGBTITQetc. identities as truths calls into question the very recommendations predicated upon those constructs. This makes any attempt at “positive change” problematic.

On the other hand, while certainly a purpose of providing training to administrators and school counsellors (adults with a certain amount of power invested in their positions, both legally and culturally) was to encourage/require that they “do” something for “them,” it was not all an emphasis on the at-risk mono-identified queer youth-victim requiring adult intervention either. When the training occurred within a year of the policy being adopted, the training participants and the facilitators were able to discuss many of the positive things that were happening already. As well, the majority of the participants articulated a need to know more – about how to be supportive of
members of the school community transitioning genders, in particular, as well as how they could be respectful and actively supportive of students and staff openly identifying as lesbian or gay, and responding to questions and concerns from parents.

**Window: Training for administrators and counsellors**

A few of the other original members of the committee and I spent a couple days over the Christmas vacation 2004 to come up with an outline of what employee training might look like. Attaining consensus on this issue was difficult, as we each wanted to emphasize different things. What we did agree on was the principle of *everyone* attending at least one session — and by everyone, we meant teachers, principals, vice-principals, support workers, secretaries, maintenance staff, and all other employees in the district.

Discussions to get mandatory training in place for all employee groups did not result in an arrangement for this to occur, however. The financial implication of providing a mandatory workshop during work hours for the five thousand teachers in the district was not considered feasible by management — and the unions were not prepared to sign an agreement that would mandate employees to attend work-related training on their own time, or to undermine individual teachers’ autonomy in establishing their own professional development goals. Rather than wait until those issues were resolved, though, the decision was made by management to accept our recommendation for administrators and counsellors to attend a mandatory half-day training right away.

After some delays, the first administrator/counsellor trainings occurred in early 2005. Here are excerpts from my notes after the first sessions:

**2005 February 28 — Antihomophobia Workshop 1**

*A.M. group*

small number of people. six from secondary and five from elementary we were expecting more. presenters for a.m.: V (policy + legal issues), S (student issues), Glen (staff issues), N & R (questions). very positive mood. questions: appropriate terminology to use, what’s with the word “queer” (S: reclamation, youth use it. Glen: concept of fluidity), is it a choice? if we say it’s “fluid” does that not imply choice?

**2005 February 28 — Antihomophobia Workshop 2**

*P.M. group*

presenters for p.m.: N (policy), S (students), Glen (staff), R (questions). very different mood. people trickled in. Two male secondary admin complained about being “forced” to be here — “We’re doing this already!” said that if the teachers are complaining about having to go to
workshops, why are we taking admin away from important work at their school? one of these men lightened up later, while one expressed disapproval about “laying this on staff.” I was really mad at having justify to them why they were here. Group brightened up during discussions, and we covered a lot of ground. Mostly positive feedback on forms, except a comment about “time wasted” going through the policy in detail, and another about forcing people away on a Monday. S___ was very impressive. “I’ve been working to make schools safe for 27 years,” he’d start. Out at work since day one, figuring that hiding in the workplace takes up too much energy. R___ let everyone know that she was happy to answer any trans questions “from National Geographic to National Enquirer…”

2005 March 2 — Antihomophobia Workshop 3&4
a.m. and p.m.
Much larger groups in bigger room at Masonic Hall. Morning group very energetic and positive. James brought along BCTF and GALE-BC book resources and “book-talked” the group through a few of them. (A follow-up of our March 1 workshop for teacher-librarians). Approximately 30 people at each 3 hour workshop. Some queer-identified admin present. Jane Bouey present at both. Very supportive crowds at both.

2005 March 10 — Antihomophobia Workshop 5&6
a.m. and p.m.
VSB room 400. Glen, R___, N___, V___, S___ (plus Jane in a.m.). Morning group of nearly 60 (!), afternoon about 40. Some questions about confidentiality. Questions about internalized homophobia . . .

For the most part, our sense as training facilitators was that this was the first conversation the training participants had ever had at any length on any of these issues, either with their administrator peers or with their staff at school. Yet, at the same time, the majority of the participants expressed their belief (either verbally at the workshops, or on the feedback forms) that the policy and the workshops filled a serious need that been overlooked – that they had been wanting to do something, but now there was the weight of the Vancouver School Board behind them and some hope for a coordinated effort across the district.
Concerns about one-off trainings such as these have been raised, which we as facilitators were aware of. For example, referring to similar efforts in the classroom, Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh (2004) argue that such moments of inclusion often encourage a separating out of those in the “added group” (p. 155) but do not complicate difference – which is not to say that “introductory moves” (p. 155) are not important, but that they have limited results. Furthermore, by focusing the introductory moves on administrators, not only do we reify existing authority structures (principal as “leader”), but we also deliver our message to a group that – while some queer-identifying administrators were present – is predominantly comprised of individuals who are normative racially, physically, and socio-economically. These are significant limitations of the training, as important as we felt it was.

Discussion of the VSB policy and data

Beyond the training, though, I return here to how Jane and I frame(d) “positive change” in our work described above, I will begin with the policy – of which we were only two of many authors – and then expand from there. As identified a few paragraphs ago, the policy focuses specifically on safety and inclusion, particularly in its statements that the VSB will: provide support for LGBTTITQ students and employees for them to learn and work in a positive, inclusive environment free from discrimination and harassment; develop leadership capacity in the district to pro-actively address the above, and to continue to ameliorate conditions; and, encourage the establishment of a “Safe Contact Person” in every elementary school, secondary school, and adult education centre. There is also a recognition built into these three points, though, that “expertise”/knowledge is not doing to develop evenly across school communities – thus
the focus on building capacity, and encouraging even small numbers of individuals in each school who will be visible as an ally. The capacity-building and sharing of leadership roles also appear as themes in this next set of points in the policy that state that the VSB will: provide on-going training and professional development opportunities for principals, management, counselors, and other teachers in key areas; encourage Gay-Straight Alliances or similar clubs in every secondary school; and, increase involvement of youth in the related issues. The other points in the policy pertain to the development and provision of inclusive resources for both classroom and library use, making sure materials are available in multiple languages, building connections with families with parents in same-sex relationships, communicating the policy broadly, and supporting employees who are either out in their workplace or wish to maintain confidentiality about their sexual orientation or gender identity. It also makes specific reference to identities other than the usual LGBT — namely, two-spirit, intersex, and questioning — and was written with the intention of meaningfully acting on its claims to support trans-identified individuals.

The action plan that was adopted along with the policy was written with ambitious timelines — too rushed, it appears now, four years later. The policy was distilled into five immediate goals, which were: Develop and disseminate policy / update and revise existing policies to ensure their compatibility with and inclusion of the LGBTQ policy; Increase youth participation; Educate entire school community; Develop, adapt and integrate resources and ensure student access; and, Ensure there is leadership within the district to successfully implement policy. These were then broken into a number of actions, with a timeline and approximate costing for the 2004-2005 school
year. While most of the items in the action plan have now been accomplished, or are part of on-going work in the form of support, it is from here and from the policy from which our notion of “queer-friendly schools,” within the bureaucratic framework at least, was defined — again: safety, equity, inclusion, recognition, with the additions of youth-driven initiatives, community involvement, and action. All important things, we believed — especially the action part, as the policy itself would not make change on its own.

I cannot claim, however, that we collectively accepted essentialism for the sake of securing a policy — or that adopting the policy as is was a strategic act accompanied with the hope of fostering something less essentialist in the long-run. While I recall many discussions about the term “queer,” and about fluid conceptions of sexuality and gender, they did not become centre-pieces of the policy itself. Given the eclectic group of people I was working with on the advisory committee, and within management, and at VESTA, decision-making ended up being a compromise-based process — which also became a process of trying to balance diverging discourses. Again, despite my previously-mentioned preference to self-identify as “queer,” that word did not appear in the approved version of the policy.

Medicalized discourses around trans-identities were also in frequent circulation — and allowed some weight given that members of the advisory committee who identified as being part of the trans community subscribed to that medicalized discourse. I raise neither of those two examples to put a value statement on the validity of other point, but rather to emphasize that the who of policy production “enables the naming of values inherent in things that are seemingly technical (such as policy) and the foregrounding of a radical democracy (which engages all people in a public process) as a legitimate basis for
policy’s authority” (Gale, 2003, p. 52) — if such a thing is obtainable in a given context. Policy (down to the very words that are used) comes very much from the people involved and the discourses circulated by those individuals.

The who and the how of policy-making are “dialectically related” (Gale, 2003, p. 52). In this case, a number of layers of discourse/participation are in play — not in the sense of one being at the centre and others influencing, but rather several heterogeneous layers in concert with one another. At the very least, one can identify that the context involved a group of individuals who constituted an advisory committee and developed something through the lenses and discourses they brought with them in response to recommendations from the groups/communities they represented. By extension, the context also included stakeholder groups with their own discourses in play and consisting of a number of individuals with their own lenses and lives outside of those groups from which beliefs and understandings are derived. Also present were additional individuals at the bureaucratic levels of the school board, including members of the public and other representatives from the stakeholder groups, some of whom may not have been party to previous discussions about what was being proposed but will look at those proposals through their understanding. As well, there were management and trustees who, by the privilege and authority by virtue of their positions (and our tacit consent to recognize that privilege and authority), could approve, change, or deny whatever the advisory committee put forward.

These groups and individuals do not have equal status or voice within the given context, thus the deliberative process that was used cannot be depicted as truly democratic or egalitarian. The policy game in this context includes, as I have listed
above, politicians and bureaucrats who can invite or uninvite whichever groups or individuals they like to the advisory committee – other than the union representatives who, through collective bargaining, had obtained the right to sit on committees and appoint their respective representatives\textsuperscript{xxix}. Thus, the power of the electorate during trustee elections notwithstanding, an “allowed” method of consensus with a degree of community participation and with trustee/management final-approval became the change process with regard to bringing the policy forward, building initial support for it, and conducting the initial stages of implementation. The \textit{wording} of the policy, then, is a result of debate, deliberation, and compromise coming out of a very particular context. There are failures, misses and lapses that can be derived from this particular change process – though, I argue, not entirely unremediable through implementation and in combination with other changes in schools.

The crucial next step, as seen by Jane and me once the administrator training was underway, was maintaining the focus on action, as opposed to letting the policy be something that came across an email once or may have been randomly come across on the VSB website like many other policies. This is not an attack against the worth of the written word (as, I confess, I continued to widely circulate the policy in printed form for a few years afterwards in order to keep it visible); rather, it is an acknowledgement of just how bombarded teachers, principals, and other people working schools are by paperwork and information coming from internal and external sources.

A written policy can be ignored or overlooked. It can also be picked up and interpreted in a multitude of ways in a school district the size of Vancouver – with seven thousand employees, sixty thousand students, and at least ten thousand parents. What
could we do to influence, then, how much of that policy becomes common knowledge in the district, how is it understood, and how is it used? What ensures that efforts associated with a new initiative attain sustainability in a school district the size of Vancouver, especially one that – even with the most essentialist reading – did challenge everyday practice of the time in most elementary and secondary schools?

The trustees’ decision to create a teacher-consultant position at the school district level came out of those concerns for sustainability and implementation, adding an additional component of institutionalization in work that, heretofore in Vancouver (and still currently in other jurisdictions), had been subaltern. I had suggested the possibility of such a position in an off-handed way one afternoon after one of the workshops for administrators, thinking that it would be a role perfect for one of my colleagues on the advisory committee.

The consequences of that further institutionalization, positive and negative, are discussed in the next two chapters before being considered, along with the content of this chapter, in the analysis that concludes this project.
Chapter 5 – Policy implementation and reflections as a consultant

In this chapter, I concentrate on the experiences of Jane Bouey, Jody Polukoshko, and me during the phase of implementation of the VSB’s new policy from the spring of 2005 through August 2006. The chapter is structured in such a way that the events are recounted from several different perspectives. This chapter relies upon both the participatory elements and autoethnographic components. The latter of these is embedded into the discussion as well as in the form of windows. I begin with a window pertaining the period of time from January 2004 through the fall of 2005. This is followed by material derived from an interview I conducted with Jody Polukoshko in August 2006, which is interspersed with additional material derived from my interview with Jane in August 2006, journal notes I made in June of 2005, and additional observations and analysis of Jody’s interview in relation to data presented earlier. This analysis moves into the examination of the balance in the data between an essentialist politics of minority interest and a politics of difference and antinormativity which will continue into the subsequent chapter. This present chapter concludes with rereadings, as per Kumashiro (2002), of the ways in which this project’s participants and I defined and pursued “positive change” and “queer-friendly schools” within the context of the VSB.

Window: January 2004 – Fall 2005

I already had a history of correspondence with the premier and various ministers of education on the topic of queer-friendly schools in general. Replies, when received, would be canned responses. The delayed release of the Safe Schools Task Force’s report (Mayencourt, Locke, & McMahon, 2003), which arrived in March 2004, provided a fresh opportunity to engage the province on these issues. A few of the committee members, as previously mentioned, were also doing queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist work beyond Vancouver, primarily via the BCTF or GALE-BC. The report, though, presented the
first occasion that we, as a committee, turned our thoughts to what was happening provincially.

In keeping with previous reports on school safety in BC by groups such as the McCreary Centre Society (1999), the Safe Schools Task Force identified homophobic harassment as a concern raised in almost every school district around the province (Mayencourt, Locke, & McMahon, 2003). However, despite its specific findings on the issue, the report’s recommendations did not specifically address homophobia. Instead, the task force framed its recommendations in general terms such as “bullying.”

Having the VSB policy adopted resulted in members of the advisory committee being asked for our opinions on the province’s work. Comparisons had already started to be made. As Perelle (2004, March 4) writes: “Maybe it’s time to share the VSB’s new queer policy with the rest of the province” (p. 5). Jane also had the following to say in a letter to the editor she wrote in her capacity as a trustee:

This Safe Schools Report will not help make our schools safer. And, in fact, the Liberals’ underfunding [of public schools] has unnecessarily made safer schools a much more difficult goal. I emphasize “unnecessarily” because this government, which has a surplus, has said that where they spend money is a choice. The Liberals have chosen not to take the steps necessary to make schools safe for queer youth.

In Vancouver, since it is a priority, we will try and find ways to meet the needs of queer youth. What will other school districts do when faced with a provincial government that provides neither the funding nor the leadership to ensure these needs are met? (Bouey, 2004, p. 4)

I was not entirely comfortable focusing on the BC Liberals since the previous NDP government had had ample opportunities to act during their decade in office. Peter and Murray Corren’s human rights complaint was launched under an NDP government, after all.

Attempts at non-partisanship, though, were lost once a public war of words started. In response to a private email I sent to him in which I was critical of the task force’s recommendations, MLA Mayencourt publicly identified Jane and me as part of “a cabal of Liberal government haters” (see Kirkby, 2004)xxx who were the real ones failing youth. I was incensed. On one hand we have a provincial government that releases a report identifying homophobia as a major problem in its schools; on the other hand, the same government is complicit in a school district’s successive appeals against a former student trying to hold his school district accountable for failing to protect him from homophobia.
In the meantime, we began distributing the VSB’s new policy around the province through various channels, and through our respective organizations.

I also began sharing the advisory committee’s work by speaking at VESTA General Meetings and Staff Rep Assemblies (which have representation from all the elementary schools in the city), and by writing articles for the local’s newsletter – the start, of sorts, of being perceived as “the expert,” instead of as someone who was working with and for a community. This increasingly made me uncomfortable because input from the Executive Committee aside, throughout the whole process of policy-development I was mostly relying upon what I thought was best – without, for example, having other queer-identifying teachers to bounce ideas off, or to rein me in when needed. Yes, the VSB advisory committee had representation from various groups – but it was just one forum for discussion. Also, I was specifically interested in examining how queer-identifying Vancouver teachers and allies could support one another beyond the parameters of policy development, or outside of the bureaucratic structures that marginalized certain ways of “being” queer/LGBTQ, etc.

Thus, in the spring of 2004 I booked a room at the VESTA office, asked the staff to send out a fax to teachers at every worksite, and then hoped someone would come. Three people did. Jody Polukoshko, a primary teacher whom I had not met before, was one of them.

With the encouragement of the VESTA president of the time, Jody and I began to set monthly meetings for groups of teachers, slowly building in numbers once the 2004-2005 school year started. VESTA also granted us formal standing committee status, which meant that the chair of our new committee would have voice and vote on the Executive Committee. It was the official welcoming-in to the union decision-making process – and a commitment to something longer-term in the organization. Jody and I developed terms of reference with the committee, focusing on supporting queer teachers and allies in their work as teachers and as potential activists.

Meanwhile, the VSB advisory committee organized a second Queer-Friendly Schools Conference for October 2004 – this time receiving broad coverage from local media and increased participation from youth and educators outside the Vancouver area.

A representative from the Ministry of Education attended the session I co-facilitated with a representative from the British Columbia Institute for Safe Schools. I was not expecting her, and was nervous since part of our presentation was critical of the ministry for not taking a role in addressing school-based harassment and discrimination based upon real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. The other workshops participants became heated, demanding to know what leadership the ministry was prepared to take in light of the findings of the recent Safe Schools Task Force, and in light of what had happened to Azmi Jubran.
and others in recent years. Many of these people were from out of district, pleased with what was beginning to happen in Vancouver, but angry that their school districts were not going in a similar direction.

Afterwards, the ministry representative spoke with me about her perspective from within the Ministry of Education – that there were, she said, good people there eager to do this work, but that the real challenge was linking this work to whatever initiatives the Minister of Education of the day was keen to implement. "It is as if the minister, whoever it is, can only prioritize on five fingers," she said, "and whatever you bring forward has to connect somehow to one of those fingers – otherwise it gets lost."

The policy now passed, the advisory committee continued to meet on a monthly basis as an advisory committee, under the new name of "Pride Advisory Committee," focusing now on emerging issues and on implementing the action plan within the limited amount of volunteer time we were able to contribute. Jody began attending on an occasional basis as well.

When the decision was made by the trustees in the spring of 2005 to create the antihomophobia position to begin that coming fall, Jody and decided to apply to the part-time position as a team. We got the job.

Fall 2005 – Summer 2006: From Jody’s point of view

In August 2006, Jody Polukoshko and I met to discuss the year that had just passed for us sharing the new antihomophobia teacher-consultant position at the Vancouver School Board office. As it was a part-time position further divided between two people, we were each also working elsewhere in the school district. When not in her teacher-consultant role, Jody continued employment as a classroom teacher, and volunteered as the chairperson of the VESTA Pride Standing Committee started the year before. At the time of the interview, I had left the classroom entirely, and was dividing my work time between my teacher-consultant role at the VSB and union work.

WHO MAKES "POSITIVE CHANGE"?

At the beginning of the interview, Jody expresses her reservations about what she characterizes as "any sort of mainstream movement" – for instance, movements that occur within institutional settings such as schools, or where there is representation from
legislative bodies. These, she argues, are frequently dominated by groups that “are not the best representation” or are not interested in problematizing identity. For instance, Jody refers to an occurrence at the BCTF Annual General Meeting in March 2006, where she and I were delegates for VESTA, after the BCTF Aboriginal Committee finished a presentation on colonialism and racism in schools. A set of recommendations addressing access and equity for aboriginal learners and teachers were moved as motions, and Jody remembered that

a gay man got up and said “What about gays and lesbians?” That was so unbelievably inappropriate on a number of levels, but it was also exemplary of how little looking-within that’s happening: “Quick! Somebody else is getting something so we have to jump on it and serve our marginalization.”

Here, Jody expresses discontent with activism that is exclusively outward-looking and coupled with what she characterizes as activists’ tendency to put their marginalized identity at the top of their understanding of the world. Jody’s critique of single-subject activism is a theme which relates to her own involvement with championing trans issues as an ally. The activism seeking “positive change” Jody believes in has to do more with being an ally than as a direct beneficiary. She does not name queer as her primary identity, nor had she identified queer as a place that needed to be focused on until she started working with the trans community through her social circles. It was then that she noticed that there was this group of people who are the most marginalized and have the least amount of voice and have no representation and there’s also six or seven discourses going around about trans stuff and some of them are really offensive [...].

That’s the part of the work about me being an ally. It’s not about my own community, or about my own identity, but it’s about being an ally. Like, I think I’m someone I know who has a pretty good grasp of it, and has the power and the privilege to make change.
Jody’s concern pertains to encouraging broader community access and representation — regardless of one’s privilege to make change. In the case of the VSB Pride Advisory Committee from a practical standpoint, much depends upon people coming after work, taking time off, being retired, not having to worry about childcare, belonging to organizations that can spare them for a couple of hours, or even being aware that there is something to attend and contribute. In the previous chapter, I stated my concerns about the “policy game” in the VSB context because of the authority of politicians and bureaucrats to enact deliberate gatekeeping practices before one becomes a member of the advisory committee — whether or not one gets appointed by an organization, for example, or whether or not a given organization is invited to participate. Further to this, even when one does gain access, one must navigate through the contradictions in ideas pertaining to the purposes of the advisory committee, which languages are used, the other committee members’ philosophical groundings, and the effects of bureaucratic hierarchies.

Jody echoes my concerns, and argues further that even “successful” navigation of the above does not guarantee meaningful participation or continuing attendance — even if committee meetings are potential vehicles for change. She says, by way of example, that she made efforts to get trans activists she knew that work for the VSB to come out to meetings. Unfortunately, she continues,

they’re not interested because they know what that looks like [...] I say, “Here’s an opportunity to come and make this committee more representative, your voice is needed” — that kind of stuff. But the one person who did come only came out to one meeting. Some of the other people in the room were behaving really poorly and he never came back. And that’s really sad to me.
Those exclusions are important to rectify, Jody argues, because the “behaving poorly” (e.g. excessive space-taking by those with more privilege – manifesting itself, for example, in the form of poor chairing or aggressiveness) serves to marginalize further the most marginalized a group of activists such as the VSB Pride Advisory Committee purports to serve. Despite efforts to the contrary, it also results in continuing (in the main) the silence around non-Western sexual/gender-identity conceptualizations (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997; Chou, 2000) and emphasizing identity constructs based on the relation between individuals’ experience(s)/choice(s) and the positionality of their erotic partner(s). The effect of this continues what Szalacha (2005) refers to as the reification of the “present hegemonic ideologies” (p. 85). What was not immediately clear was what was to be done (given the bureaucratic limitations) once this problem is identified. The creation of the VESTA Pride Committee was done, in part, to rectify this – to bring more people into the conversation, as I identified in this chapter’s opening window, than those most likely to access or be given access to bureaucratic structures within the VSB.

But even when that is done, moving the education-activism into the bureaucratic structure changes the relationship between the participants. Jody brings up difficulties she personally has found with doing activist work within the specific context of her job. For example, this particular situation involved being paid to undertake work that is advised by a voluntary body. Jody and I found that relationship being misunderstood as one where those who are being paid are seen as the experts rather than the volunteers being the ones bringing their expertise. Thus, we continued to make efforts to involve broad communities of people. However, given the paternalistic structures of the North American public education systems, the education-activism as job risks reproducing the
phenomenon present in the educational leadership and educational change literature, which relies upon an equation where “education leaders” equals school administrator or someone else perceived to be in a quasi-management role (Ahnee-Benham & Napier, 2002). This reproduction remained a (potential) problem, built-in to the framework being used, regardless of work being done to engage others. The response to this dilemma comes in the form of a balancing act.

“POSITIVE CHANGE,” FINDING BALANCE, PRIVILEGE, AND BEING AN ALLY

Jody notes the broadening the scope of venues her work as a consultant for the Vancouver School Board and her involvement with VESTA has allowed her to work in. Yet she recognizes too that this increases her privilege and the perception of her as “the expert” even further. Still, she feels fortunate to be in the position that she finds herself in so that she can pursue changes that have become important to her in ways that she was not able to as a classroom teacher. For instance, being able to access a variety of schools as opposed to working in working in a single school community situation.

However, the balancing act needs to be acknowledged and tended-to. Jody attempts to balances her newfound “pseudo-celebrity” status, in both her work-related and broader community activism, with what she views as “appropriate” use of privilege. The first two elements of “appropriateness,” as described by Jody, involves basing her activism around resources:

I think that if people are coming to me and have nowhere else to go, then I can do that but not lose sight of the end goal of connecting people to resources and supporting things that are already happening. But at the same time too it’s getting easier [...] The recognition of the work that I do in that area is helpful in that more people are being connect to resources, whereas otherwise [they] would just be using a list-serv or something. [...] In a resource sense, I see myself using my privilege in an appropriate way.
She also acknowledges the importance of respecting existing work in a given community in determining “appropriateness,” and thus the importance of continuous consultation with the community one is serving – the opposite, clearly, to claims of visionary-style change-making described by Fullan (2001), who puts the “moral purpose” (p. 2) as emanating from a singular leader or elite of leaders to be then passed on to the non-leaders in a school community to then implement the administrator’s “change.” Resource, community-driven “positive change,” as described by Jody, comes from a different paradigm – one which also stresses the importance of being an ally.

Reflecting upon a situation where she made school preparations for a student moving into the district after the student transitioned from one gender to another over the summer, Jody notes that her confidence in her advocacy and referral abilities, she nevertheless continued to make efforts to do her homework by connecting with individuals who had been in similar situations. This was crucial to her identification of herself as a “good ally” – not only for the (district- and gender-) transitioning youth and family involved, but also for the people in the school and board office who needed it, and those in the community for whom she was protecting the integrity of their information and experience. It was not her “moral purpose” (Fullan, 2002, p. 2) that was paramount, from her point of view – rather, it was that of a broader base of people.

On the other hand, I am suggesting that one has to acknowledge work done previously by communities and by individuals in establishing a context in which “appropriate” use of privilege, as described by Jody, can occur. The accommodations and provision of space on that student’s terms (e.g. pronoun use, choice of changing-rooms
and washrooms, style of dress, confidentiality or support for public self-identification as transgender) were not just made available spontaneously.

The process Jody describes also brings up the difficult dilemma of balancing discourses. For example, Jody refers to “old” and “more offensive” discourses around trans issues. Medicalized discourses have historically served to regulate people’s bodies (Foucault, 1980). Medicalized discourses with regard to trans identities, while widely used (if only provisionally by some in order to access services), remain problematic (Butler, 2004a). I view this problem as being compounded, in an education context, because study and activism under queer/LGBTITQetc. banners have habitually obscured trans identities (Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998). In the “appropriate” process, then, how does Jody attempt to balance discourses around a given issue that is routinely overlooked – even points of view within the community she might not agree with?

I have lots of conversations with people. My approaches to things never lean towards one person’s point of view, or one person’s experience. We try to find a way to make everything make sense, instead of having one discourse over another. Again, it’s always an ongoing learning thing.

From my point of view, this answer is not entirely satisfying, as there will always be an element of selectivity involved, despite one’s best efforts to the contrary – for practical reasons (e.g.: access to individuals within a community who are willing to advise, the range of diversity of opinions within a given community, timelines, geographical, competing work demands), and because of one’s unintentional censorship for reasons not necessarily understood. On the other hand, in referring to there always being “ongoing learning” required, Jody acknowledges that understandings are never complete, always in reformation.
AGENCY AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR BUILDING “QUEER-FRIENDLY” SCHOOLS

In the preceding sections, Jody alludes to what she views as part of what is “positive change” within the school system: that is, what could be described as the proliferation of individualized self-identities and self-understandings, as opposed to the goals of tolerance and inclusion. Agency, she argues, is key to this proliferation.

... we need to continue to be giving people the ability to name their own identity and to talk about that – to use whatever terms they want to use to describe themselves, and to not put a hierarchy on that. [...] And so for people to be standing up and saying that this discourse or this discipline paradigm doesn’t reflect my identity or my life, that’s okay.

Her vision of a “queer-friendly” school system, then, is one that would have a space for everything – not like if you want to get resources then you have to identify this way, or if you’re trans then you have to have surgery, or those kinds of things about who we are in order to fit into that group. And to see everything as agency. Agency: that’s the monomer\(^{xxxii}\) of my politics.

Jody offers a description of agency whereby individuals have meaningful ability to name themselves and are perceived as making choices based on what is “best for them.” This description of agency acknowledges “that people’s leadership about their own lives is way more important than any paternalistic ideas about what’s best for other people.” I argue, though, that this raises particular problems given the current conservative structure of North American schools, which for the most part are predicated on a hierarchy of adults over youth and of management over professionals (Hyslop-Marginson, 2005; Rofes, 2005). I see the net effect or scope of that agency continuing to be mitigated by public schools such as they are – presenting difficulties for the proliferation of self-identities or for individual creative choices away from the normative. This coincides with Jody’s understandings that while someone could be comfortable
naming their identity in the community outside of the context of school, within the parameters of school a different situation presents itself. Jody argues that adults need to fight for a school system where adults with a certain amount of privilege use that privilege for the benefit of the agency of youth and those in the system who are marginalized.

Giving an example from her experience as a consultant, Jody refers to the involvement of a secondary school student who attended one of her workshops and then became involved in our work:

[I] started talking to him about his experience with the work that we’re doing, and he was, you know, nominally appreciative. And then, I asked him what he thought would be better, and he had some ideas. And so I asked him to help plan the next event because it would be more representative and more responsive – and so we’ve had lots of conversation and meetings where he offers his leadership I take it even if it’s not necessarily that he knows best about his community or that that his community will be more readily generalized than mine will for the needs of students.

Jody does not presume, however, that she is giving agency, but rather using her privilege to provide a broader space for the agency of others to be exercised. However, the capacity to connect for this to happen depends upon the context and individuals involved. As Jody puts it:

I get the feeling that [the youth referred to above] has a fair amount of privilege in the world. He’s a visible minority, but a [socio-economically well-off] Westside kid. He’s an English speaker, and his class training has taught him that his opinion is important. So it’s a bit easier. I’ve continued to show him that his opinion is important.

But having kids from [an inner city school] show up and be like “This program doesn’t respond to my needs and here’s what I’m going to do” is going to be harder because of responding to all of that stuff that’s going on in their lives. But I think there is space, and there is opportunity for that.
It is in this sense that one of the difficulties in doing district work emerges when one strongly believes in grassroots organizing as being the most meaningful and effective. For Jody, every school is its own community. In contrast, work being done at the district level often feels disjointed — though it “is nice,” she says, to be able to “throw down policy and go ‘Ha! There!’” Jody believes that activists need to maintain faith in and high expectations for grassroots work, and contrasts it with the compromises made at the district level in terms of momentum and ownership. The difficulty, however, rests in determining what is “grassroots” and what is not. From my perspective, the VSB Pride Advisory Committee began, in a sense, as an extension of Outreach Coalition — but was, from its inception, within the system.

LINKING COMMUNITY TO BUREAUCRACY, RISK-TAKING IN BUREAUCRACY

The advisory committee, in my mind, could never make claims of being “grassroots,” despite attempts to connect with as many outside voices as possible or to invite people to participate in a process that was largely bureaucratic. That bureaucratic component, in turn, dissuaded many people (in particular, youth) who did attend from participating over the long term. It also limited the number of individuals involved in conversations about how the work we were doing could be used to influence outside bodies — other school districts, certainly, but also in the Ministry of Education.

That does not mean, however, that education-activists working within the bureaucracy cannot then forge links to grassroots communities in order to make “positive change” connected to those communities. It does mean, however, that efforts need to be made beyond what are proposed by Hargreaves & Fink (2000) or Fullan (2001), who do...
not acknowledge an always-in-flux grassroots base for establishing the direction of “positive change.”

Jody is clear in her interview that influencing legislative and governmental change on queer/LGTTITQetc. education issues not a priority for her. This has been demonstrated in the work that I have done with her, and continue to do with her, in terms of dividing the labour associated with our education-activism. External organizations, media, and political/governmental bureaucratic structures were spaces I, as well as Jane, have been comfortable engaging with to create “positive change,” despite the compromises, where Jody has set firmer boundaries on that variety of education-activist practice. She does not, however, posit an either/or approach:

My feelings with working within the system, I want to be as close to the outside as I can be. And my experience in organizing community-based politics for so long means that’s where my success is, that’s what feels closest, that’s what works best for me. But you can’t do that without the other piece. There also has to be the lobbying, the schmoozing with the Ministry, and the writing of letters [...] 

I make note that Jody does attribute an importance to policy created within and for the bureaucracy – even if in the hierarchy of her priorities it does not come at the top. Jody acknowledges that what makes most teachers “feel safer” is policy and structures “telling them it’s ‘okay.’” As such, she argues that education-activists need to be encouraging students and teachers to take risks knowing that they are fully supported; setting potential education-activists up to take risks where they are going to fail is “not okay.” Given the bureaucratic structures and the broader context, though, such risks are becoming easier to surmount. Jody attributes what has been happening in Vancouver schools by way of queer/LGTTITQetc. education-activism as a result of human rights-based discourse
and because some people stood up and took some risks. Some people took some risks and other people didn’t say no. I didn’t think there was a very huge amount of active support for it. I think it was one of those “We got away with it” kind of things, and I think we’re continuing to get away with it. [...] There’s been enough going back to the legislative stuff where people realize that people can’t pick and choose [...] When there’s a court backing that up, it’s hard for individuals to say “Well, I disagree, so I don’t think homos should get rights.” [...] I think that’s the key, especially when it works in our favour.

Part of me is surprised by Jody’s comments about the benefits of essentializing, human rights-based discourse (which she also critiques) and of it working “in our favour” at the present moment. However, while on the one hand, I view the VSB’s policy clearly as an essentialist text which can be limiting (as discussed in the previous chapter), on the other hand, opportunities for radicalism were not limited entirely to being the occasional luxury because of that design and the bureaucratic system that supports it. The policy’s framework did provide a vehicle for moments of radicalism (a term only comprehensible relative to the normative within a given context) to occur — particularly once Jody and I were well into our first year as antihomophobia and diversity consultants for the VSB. We built trust in implementing the more conventional aspects of the policy referring to safety and visibility à la Walton (2006a) and Uribe and Harbeck (1991), and then branched from there.

Jody and I did so, for example, by downplaying materials employing what Sykes (2004) refers to as a “pedagogy of censorship” (e.g. classroom posters admonishing “That’s so gay’ is not okay”, punishing the use of certain speech acts rather than unpacking them), and instead produced and disseminated materials that play on gender normativity — often developing these with youth or with the involvement of multiple groups in the broader community. In our consultant roles, we subverted normative use of
the VSB Education Centre by occupying it as the space for day-long conference on transphobia and homophobia, inviting in youth and teachers as school teams to “take over” the building and participate in workshops and other activities on all floors of the building. Jody, in particular, also worked closely with school community at Byng Secondary School to put on productions of *The Laramie Project*, shortly after the play had been banned from Surrey secondary schools (CBC, 2006), as well as school, neighbourhood, and media events involving the play’s author and the family of Aaron Webster (who had recently been killed in a gay-bashing in Vancouver’s Stanley Park) to explore the links between homophobia, censorship, and violence. The thrust behind that particular work was to involve as many people as possible, and to provide space for proactive queer/LGBTQ/etc.-positive work from within the school community (in its broadest sense) in conversation with the queer/LGBTQ/etc. communities which overlapped the school community and the Vancouver “external” to the school. We also made significant use of the VSB’s communications vehicles (press releases, publications sent to schools, updates on official VSB letterhead, ghostwriting responses to letters for management and trustees on related issues) to continue to widely disseminate messages in multiple languages about the work that was being done, and to incorporate a sensibility challenging of normativity as opposed to writing solely for the logics of visibility and safety -- interventions, we would remind ourselves, have not been demonstrated (Gilbert, 2004; Sears, 2005b) to necessarily have the positive impact that essentialist discourse would have one to believe.
During our conversation, though, Jody articulates several times a concern about staying with this sort of work for too long for fear of losing her radical politics. Then again, she declares that she is leery too that the same thing could happen if she were to stay in the classroom as well:

You know we are doing things that are transformative, but they’re still fairly close within acceptable ideas about youth and sexuality and stuff like that. So, the idea is just to make sure that just because we’re working in the system that we don’t lose sight of the big piece.

In terms of pressures to stay within bounds of “acceptability,” we discuss plans we have had regarding supporting a ’zine for youth involved in secondary school GSAs. Jody had come across a Toronto youth-produced ’zine entitled Queer Asian Youth (2005), and we both remarked how great it would be to see something like that produced by Vancouver students with assistance from the school board. When she first handed it to me, though, she cautioned me that some of it was overtly sexual — and thus something we perhaps would not disseminate ourselves as a model text.

During the interview, Jody remarks that the thing that is important about the Queer Asian Youth ’zine was that it was independently produced for youth by youth in a kind of atmosphere similar to on-line communities where not everything is “proper.” As desire and expressions of desire may be part of what that community wants to share, Jody says that she would disseminate it — not as something that is necessarily “representative” of a community, but an artifact produced by individuals within a community that has not been censored by adults providing assistance. Jody notes that we need to avoid being knee-jerk and throwing out everything in an effort to avoid censorship. There are lots of bad books out there — books I wouldn’t want
anyone to read. Like, *Asha’s Mums* is a terrible book

Jody’s statement here is similar to one made by Jane Bouey, who also touches upon similar concerns related to censorship and risk taking. Specific to those issues, Jane notes:

> Sometimes I think queer activists censor themselves, are too worried about pushing it too far, making it seem like we do have a political agenda of changing students or something like that.

Jane attributes this “fear” to a promotion of the tendency to focus predominantly on negative experiences, guilting people into action rather than providing a fuller understanding. Use of the negative experience, Jane argues, can be useful to bring forward for short-term advances, but it can also feed homophobia and serves to pathologize – by reifying a perception with parents, for instance, that the queer experience is always a negative one. Jane also notes the need to be cautious about “making it simply a human rights issue,” which she describes as often being a narrowed-down attempt to make the unpalatable palatable within a rubric of tolerance rather than one of building an inclusive space. Jane argues that queer/LGBTTTITQetc. education-activists need to continue pushing boundaries, especially if concerns around safety and inclusion are beginning to be addressed.

Jody concurs. Specifically, what Jody argues that education-activists seeking “positive change” need to continue to pursue is further risk-taking on our behalf and on behalf of the advisory committee, further efforts to ensure that the work is representative, further participation of youth, and further emphasis on making sure people in the school community feel supported in order to encourage others to take risks.
Gauging the effect of that support, including quantifying the "positive change" that might result, is not something that can necessarily be done with any reliability, she concludes. Nor is she particularly concerned about that, saying: "I mean as long as we're visible with what's happening, and then other people can take the lead in direction they want to, then awesome. I mean, people are picking things up in other ways loosely in ways that hopefully works for them." Our primary role as consultants and as activists in a privileged position, Jody continues, is to facilitate supports and be resources so that risk-taking across the system is more likely to occur. I agree that this is a key point as we try to keep focused on activism and "positive change" — how they work, how they occur, and the challenges and possibilities involved.

Window: June 2006

I had two main worries by the end of the first year in the consultant role. One was that I would be seen as claiming ownership of a movement, or where the egos of those involved become more important than the actual issues. The other was that our non-normative approaches become diluted over time as one becomes more invested in maintaining the role of antihomophobia and diversity consultant for the sake of the role rather than for the antioppressive possibilities it could serve.

Additionally, there was a fear of succumbing to approaches we could not find any value in, or becoming discouraged to the point of being counter-productive in the face of apathy or criticisms from other queer/LGBTQTI+ -identifying adults in the system who wanted more concrete strategies, more tangible material making gays appear "acceptable," and less talk of trans and intersex people. "I'm not 'queer,' I'm gay and I'm normal," was something we heard occasionally. I would show less patience for adult "allies" who imposed their trauma as an adolescent as the template by which every queer/LGBTQTI+ -identifying youth that came their way must also be experiencing — rather than allowing those youth to define their reality their way, for good and for bad.

What was occurring too was somewhat of a Möbius strip given that both Jody and I were doing graduate work part-time, still in the classroom a few days a week, working at the board, either working at the union or participating on committees, and being active on these issues in other venues as well. Discourses from each of these flowed into the other.
We would occasionally send out academic articles we found interesting to our Safe Contacts out in schools, or use as discussion pieces in our VESTA Pride Committee members with those who attended. Activities such as these, and my learnings from my students and colleagues would then feed their way into how I was reacting to readings in my graduate classes. At the same time, my continued readings precipitated a lot of second-guessing of the work Jody and I were doing – which had by now branched out into writing and providing workshops on queer/LGBTITQ etc. education issues for the BCTF, consulting I was doing on the side for my contacts at the Ministry of Education, and case-preparation for the Correns’ human rights complaint against the province.

This growing focus on what was happening outside of Vancouver was something that increasing became the preoccupation of Jane and me.

**Fall 2005 – Summer 2006 from Jane’s point of view**

In discussing possible influence that the policy had outside of Vancouver, Jane admits that she has “a really hard time getting a sense of it.” In early 2005, for example, the Vancouver trustees, as representatives of the metropolitan branch of the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA), brought forward a motion I wrote to the BCSTA Annual General Meeting – by reputation a fairly conservative body, and not one that has any governance over decisions made by trustees in individual school districts. The motion and supporting statement was meant to educate districts about the importance and possibilities of implement standalone policies similar to Vancouver’s.

Much to our surprise, the BCSTA AGM adopted the motion as policy. In this case, however, Jane doubts it had any effect within that organization or in school districts other than those working on these issues already. Momentum was diminished once the BC Human Rights Tribunal ruling in favour of Jubran was appealed. The same seemed to be true even after the Supreme Court of Canada rejected the provincial government’s successive appeals of the original tribunal decision obliging school districts not only to be proactive in addressing systemic harassment and discrimination, but to also take
responsibility for the harassment and discrimination perpetrated by their students. As Jane perceived the situation,

I think there probably have been staff at various school boards that began to look at it. But then when it seemed like they didn’t “have to,” their time was spent somewhere else. It was just gone.

[Momentum] takes so long. That’s what I’ve learned – it takes so long, so much effort and so much determination in the bureaucracy the size of a school board.

Unfortunately, Jane lost her seat as trustee in November 2005, after a split in her political party had an effect on that party’s fortunes in its bid for mayor, city council, parks board, and school board. I worked on her campaign, and was disappointed in the loss.

It was not, we think, because of her work as an outspoken queer/LGBTTITQetc. education-activist while she was a trustee. Even so, Jane has some evidence that points to an underground email campaign from the religious right against the COPE trustees during the 2005 election, her in particular. The only time when she had “any real negative stuff,” as she describes it, was around the trustees’ decision for the VSB to formally participate in the Pride Parade in 2005xxx. That aside, Jane describes only two regrets from her 2002-2005 term as a trustee in relation to queer/LGBTTITQetc. education-activism. First, that the Vancouver trustees, collectively as a school board for the largest city in the province, did not pursue queer/LGBTTITQetc. issues with the Minister of Education. Their focus instead was on funding issues when meetings did occur. Making certain decisions not to push things, she argues now, strategically can be a mistake. “By not pushing the province on this we left it to [MLA] Lorne Mayencourt to push, and what he was pushing for at the time was so inadequate,” she says. Second, Jane states that she regrets that the board declined to participate in Peter and Murray Corren’s human rights case against the provincial government. It was, she states, the one time she had “great,
great frustration with [her] caucus' and disappointment with herself for not pushing it more with them – even though both she and I volunteered doing case research for the Correns' complaint, which did reach a resolution.

The settlement between the provincial government and the Correns

AN OVERVIEW

On 2005 June 6, I wrote in my journal:

*Good news! Met with Peter and Murray Corren[xxvi]. They met with ______ and lawyer from Ministry of Education who now "get it," and seem open to a scenario where queer sexualities and gender identity are not listed as "sensitive issues," that "sensitive issues" be more specifically and narrowly defined and that positive inclusion of queer content into all present and future curriculum programs. ______ also sounded excited about Murray's suggestion of creating a History of Human Rights course for high school. New minister (or old one) will be (re)instated on May 15 and this proposal will be presented by ______ right away. If agreed to, then things can get underway – with both parties signing off as they go (with the option of going to tribunal if some aspects are not covered). To be settled by 2006 January 31. If not agreed to by minister, then July tribunal will go ahead.*

Not surprisingly, the official settlement did not come at this time. After the above plan failed to be accepted by newly-appointed Minister of Education Shirley Bond, and after more legal maneuvering by both parties at the BC Human Rights Tribunal, a resolution to the Correns' complaint took nearly another year.

The spring 2006 settlement reached between the provincial government and the Correns consists of three main commitments on the part of the Ministry of Education: 1) the creation of an elective grade twelve course focusing on social justice; 2) the review of all Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs), as each comes up for revision, using guidelines developed from the perspective of inclusion and respect for diversity inclusive of sexual orientation and other grounds of discrimination, an over-arching concern for social
justice, and consultation with the Correns and outside groups identified by the Correns; and, 3) the distribution of a letter to all educational partner groups in the province detailing the true nature and limited reach of the *Alternative Delivery Policy*, and a clarifying statement in all IRPs identifying where and how policy applies. For this last item, it was clarified that the policy applied only to the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) in the health organizer of the provincial *Health & Career Education K-7*, *Health & Career Education 8 & 9*, and *Planning 10*. It clarified too that options would be available for families who would prefer their children to attain these learning outcomes in an "alternative" manner; however, contrary to what had been practice in some schools, the ministry declared that students could not be exempted from any of the PLOs, nor, the ministry continues, under no circumstances could schools omit sections of the PLOs.

I contend that the settlement between the provincial government is so sweeping (particularly its emphasis on reviewing *all* present and future curriculum with social justice in mind), that its long-term effect will be broader than what would have been arrived at through a decision by the BC Human Rights Tribunal had pre-decision settlement not been reached. This very point was met with great displeasure by some groups, including the Catholic Civil Rights League, Focus on Family, and other religious-right groups who framed their publicized objections in terms of: a) the government signing secret deals with two homosexual activists, giving them an unprecedented position in the writing of curriculum; b) the government overriding parents' concerns about their children having to learn about lifestyles that conflict the religious beliefs at home; and, c) school districts being made to force their employees to teach about subjects they may
object to for reasons of religious belief. (Catholic Civil Rights League, personal correspondence, September 27, 2006; Steffenhagen, 2007, February 19).

My concern about the Corren settlement is with “the state” (in the sense of political government) now even more involved in the business of controlling and disseminating discourse about queer/LGBTQetc. identities: packaging these identities without necessarily seeking broad input into what representations are given and how they are given – as well, most likely, as essentializing, decontextualizing, and curriculumizing these identities without necessarily having resources, support, and critical tools in place soon enough for schools, school districts, and families to work towards antioppressive and non-normative understandings.

But then, is it in the state’s interest to provide critical tools such as these? If so, which critical tools, and for what purpose? The Correns’ stated purpose in pursuing their case was framed in terms of mainstreaming and normalizing, in keeping with their work around same-sex marriage in this province as well and seeking adoption rights (Steffenhagen, 2003, April 30). Their main argument for public consumption was that queer/LGBTQetc. students had the right to find themselves in the curriculum, and that this would engender positive feelings of self-worth as well as promote tolerance and acceptability throughout the school community as a whole.

This is similar to the logical thrust of Mallon (1996), Ridky (1996), and Asher (2005), who promote the implicit messages of acceptance and helping queer/LGBTQetc. address the “struggles” they face. I know first-hand that the Correns’ intent was broader than that, yet it is the essentialist discourse argument which predominates because that is what is is intelligible to the courts and to the media.
As for the other party involved, I can only speculate as to provincial government’s purpose in agreeing to a settlement with the Correns. My opinion is that it is highly unlikely that the provincial government would have been able to defeat the Correns’ complaint had it made it to the tribunal or any level of court, given the wording of the BC Human Rights Code in terms of discrimination in accommodation, service and facility – though at this point we will not know because the settlement foreclosed the possibility of a decision in that regard. In the end, it will be the process and the individuals involved with developing curriculum at the provincial level that will determine the shape of how the three-part agreement has an impact on that curriculum. At the school level, it will then be up to individual teachers and (in some cases) individual schools or school districts actually implementing that curriculum. The discursive framing of that curriculum from the provincial level will, however, set the tone – particularly in British Columbia elementary schools, where implicit messages of acceptance and being socially responsible are very much the flavour of the current climate.

CONTRASTING METHODS FOR SEEKING “POSITIVE CHANGE”

Given the concerns I have raised here about the role of “the state” in relation to the implementation of the settlement between the provincial government and the Correns, should I not be equally concerned about our education-activism in the context of the VSB? I must say that the answer is yes – yet the context is different, too. In Vancouver, the context was such in 2002 that the Outreach Coalition’s recommendations were not only heard but accepted for implementation; therefore, a number of different strategies were employable by us in the Vancouver context that were not necessarily available to the Correns when (after several years of advocacy work involving youth in another
school district, putting pressure via GALE-BC at the provincial level under the NDP government, and being involved in the Surrey book-banning situation) they decided to advance through legal channels – a route that, it would seem, limits community involvement.

In contrast, Jane was in a situation where she was able to push her political party to have a strong position on queer/LGBTQ+ issues, so that when/if it ever were to win a majority in an election, it would be able to implement those policies expediently. Her political party already had links with other groups that were also already active on queer/LGBTQ+ issues – particularly unions, which has long been the case in Canada (Rayside, 2007). The fact that a community of queer/LGBTQ+ youth were also organizing in Vancouver around these issues at the same time also contributed to an optimal context. These factors meant that there was the opportunity to keep the community involved in the development of policy so that a built-in pressure is created to make sure there is follow-through, and that the follow-through is more meaningful than it would be otherwise. As Jane elaborates, “Even if the Outreach Coalition hadn’t come together and gone ahead, COPE would have made sure stuff happened anyway – but it wouldn’t have been as effective and thought out had we not had the community there.” Jody’s comments earlier about the importance of returning to the community for the direction (their leadership, as it were) are confirmed by Jane’s statements here. These links to community and respect for community (inclusive of human beings who will forever be complex and in flux) temper human rights rhetoric with a broader analysis that includes the possibility of moving away from essentialist politics of minority interest and towards a politics of difference and antinormativity.
All of that being said, the settlement between the provincial government and the Correns is now a legal reality in British Columbia. Therefore the list of tasks of queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist in this province that seek “positive change” (one that contest the limits of who is included and excluded in public schools; and one that seeks to transform the public domain of public education as a site where all members of the school community can participate equitably, meaningfully, and safely; and one that involves a shift away from binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, and away from the essentializing practices associated with these) needs to include a careful monitoring of the implementation of this settlement, and creating links between those responsible for the implementation and the communities ostensibly served by that implementation.
Reading beyond 1

Despite theoretical considerations in the first few chapters, I find myself grappling with a tendency to write in a certain way in order to share "the" queer/LGBTQ+ etc. education-activist story, and to make it as "complete" (by providing detail, by including Jane’s interview pertaining to similar events) and "intelligible" as possible (by working chronologically, by providing background information on groups or public institutions referred to, by explaining my use of terminology). Even from a practical standpoint, however, it is not possible to share everything. Yet my reference here to practicality also assumes that, with the right amount of time and resources I could depict everything entirely "as it was," when theoretically I claim want to work against completeness, intelligibility, and "the" representative story.

As discussed in the opening chapters, Kumashiro (2002, 2004) suggests that activists "read beyond" – that is, *employ a method of multiple readings for the partiality of all texts and activism* (involving examining silences and the effects of those silences on the "meaning," and our complicity with oppression in reading in particular ways) *and willingness to go through crisis* (involving questioning what is valued or desired as "knowledge" or "standards," questioning what constitutes "good" teaching and activism, and asking if any of these is ever complete). *He argues that this be done in order to recognize and challenge oppression within activists' own work.*

For example, while I can speculate or refer to accounts represented in the media, I cannot account in this project for what queer/LGBTQ+ etc. education-activism students and teachers in Vancouver were already doing before the policy was adopted – and how that work may have contributed to the success or failure of the education-activism I *do*
describe. Or, what work may be occurring presently without having any knowledge of the policy being in existence. I must acknowledge my surprise when a gay-themed drama was produced by a French Immersion program by one of the Vancouver secondary schools, without our knowing about it ahead of time. That surprise came from a sense of ownership, a feeling of “Look! This is occurring, and they did not need our permission” that challenged my belief that many teachers feel need the safeguard of policy. I also claim earlier in one of the windows that a “public backlash did not occur in Vancouver,” but how would I really quantify that? The protests and petitions occurring in BC at the time against same-sex marriage, and those around the eventual settlement between the Correns and the provincial government, could have been influenced (even in a minuscule way) by what was already happening in Vancouver schools.

My concerns cause me to question my sense of ownership built into my education-activism and my representation of that work in this project. How might this sense of ownership impede other possible understandings of how discourse works in this context, or cause me to write and work in ways that might be oppressive?

Rereading the present and previous “data chapters,” I imagine that a reader might look at my use of the word “queer” as self-identity and reasons provided in the first three chapters of this project, and be surprised/confused/annoyed. Have my claims to indeterminacy been put aside to work within essentialist discourse? Is that not paradoxical, or a sign that I am not truly committed to any particular position? For all my posturing about essentialism in the literature review, do the windows presented in this chapter depict me as largely working at putting supports in place for “helping” gay-identifying youth, even if that “helping” makes paternalistic assumptions? Or, is it more
paternalistic to negate the exercise in agency required to ask for help in the first place, or to assume that the asking will come to me? I feel discomfort with all of these seeming contradictions and omissions on my part, and find myself wanting to “correct” them somehow by supplying more information or re-framing how certain events occurred. I cannot resolve these concerns at this point, nor am I sure if these concerns are resolvable – unless that “resolve” is able to take the form of questions that do not necessarily have complete answers.

There is other “reading beyond” I would like to do as well, in keeping with the method Kumashiro (2002) describes. Another question he suggests researchers ask, for instance, is: \textit{What did I desire to see in the interviews, and why did I desire to see that?}

Perhaps I was looking for someone to mirror what I was saying, to reaffirm the assumptions I was making – about “community,” for example, and how we made efforts in our work to always put things out to people for their response and input before moving on to the next step. Rereading the windows and the interviews now cause me to question the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of those efforts. It was a practice we became better at as we worked to critique our practices together as a team, and when were were able to draw upon Safe Contacts at almost every school. On the other hand, I also desired to see more challenging of the status quo, of the public education system \textit{as is}, in the interviews and (from the point of view of coming back to them several months after they were written) the windows as well.

For example, Jody, Jane, and I comment little on the broader structures and bodies of the public education context, and the discourse in which these exist – providing an illusion that we view these as being value neutral. Becoming a trustee, for instance, is not
about turning the system as a whole on its head; there are certain assumptions that come along with being in that position, and accepting being in that position – how one relates to the government, what one is willing to stay to the public, how the role has been defined in practice over the decades. What was being done to make use of that role in a non-normative way? Yes, Jane had been a liaison trustee to the advisory committee, and a main instigator of that committee – but the processes involved were mainly those of the predominant discourses, and the advisory committee itself was patterned after similar bodies within the bureaucracy. While the individuals involved may have pushed things in a way that perhaps other advisory committees had not in the past, this was not done to an extent where “the limits” were reached.

This causes me to think of my own lack of questioning of the roles of being “a member of the advisory committee” or “a VSB consultant representing management” as being problematic. In not testing “the limits” of what it meant to “be” those roles to the degree that could have been possible, did I acquiesce to normative discourse and compromise our work – even when risks in the work itself were being taken? As discussed earlier in this chapter, Jody and I did make efforts to put on events, provide materials, and engage youth in ways that heretofore had not be usual VSB practice. But we did that within the capacity of “consultants,” and with many of the privileges and assumptions associated with those roles in this context.

A further question: Did I resist reading the interviews in ways that did not match my views, or to see myself in either of them?

During the interview with Jody I felt uncomfortable during our discussions about distributing material generated by youth featuring extensive sexually explicit material.
Even here, I find myself resisting what she had to say on the matter and careful how I am representing it. At this point in time and in this context, given the standards for teachers set out by the BC College of Teachers (2008) and commitment of the Vancouver School Board to implement a code of conduct for all employees and volunteers in the wake of a sexual abuse situation (VSB, 2008), I would also counsel any adult working in the public education system to refrain from distributing or encouraging student-written material featuring sex acts. I would give this counsel, even if at the same time I see myself in what Jody is saying—in that I (as an adult) seeking to challenge what is “proper teaching” and “proper activism” do not wish to deny youth sexualities and the expression of those sexualities, and I want to encourage (not censor) the expression of those sexualities that have previously been marginalized by heteronormative discourses.

As discussed earlier, the work of Sumara and Davis (1998) suggests a model of how adults in the school system within the Vancouver context might address these tensions by engaging in a pedagogy that attempts to interpret and illuminate the relations among knowledges, desires, and identities—and doing so responsibly by maintaining professional boundaries. I do not think that agency as the “monomer” of one’s politics, as Jody describes it, suggests that one can ignore the power differential between adults and youth, and what unproductive risks adults with well-meaning intentions may be putting themselves in for little or no benefit to the youth for whom they are allies—particularly when there are many other forums (in the Vancouver context, at least) outside of the presence of adults where they can discuss sexual practices that might be a “best choice” for them. Jody’s remarks were helpful for me in that, in resisting them I was able to doubt my pro-sex stance, reconfirm it, but then also be able to consider what
that stance meant within this particular context and whether or not the associated risks would be worth any possibilities for "positive change."

Further attempts to "read beyond" occur in the next chapter.
Chapter 6 — Transitions, disruptions, “conclusion,” and limitations

As stated at the outset, work on this thesis proceeded with three guiding questions in mind. That is:

- How might one define and view “positive change” with regard to queer/LGBTQ etc. issues in the context of the local school system in Vancouver?

- Through what processes has “positive change” occurred or been attempted?

- How does one begin, doing education-activist work at a school district level, to move away from an essentialist politics of minority interest towards a politics of difference and antinormativity?

Also as stated at the outset, I am not assuming these questions to be fully answerable — though I have explored each of them, to varying degrees in the previous chapters. In the “conclusion” offered in this chapter, I concentrate on the last of the guiding questions, building upon what I have already presented in relation to this question in chapters four and five, and referring back to the discussions of Butler (1990, 2004a, 2004b) and Foucault (1994) in chapters one and three. Note that I do not claim “success” in moving the queer/LGBTQ etc. education-activism in at the school district level in Vancouver past some imaginary divide between essentialist discourses and antiessentialist discourses. The guiding question, after all, commences with how does one begin to — not how does one completely and entirely. I will, however, make use of data in this chapter and the previous two chapters to discuss spaces where antiessentialist interventions were made or might have been possible. As discussed earlier, I am seeking to avoid a modernist account of how the participants and I were “mistaken” or “uninformed” or “ill-prepared” but have now come to be fully knowledgeable about ourselves and our activist
practice — unstymied by the unexpected, the unplanned, and failure. Thus, I employ “conclusions” instead of outcomes-oriented conclusions.

I commence this last chapter with a window that proceeds from the time shortly after the trustee elections in November 2005. I then move into data from a conversation involving Jane Bouey, Jody Polukoshko, and me in February 2007 pertaining to the complications of our roles and the work we were able to do in them. This is followed by my “conclusion” linking the data to possibilities for “positive change” and “queer-friendly schools” in a way that moves education-activism away from dominant approaches. Closing, I discuss the limitations of this study before providing a second exercise of reading beyond, as per Kumashiro (2002), continuing discursive interventions into this thesis as a text itself.

**Window: November 2005 — onwards**

My first encounter with the new trustees was at a welcoming-in party for the new board shortly after their win in November 2005. Several of them approached me to discuss the work the Pride Advisory Committee was doing, and a couple of them even indicated that they had read the policy itself — raising questions about the Safe Contacts, in particular, and what sort of supports we were providing those individuals. I was worried for a while that the rug might be pulled from underneath us. 

That did not occur, though, even though we had lost Jane as a trustee. Well into the new NPA-majority board, funding continued for our work, materials went out into schools in greater quantities than before, and we continued to hold events for employees and/or youth. The VSB continued participating in the Pride Parade, supporting youth components of the Queer Film Festival financially, allowing outside groups such as Out on Screen and GAB Youth Services into elementary and secondary schools to show films or perform PrideSpeaks, and endorsing the National Day Against Homophobia — all work that began soon before or soon after the loss of the COPE school board.

While we were open with our activities, and while we were working under the supervision of one of the associate superintendents, we were often surprised at how we never directly reported to anyone or asked to justify our expenditures. On the other hand, a new trustee took me for tea one morning shortly after the elections, and assured me that as long as
we kept things “fairly mainstream” support would continue. I did not interrogate what she meant by that, not really wanting to know what those parameters might be, and not wanting to let on that our work as consultants had been going on without an “approval” mechanism.

That being said, perhaps members of the school community were “voting with their feet” to show their approval or disapproval. For example, there was not much of a turnout for a panel discussion on traditional and contemporary Aboriginal understandings of sexuality I had helped organize and promote, and no one registered for the daytime in-service workshop (with release time! with “experts”!) I offered twice for teachers to explore queer pedagogy. I felt discouraged by this – though the interest shown around trans issues and increased mobilization of GSAs compensated! We would get there, I thought.

Meanwhile, the various incarnations of the Safe Schools Act, MLA Lorne Mayencourt’s private member’s bill stalled in the legislature. Despite misgivings from some advisory committee members about the bill’s source and earlier versions, the consensus was that the 2006 version of the bill was in keeping with what we had been calling for – that is, revisions of British Columbia’s School Act to ensure requirements are in place for school districts to comply with the Juban vs. North Vancouver School District decision. Ultimately, though, the Safe Schools Act went the way of its predecessors.

Post-election, Jane continued to sit on the VSB Pride Advisory Committee under the banner of GALE-BC, and she continued to be sought for comment by the media. She was kept busy, particularly after the settlement between the Correns and the provincial government was made public. There was a strange contrast, we felt. Since the Safe Schools Task Force made its report,

only the Southeast Kootenay, Gulf Islands and, more recently, North Vancouver school districts have joined the Vancouver and Victoria school pioneers in developing such policies – five out of 60 school districts.

What surprises and disappoints Bouey most is that the government would allow the Safe Schools bill to languish even as it champions curriculum review to ensure courses include positive representations of queer people. (Barsotti, 2007, February 7)

Months earlier, the first publicly-acknowledged implementation of the provincial government’s settlement with the Correns began with an invitation-only “closed-door curriculum meeting” organized by the Ministry of Education to discuss planning of the Social Justice 12 IRP that was promised in that settlement. Jody and I attended on behalf of the VSB, at the request of the ministry representative I had met at the Queer-Friendly Schools Conference in 2004 and whom I had kept in contact with.
Jody and I were dismayed at how homogeneous and adult the crowd in attendance was:

"The aim of the ministry was to invite umbrella organizations to the workshop," explains Polukoshko, "and I think this meant that many grassroots or youth-driven organizers were excluded." [...] The ideal situation, she says, would be for more and continuous consultation, noting that participants were quite vocal about having ongoing discussions. "My guess is it's full steam ahead, but it's important that all of us activists stay in the process," she says. [...] (Barsotti, 2006, October 12).

Which activists, though? While Jody and I had a number of individuals and organizations we thought should have been there but who were not, also excluded from the meeting were a number of religious-right groups who argued they should be there to push back against "pro-homosexual propaganda" (Hasiuk, 2006). Several of these groups worked together to hold rallies of several hundred people during the summer of 2006 in both Victoria and Vancouver to express their opposition to the settlement between the provincial government and the Correns. An unexpected part of the work handed down to me as part of my consultant job involved ghostwriting the replies for VSB trustees and management to letters from the groups listed above — something, I admit, I relished doing.

In Vancouver, we continued with our "pro-homosexual" and "pro-transgender" work — which was now beginning to be shaped, incrementally, by the settlement. The Health & Career Education and Social Studies IRPs were introduced into elementary schools in the fall of 2006, for example, with the Alternate Delivery Policy clarification already included in them, as well as references to sexual orientation for the first time. These provided new points of conversation for us to have with teachers, parents, and principals in schools — and a fresh stamp of "legitimacy."

We noticed, though, in that the functioning of the VSB Pride Advisory Committee was also beginning to change, as was our other committee at VESTA — with members of both those committees less inclined to participate in the action part as they did previously. Many of the original committee members had moved on, too, and therefore did not attend the meetings anymore. In their place came a number of new people, many of whom Jody and I had brought in to include other organizations on the committee, or to inject some new enthusiasm. But the overall tone had changed. The committee continued to fill a valuable purpose, advising from a broad-based perspective, but Jody and I had become responsible for "the action" instead of the committee as a whole. With the policy nearly two years old, with the consultant positions in place, and with the government/Corren settlement reached, our priorities for seeking "positive change" as an advisory committee were no longer focused.
I still had much on my personal list needing doing – in particular, materials I was developing with a group of queer-identifying students from Chinese, Korean, and Japanese cultural backgrounds to use with their cultural communities in the languages of those communities, and which I was keen to distribute. Interesting cross-cultural conversations were beginning to occur around non-Western gender/sexual-identity markers, particularly tongzhi, which also came into play when I initiated work with community groups on what I hoped would become a set of print- and web-based resources in a variety of languages for women who have sex with women and for men who have sex with men – regardless of their self-identification.

We also continued to bringing in as many people and purchasing as many resources as we could within the financial constraints of our budget, putting on additional events in order to capture a broad cross-section of the school community and encourage involvement, and making sure administrators in the system were comfortable enough and cognizant of their responsibilities so that the policy would be enforce. After that point it was our chance to make links with communities we had yet to connect with, and to challenge ourselves against normative practices as much as we could within the role we were in – moving away from an essentialist politics of minority interest towards a politics of difference and antinormativity. This involved more than the work we were doing with youth and “outside” community members to blur the normative lines of educational leadership, authority, and insider/outsider status in the school system. It also involved our careful choices in naming and representing, a near-complete avoidance of at-risk mono-identified queer youth-victim requiring adult intervention constructions, and regular checking for silences and exclusions within our practices and within the organizational bodies in which we participated or with which we were affiliated.

Life changed unexpectedly, though.

In December 2006, just prior to a holiday break, a stroke befell the president of VESTA (on a day Jody and I, as part of the union’s bargaining team, were bargaining the term “gender identity” into our Collective Agreement’s anti-discrimination language). When work resumed in January, the VESTA Executive Committee asked me to step into the president’s role for the duration of the 2006-2007 term. With a lot of mixed feelings, I agreed. Jody came with me, giving up both her part of the consultant job and her classroom position in order to be full-time grievance-officer-in-training. This was not “the end” of the queer/LGBT/TITQetc. education-activist work Jody and I were going to do in Vancouver. But it was the end of our work as Antihomophobia and Diversity Consultants for the VSB.

There continued to be many overlaps. For instance, during the spring of 2007 saw the introduction of a set of provincial educational “enhancement” legislation (Bills 20, 21, and 22) that included a number of regulations, measures, and re-directing of financial resources that, in my
opinion, are intended to further undermine the public education system and the profession of teaching in British Columbia in the guise of benign-sounding “choice,” “accountability,” and “achievement.” These were concerns viewed through my union lens. Included in that same set of legislation, however, was a reworking of the failed Safe Schools Act — that is, a requirement for all school districts to ensure that their schools adhere to a set of mandatory provincial standards for school codes of conduct. It was unclear when the legislation was passed what this would actually mean since it did not include specifics.

Jane and I went into full lobbying mode, and at the very end of June 2007 were summoned to a “confidential” meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Education, as well as MLA Lorne Mayencourt. We were asked to share, one more time, our suggestions for possible revisions to ministry policy. Jody, now fully in her role as grievance officer, was aghast that I was going to participate in something involving the government where “confidentiality” was “mandatory.” Yet I was fairly confident that we were finally going to get what we had been arguing for the past several years, and now was the last possible chance from momentum gained by the original VSB Pride Advisory Committee to get gender identity on the Ministry’s radar.

Jane was not able to go, and she sent others from GALE-BC instead. It was not a pleasant experience, for a variety of reasons, and resulted only in somewhat of a qualified “success”: November 2007 brought the release of Ministerial Order 276/07 — Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order, which requires that school boards “ensure” schools’ codes of conduct include “one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the BC Human Rights Code in respect of discriminatory publication and discrimination in accommodation, services, and facility in the school environment.” It lacked the proactive piece we were hoping for, and framed the debate in terms of freedom from something (e.g. harassment and discrimination) rather than in terms of proliferation of identities and opportunities to exercise agency (which are difficult, I admit, to capture in “standards”, and antithetical to the idea of “standards”). More practically, I was worried that the language was so opaque that school districts would ignore it, feigning confusion about what the requirement meant.

Around the same time, some of my revisions referencing gender identity, two-spirit identities, and youth-driven organizing I had made to a pre-release version of the draft Making Space, Giving Voice: Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice Through the K-12 Curriculum — A Guide for Teachers were included in the version issued by the Ministry of Education for public review.

Despite misgivings about the wording of the Ministerial Order, it and the curriculum guide were incremental steps I could accept on the way to something more, something expansive — which seemed to the balance of a lot of work we had been doing. More important, though, Jody, Jane, and
I were able to maintain our links to the broader communities we had been working with, and were able to keep encouraging and supporting some of the youth from GSAs who had stepped forward and were now organizing on their own terms to seek “positive change” in their school communities.

**Conversation with Jane & Jody: February 2007**

Now that our roles had changed, I invited Jane and Jody to participate in follow-up conversation in February 2007, coming together to reflect specifically on the complications involved with promoting “positive change” from *within* the structures of the school district.

Jody allows that her thinking about this form of education-activism has changed because of her experience as a consultant. To be clear, she continues to have reservations that the constraints of doing education-activist work within the school board bureaucracy – constraints which are, in her words, “risible” because the boundaries are stricter than in activism outside. She notes too how decisions made within the structures of the school district, even those that are well-intentioned, can have unintended consequences which may limit “positive change” to fewer areas. From this perspective, she argues that

> Every time we do something like that — enshrine something policy or make it a standard practice — there are pieces that fall off.

Similarly, Jane, from the vantage point of having been a trustee and then not being a trustee again, identifies that certain trade-offs led her to feel that she was being, to a certain extent, co-opted into the system as a trustee. She notes, for example, that she did advocacy around the right of a trans person to have their student records be in their chosen gender, and I came up against all sorts of obstacles. I got that through, though, and I had thought: “Well, I’ll change policy if necessary.” And that would be thing to do – to change policy. Well, the board lawyer at the time said: “No, no, we don’t want to have *policy* on that, we’ll just make it standard practice.” So I kind of went along with it [...].
On the other hand, as Jody points out, if Jane had not been a trustee, she would not have had the opportunity to make the decision anyway. This, Jody identifies, is how her understanding of activism has been complicated by the perspective her consultant experience has given her. There are always some trade-off being made, she now argues, sometimes simply in the process (as she posits above) of making what appear to be “good choices.” I agree with her on this point, and see that this trading-off can also possibly be understood as a strategic move in order to maintain credibility for when it is most needed or when there is an opportunity to disrupt dominant education-activist practices and sexual/gender-identities – even if that disruption is occurring from within a bureaucratic structure that propagates the matrix of individualization (Foucault, 1994) that one’s practice of education-activism seeks to disrupt. (Though, as identified in the window above, getting people to come forward to explore understandings that they may not accept as pertinent to their practice or that challenges their privilege presents some difficulty. Colonialism, I suspect, had much to do with the disinterest in a panel organized on two-spirit identities as opposed to the relatively high participation in professional development related to trans issues.)

Jody remarks that she

used to make the argument about you can’t make change from the inside. I used to be really vehement about that, and believed in renegade, middle-of-the-night activism was the only kind worth doing.

It’s possible that I’m failing to see the different ways we’re selling-out in doing this job. But didn’t feel like it cost me as much as I thought it would. That’s partly speaking to the institutional setting that we’re in particularly: that particular board at that particular time, in this particular political climate, in this particular city. But the other part of it is that I think we’re just good at it. Like, we know when to push and we know when to stop.
Though I will not claim that this strategic-maneuvering-as-helpful is generalizable to other contexts, it has been helpful in the change process in the Vancouver context. It also makes it possible, I argue, to go beyond the paradigm à la Marchildon (2006) that suggests that all it takes is for “le leadership” (p. 12) to make a declaration (e.g. Ministerial Orders on codes of conduct) and then all will be carried out to specifications. Even if one accepts, momentarily, the overarching leadership role of those in administrative and management positions in school districts, “change” does not occur in the way that Marchildon implies — without the numerous stakeholders contributing and buying-in, without numerous bureaucratic hurdles, without competing with other interests, without the cooperation of vocal communities to support it and expand upon it, and without education-activists being surprised by the choices they make. I write this not to disparage, but to put forward the understanding that school districts — large and small, urban and rural — are more complex than Marchildon allows for, as are the mechanics of “positive change” involved.

The demands on education-activists’ time is also a factor. For example, in her role as a trustee, Jane could only devote part of her trustee work to the efforts of the Pride Advisory Committee as it competed with her other, “regular” duties as a school board trustee, and the political organizing and other processes associated with becoming a trustee in the Vancouver context. Likewise with our hope of more youth participation, or participation from the wider community — regardless of the fact that most of our meetings occurred in the late afternoon, or our other activities were organized during most people’s work hours. These are practical complications and conditions not necessarily anticipated by theory. Related to Jane’s experience as a trustee as well are the pros and cons of
working as part of a political caucus that believes in grassroots decision-making. On the positive side, one has an immediate community from which to draw support and develop plans together; on the negative, one’s profile as a politician in an elected role is muted, which presents challenges when it becomes time to seek re-election. As Jane notes,

I’m not a very good politician in that all. My political work [...] was collective. That’s how we worked as a board, that’s how we made decisions, and is how I’m the most comfortable working. So, standing up and saying “I’m the one who did this” didn’t work for me.

But I’ve come to the conclusion that that approach is really the secret to being elected [laughter], though it’s not the best way of doing work.

Tension between these two (community-based activism vs. the need for individual visibility in order to access elected positions of power) is what Jody states she continues to have the most difficulty grappling with, given her commitments to a grassroots politics – and is what has usually preventing her from participating in activist work which she may have otherwise had strong allegiance. It is, Jody argues, the reason why she would not ever personally run for political office. I do not understand her to mean, though, that there are no people who play a political role and yet maintain a belief in a process that involves the community and leaves space for the community to lead and to do the work – activist or otherwise. This is most desirable, from all of our points of view.

**Potential use of insurrectionary discursive practices in the Vancouver context**

*Connecting earlier considerations with the data*

As discussed in the opening chapters of this project, it is problematic to delineate which “reality and experiences” represent the “reality and experiences” of those identifying or identified as queer/LGBTTITQetc. when the act of representation, as a technique of the matrix of individualization, functions as a significant heteronormatizing
and marginalizing force (Butler, 2004a, 2004b; Foucault, 1980, 1994). While the assertion of identity may sometimes be appropriate to advance political aims, Butler and Foucault suggest that assertion should not become the sum and total of queer/LGBT/TIQ etc. education-activism — and I have made that a feature of my definition of “positive change” by indicating a desire to shift away from binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, and away from the essentializing practices associated with these. (I must reiterate again, as well, that the autoethnographic and participatory elements included in this thesis should not be viewed as the sum and total of queer/LGBT/TIQ etc. education-activism in Vancouver, or even the sum and total of the education-activism of the participants and me.)

Instead of emphasizing a politics of minority interest, Foucault (1994) and Butler (2004a, 2004b) encourage the marginalized to intercept oppressive performatives in order to constitute their subjecthood differently. While the subject is named in ways in order to be recognizable, this constitution is performative and the subject can performatively constitute another by exercising discursive agency (Butler, 2004a, 2004b). In other words, subjects who are constituted by prevailing constitutions of subjects can deploy challenges to these prevailing constitutions through insurrectionary discursive practices that involve decontextualizing and recontextualizing, reappropriating and redeploying terms to make tenuous or even break prevailing discourses.

Within the context of public schools, the use of insurrectionary discursive practices is not part of what is considered as linear, checklist-style model of “change” — nor does it fit into the administrator-centric approach to educational change proposed by Fullan (2001). Such changes do not take place through legislation and policy
development alone – welcome, I believe, as those must be. Rather, long-term “positive change” involves “practicing differently in the everyday, from moment to moment, across school spaces” (Youndell, 2006, p. 40) with the view to displace marginalizing discourses. This, I argue, can only ever be part of ongoing, localized, contextually sensitive education-activist work that recognizes the constraints of enduring discourses, and yet acknowledge that all subjects have a capacity for action to some extent.

I do not believe that other modes of political engagement are incompatible with a politics of the performative, of difference, and of antinormativity. This is a central point Kumashiro (2002) makes by positing that all approaches to antioppressive pedagogy have their strengths and weakness, and that none should be done exclusively or in isolation. Loutzenheiser (2005) makes a similar argument in stating that while a more fluid reading of identities is required, that practice does not preclude the occasional use of static notions of identity in order to read intersectionally or in order to make institutional gains. However, within the context of Vancouver and the province of British Columbia, I argue that those seeking “queer-friendly schools” have an unparalleled opportunity to de-emphasize essentialist discourses and encourage the insurrectionary discursive practices Butler describes. Since language is an open-ended system, one is provided with the opportunity of agency, which Butler (1997b) describes as allowing for “the repetition of an originary subordination for another purpose, one whose future is partially open” (p. 38). In other words, insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, “a repetition in language that forces change” (p. 163, emphasis mine). This argument should not be taken to mean that the capacity for subversion and reinscription is equally distributed, or that the individual
subject should be blamed for unsuccessful reappropriation of discursive acts. Rather, it is intended to acknowledge that power relations are never one-sided, as per Foucault (1994), and that one is never without agency even to some small degree.

Butler’s arguments here have critiqued on a number of points (Hill, 2003; Mills, 2003; Schwartzman, 2002) particularly if they are to be taken as the exclusive course of action for those seeking “change” in situations where individuals face bodily harm or other present danger. As discussed previously in the methodology chapter, there is a differential ability of subjects to engage in insurrectionary discursive practices; likewise, in terms of immediate practicality, resignification may not be available for usage in some situations. To situate the debate in a school setting, it would be presumptuous to assume that marginalized youth are sometimes or mostly in a position where they could employ resignification without jeopardizing their physical safety. For instance, given the particulars of the situation, a practice of resignification would not likely have helped Jubran in dealing with his tormentors in the immediate moment of their physical assaults on him, or in convincing the school’s administration in the short term to not only help him but to also address the whole systemic nature of heterosexism and heteronormativity within the school setting. Jubran decided to push back – not through insurrectionary discursive practices, but first by using “the law” of the school administration, and, then, by using “the law” of the law (i.e.: the courts). Given the context and the immediate situation he faced, I suggest that this was the best choice left for him, even if it was not what I would suggest that others use in terms of activism geared towards “positive change” achieved over the long-term.
That being said, many of the youth that Jody and I have been working with have been able to push back to some degree — and while not necessarily redeploying “harmful” speech acts or making use of “queer” in a fluid or contingent sense, have surprised many (myself) with their proactive and unapologetic claiming of leadership positionalities. This is not to say that this claiming has been without its foibles, or that adults were not also involved; the important piece to this, I argue, is that their presence and demonstrable sense of entitlement subverts the stereotypical image of the at-risk mono-identified queer youth-victim. I cannot really know if their presence and actions ameliorate the school context for the at-risk youth who are in the system, or really know if any of these visible and proactive youth are or are not at-risk in any other part of their lives — or, if they are deemed at-risk because of their “real” or perceived sexual/gender-identity in other contexts in which they move. The point is, their presence and education-activism such as it is disrupts (unevenly, unpredictably, and perhaps only momentarily) the discourses around queer/LGBTQ+ etc.-identifying youth within this context; and, as Jody might put it, we have used our (adult) privilege “appropriately” in order to support them.

For a practice geared towards achieving “positive change” over the long-term, though, I defend Butler (2004a, 2004b) for positioning discursive resignification as an important tool for marginalized groups to use to their advantage, as opposed to using the tools of the state exclusively. I do so even with the understanding that I have only pages ago presented a window that describes full-on engagement with the state and its instruments to work towards education-activist goals very much in keeping with what are hoped for in the dominant takes on queer/LGBTQ+ education issues. I understand, pragmatically, such acts as compromises in the short-term in order to build toward
“positive change” over the long-term (though others may view such acts not even remotely helpful for the cause, but rather as reckless and dangerous). Why is this distinction important, even in a context where the state and education-activism have become intertwined quite complicatedly? Because, as Smith (2001) notes, even without “retreat[ing] to the reductionist idea that the state is nothing but the tool of the dominant class,” the state certainly has never “function[ed] as an obedient instrument of the disadvantaged” (p. 396). History has shown that the law and the state cannot always be trusted to provide the support needed in remedying injustices, and has often worked against marginalized groups. Even in cases where injustices have been remedied in favour of sexual/gender-minorities, the courts fortify, with a “paranoid insistence” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 83), a clear delineation between “the heterosexual” and “the nonheterosexual.” Likewise, Yoshino (2005), a lawyer himself, states his discomfort with the increasing tendency for individuals to turn toward the law “to do the work of civil rights precisely when they should be turning away from it” (p. 194). The “solution,” he argues, lies in all of us as citizens, not in the tiny subset of us who are lawyers, to move away from minority interest towards a project of human flourishing in which we all have a stake.

I agree. Could there not eventually be a point, after “declaring war on homophobia” (Fondation Émergence, 2005) in schools, where we can let the exhausted homosexual go?

**Implementation and steps forward**

The concerns I raise above about engaging in essentializing practices within the legal system also apply to predominant queer/LGBTQetc. education-activist practices
– including, by and large, the ones in which I have participated. I am not going to disown or abandon those entirely; however, I posit that there is an opportunity to conceive of and pursue “positive change” and “queer-friendly schools” differently by de-emphasizing essentialist discourses and by instead encouraging insurrectionary discursive practices as Butler (2004a, 2004b) describes. In addition to the less normative queer/LGBBTITQetc. education-activism that Jody, Jane, and I enacted and described earlier, what further actions can now been taken to move this away from an essentialist politics of minority interest towards a politics of difference and antinormativity within the context in which we are in?

Butler has remained firm in avoiding “How-to” lists for activism, arguing that politics has a character of contingency and context to it that cannot be predicted at the level of theory. Butler (2004b) posits that “The effort to name the criterion for subversiveness will always fail, and ought to” (p. 99, my emphasis). Prescriptions “preempt the whole problem of context and contingency,” and ignore “that political decisions are made in that lived moment and they can’t be predicted on the level of theory” (quoted in Bell, 1999, pp. 166-167). As a political field, the context of public education in Vancouver, too, has a character of contingency and context to it that cannot be predicted at the level of theory; and while we can be informed by theory, and while we should be reflexive of our philosophical viewpoints, education-activist decisions will continue to be made in the lived moment. I will offer here, though, several suggestions as to what could be potential for future work in the Vancouver public school context.

First, making additional efforts invite educators and students to practice, as per Kumashiro’s (2002) education that changes students and society, an approach to their
everyday learning and education-activism — one that involves going through crisis, seeking routes that act as catalysts for action and change, and organizing our education-activist work in such a way that we are able to model and encourage such an approach. I was able to offer some professional development for teachers around Kumashiro (2002) as a text, but I do not have data to connect that limited professional development to specific pedagogical or systemic changes. I think there are additional possibilities for this in the future, though that will undoubtedly look quite different from opportunity to the next, and cannot be the end sum of the education-activist work that is done.

The second suggestion relates to an uncomfortable question (Kumashiro, 2002, 2004) I have asked myself several times during my work with the VSB Pride Advisory Committee — that is: *How does one keep from being essentialist, especially when one believes oneself to be an activist seeking “positive change,” especially one that embraces contingency and antinormativity?* I have continued to ask myself this question because of the tendencies for activism on the political left which Jane, Jody, and I have identified in earlier chapters. There are similarly identified by Dempsey and Rowe (2004) who, relying upon the work of Foucault (1980), delineate: the tendency of activists and movements to replicate the very exclusions they are working to allay, threatening already contingent solidarities; the tendency to be immobilized by the tension between moral vision/righteousness and strategic vision/political strategizing; and, the tendency for activists and movements to essentialize their “enemy,” disempowering themselves by affording their targets more coherence and strength than actually possessed.

I see these tendencies in the queer/LGBTQetc. education-activism work being done in Vancouver, beyond what has been recounted in this project itself. The
"replicating exclusions" tendency is the most obvious — for instance: disdainful comments I have heard about non-Western cultures' "views" about homosexuality coming from a predominantly white education-activist community; shallow knowledge about and lack of leadership opportunities within activist circles for certain individuals or groups education-activists claim to be "representing" (intersex or trans-identifying people, for example); the seductiveness of organization-based gatekeeping to determine who participates in or "owns" education-activist work; or, most commonly, the sort of space-taking Jody describes as being predominant among men in that movement. Foucault (1980) argues that power always is, and therefore there is always the potential for its use and misuse, the latter compromising the possibility of "positive change." In recognition of that, as Jody and I have both argued, queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist work must involve an in-group analysis of privilege and misuse of power directed at the education-activists themselves. It must also involve consistent confrontation and deconstruction of marginalizing discourses and hierarchical structures within education-activist groups.

Third, as per Butler (2004a, 2004b) and Foucault (1980), it must involve recognizing that deferrals to abstract principles (e.g.: "queer-friendly schools") are at all times power-ridden and context-based, and are therefore contingent and guarantors of nothing. If education-activists come to an understanding of that, then it becomes clearer that it is not ever just about "making the good argument" — particularly in bureaucratic structures, as Jody identifies. Thus strategic vision and political pragmatism must always accompany the righteousness element of activism.
Finally, following Butler (2004a, 2004b) and Foucault (1980, 1994), education-activists seeking “positive change” aimed at building “queer-friendly schools” need to be mindful that we constitute the world by how we represent it. By representing homophobia and transphobia with more coherence and sway than they actually possess, queer/LGBTQetc. education-activists activists risk quashing the very participation they seek to elicit from marginalized groups and allies who have heretofore been reluctant. Instead, by *troubling* understandings (our own and others’) about homophobia and transphobia, our understandings of schools and our approaches to those “problems,” and our understandings of leadership and agency in educational settings, we may open up space for different approaches, participants, and outcomes. An emphasis on contingency (of our always incomplete representations of always incomplete identities or institutions), and on the cracks and contradictions of more oppressive formations, can effect more hope and proliferation — a main feature, I argue, of a “queer-friendly school.”

I think there are opportunities to do all these things within the context of the public schools system both in Vancouver and elsewhere in British Columbia.

“Conclusion”

As discussed, transphobia and homophobia rely upon on-going institutional reification of heterosexuality and gender conformity as normative. All of these are present in North American public school settings (Sears, 2005a), and are present in the everyday enactment of leadership within the field of education (Blount, 2005b). Educational administrators are nearly the exclusive focus of dominant educational leadership discourse (see Fullan, 2001; Furman, 2002), while teachers, youth, parents, cultural minorities, and other members of the public supportive of building “queer-
friendly schools” have not necessarily been recognized or provided enough space for their leadership work to flourish (Franck, 2005a; Kumashiro, 2001; Rofes, 2004).

However, school-based and community-based queer/LGBTQTetc.-inclusive interventions are appearing in a growing number of municipalities across the country, both rural and urban. The work of queer/LGBTQTetc. education-activists indicates that resistance to the regulatory devices of heterosexism and homophobia has been successful in some situations — at least in the sense in achieving liberal discourse gains (Loutzenheiser, 2005). This work is expanding incrementally.

Given that this work has been context-specific, though, the strategies utilized (and the resistance received to these efforts in return) have also been context-specific and will change over time. While there is no predeterminable outcome nor generalizable “best practice” (Glatter & Kidd, 2003; Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002), I argue that a commitment to a politics of difference and antinormativity with one’s specific context in mind, and in conjunction with a community of activists, provides an opportunity to move towards “queer-friendly schools” beyond the scope of safety, tolerance and inclusion.

In the previous chapter, Jody expressed that she felt more comfortable working as close to “the outside” as possible, and that she worried that activists may compromise themselves and their work unless they did so. But the argument has also be made that activists may be shortchanging their work by romanticizing notions of “the outside” as the ideal site of radicalism, and that “inside”/“outside” and confrontation/assimilation binaries overlook the possibilities that most individuals are both “inside” and “outside” at the same time (Vaid, 1995; Rottmann, 2006). Certainly Jody shifts in her previously hard-held stance on this matter, as demonstrated in the contrast between her earlier
comments and those she makes with Jane in February 2007. These arguments relate to the broader concerns I raised about dominant educational leadership discourse. I believe that destabilization of normative conceptions of leadership, with broad-based participation in organizing and advocacy, will not only foster more “queer-friendly schools,” but may also contribute to “positive change” across a number of inequity issues in the public education system. To destabilize normative conceptions of leadership means to create a context where differently-positioned people can more easily gain access to decision-making structures and resources within the education system, and create new possibilities for decisions to resonate with differently-positioned members of an always-heterogeneous school community and public.

This does not occur in a vacuum. The context in British Columbia is one in which centralization and standardization are the current and previous provincial governments’ preferred solutions to educational problems. This signals, I argue, that dominant educational leadership discourses – if they are truly meant to support public education – have hit the limit of their effectiveness. Is it not time then, as Rottmann (2006) argues, to ask those who are not stuck on a particular problem (either because they do not envision it to be a problem or because they have thought of less harmful solutions) to work through the relevant issues?

With current emphasis on “accountability,” “achievement,” and privatization, it seems particularly important in British Columbia that this space for critical dialogue involve a process that goes beyond “consultation” leading to “consent” dictated by a government. I argue that if a space for genuine critical dialogue and broad participation is established in the British Columbia public education system with differently-positioned
individuals involved, then students’, teachers’, and community members’ contributions are more likely to lead to productive action. I include queer/LGBTITQetc. education-activist concerns in this overall sentiment. This is a concern that requires further research and theorizing.

By linking “positive change” to the building of “queer-friendly schools,” the education-activism described in this project can be said to include efforts that contest the limits of who is included in and excluded from the “public” in public schools. It also includes efforts to transform the public domain of public education as a site where all members of the school community, including those who identify as or are perceived to be queer/LGBTITQetc., can participate equitably, meaningfully, and safely. Additionally, the “positive change” sought here might involves a shift away from binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, and away from the essentializing practices associated with these.

The actual practice of resignification in public schools requires further research and exploration. But I must ask, much like the trustees in North Vancouver asked in Jubran vs. North Vancouver School District: should this be the work of schools alone? Can this be the work of schools alone? Schools are merely one space within a larger public sphere, and yes, they are ill-equipped to efficaciously remedy oppression in the broader society without sustained effort from the broader community. Students and educators alike bring their experiences of normativity from the broader public sphere into their school context. One’s ability to imagine a “desirably queer world” (Warner, 1993, p. xvi) or “queer-friendly schools” is shaped by the very context in which one dreams. My position is that activists need to start with themselves -- to do the “looking within” that Jody, in particular, and Kumashiro (2002) call on activists to do more of.
I do not unquestioningly claim in “concluding” this thesis that “positive change” or “queer-friendly schools” have been “achieved” by this project’s participants and I; rather, I include them as a call for education-activist work towards those goals continue while concomitantly being interrogated for the oppression they may generate as well. Resignification and other insurrectionary discursive practices as conceived by Butler could produce changes in the very identities of those instigating the process. That is what activists, regardless of their position on the political spectrum, should aim for.

Will we recognize anyone in the end?
Limitations of my research

There are many limitations of my research, not the least of which are those that relate to the oversimplification of many of the events narrated and difficulty in providing satisfactory discussion of such a complex chain of events, experiences, and context. As a researcher, I had to constantly fight against my research in order to keep it to a more manageable size and scope. Proceeding with three guiding questions complicated matters as each could have sustained a thesis without the others. I will not state a preference for any of the guiding questions here, as I have attempted to balance the three in a way I have found satisfactory. No doubt, each reader will have their own opinion as to which of the three guiding questions is more compelling, which has been overemphasized, and which has been neglected — though, I hope that the exploration of the three in this thesis contributes to an understanding of the tensions between theory and the pragmatism of education-activism work.

Had this been a dissertation, my preference would have been to involve a greater number of participants — particularly, the other members of the VSB Pride Advisory Committee who were active during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years during the work leading up to the development of the policy, during the writing and adoption of the policy, and during the initial implementation of the policy. This group of people included many people who are not, by training or trade, "educators," but can be counted as education-activists just the same.

My unexpected change in work situation that occurred for both Jody and me partway through the work on this thesis also shaped the progress and content of it in a way that had not been anticipated when the research was originally approved and initiated.
Given that the research was, largely, about the work we were doing in our jobs, the change both complicated and put significant additional limitations on the research – in terms of time, opportunity cost, and data. While I cannot say with any certainty how long Jody and I would have remained with the Antihomophobia & Diversity Consultant position, it is likely that we would still be in that role at the present moment and would have had more opportunities to shift the work toward a politics of difference and antinormativity. Even if that presumed shift had not occurred in a dramatic fashion (which is reasonable to assume given the bureaucratic context), the data contained in the sixth chapter would not have been anything like it is had queer/LGBTQ+ etc. education-activism still been the main occupier of our work day and volunteer time.

Finally, my research does not address, to the degree that a longer text might be able to, some of exclusions in the dominant education literature on queer/LGBTQ+ etc. issues that I argue need to be rectified. Specifically, I am referring to silences around non-Western conceptions of sexual/gender identity and, around youth who simply do not identify along sexual/gender-identity lines regardless of their erotic desires, their experience(s)/choice(s) in expressing those desires, and/or the positionality of their erotic partner(s). Similarly, while intersections of race and sexuality are alluded to in the research, intersectionality across multiple positionalities is not included here as a mode of analysis.

For these reasons, particularly the last paragraph, I argue that there clearly would be value in more research on these issues in this context.
Reading beyond 2

I come now to two other questions in order to take another opportunity to “read beyond” (Kumashiro, 2002) what I have presented above, and to push against any normative expectation of closure one might expect of a project such as this.

The first is: Did I enter any crises when confronting contradictions in our stories and this project as a whole, how am I working through those?

My answer to that question is: “Yes, several of them.” There would be little learning and little “change” in detachedly itemizing what we “did” and then insisting on stability and normalcy. Jody’s and Jane’s stories confronted my perceptions of the worth of my own activist work, and the “positive change” that may have come out of that work.

Doing this work within an institutional, bureaucratic context provides an easy scapegoat for the contradictions. Working collectively, with many other people with whom one may have little in common paradigmatically, also sets up a number of contradictions – in the form of compromises. Activism in this context is driven, to a large extent, by who shows up. The VSB Pride Advisory Committee and this project have been no exceptions to that.

I think all three of us have been put in a number of situations over the past few years where our ideals and notions of “best practice” have been troubled by the contradictions we have encountered between our differing philosophical positions, or between those philosophical positions and practical circumstances within our lived lives – where emotion, immediacy, convenience, and other “external rewards” come into play. How often, then, do principled positions prevail?
I suspect that the crisis I experience in those situations increasingly stems from
the recognition of my own tendency toward linear, dominant praxis: the learned
“common sense,” forever driven by marginalizing discourse, and reified by me in
allowing myself to drift back towards essentialism whenever I am confronted by seeming
“contradictions” or approaches that are by necessity without closure. This is privilege at
work, working against principle – and recognizing that is upsetting. I still have work to
do with myself.

The other question that has had a persistent presence in my thoughts has been this:
How much of my own history of “woundedness” over-rid other decisions I may have
made in this project or in my activist work?

Briefly, I was once, in many ways, the stereotypical at-risk mono-identified queer
youth-victim. In the production of this project, I have felt at times like I have been
betraying that youth – by turning away from the education-activist discourses promoted
by Walton (2006a) and Sears (2005a), where it is easy to find that youth, and moving
instead toward something more nebulous. But I am no longer that youth, nor is the
Vancouver public school system that particular youth’s school context. I have seen
queer/LGBTQetc. education-activist peers in their forties and fifties refer in
workshops to their own secondary school experiences as if those experiences were
relevant and would play out now exactly as they did then – and that is always something I
have avoided in my own practice.

Perhaps it seems strange to be concerned about self-erasure in a project containing
autoethographic elements. Neither the stories shared nor the education-activist work
done should be regarded as “complete.” But I will share this: while I have not now come
to be "fully knowledgeable" about myself and my activist practice, I still want to change the message – to encourage proliferation of what it means to be recognized. The experiences I have had with my participants working both in our education-activism and this project provoke me to continue earnestly seeking "positive change."
Also, ideally, I would be able to randomize the letters in “queer/LGBTTITQetc.” In these acronyms, the L or the G predominantly and prioritizingly comes earlier in the construction than the Ts or the I, if the latter appears at all. I had considered reversing the order too (perversely) as “etc.QTITTBGL/queer” for the same reason – and because the placement of etc. at the beginning of the construction would serve to immediately signal the indeterminate, open-ended, and problematic nature of these very identity categories in ways that queer perhaps no longer does, despite theoretical intentions. Likewise, with the use of third place singular pronoun use. Where possible, I make use of “she/he,” except in quotations where the source employs a different construction. English does not provide for the use of “they” in the singular, and though I am open to ignoring that convention, I am concerned that a blanket use of “they” in the third-person singular may contribute to the erasure of women that “she/he” is meant to avoid. An alternative may also be to deploy suggested genderqueer or other more recent gender-neutral constructions for the English language third-person pronoun. I will deploy “she/he” to be inclusive, while being mindful that it too is a binary construction silencing of non-binary constructions. I again encourage the reader to read/re-author in consideration of these concerns.

I should note too that “female” and “male,” “woman” and “man” will also be used – though, again, not all of the texts or participants agree upon the fluidity and textuality of these concepts.

Have gays and lesbians not made contributions to other fields?

This claim, and claims such as these, ignores the possibility that queer students are already present in the classroom and may have life experience and cultural understandings different than the “particular struggles” “encounter[ed]” in examples provided by the adult dialogue engenderer. It also assumes that, endowed with knowledge provided by the (heterosexual) pedagogue, the (heterosexual) youth in question will be able to rationalize through the heterosexual matrix, transcend biases, and have enough privilege in all aspects of life to “become allies” (i.e.: additional custodians and saviours for the queer youth-victim).

This dilemma raises a number of questions. Does queer advocacy or antioppressive work rely upon a small number of individual activists willing to put themselves forward in this regard, and should we assume that these individuals possess “sufficient” critical skills or altruism? Does their work become a normative/normalizing “best practice” unintentionally? Can antioppressive work be done antioppressively without a community with which to inform that work?

In Canada, Sears (2005b) states, school governance issues are much more localized (presumably in relation to the United States, though he does not specify). I would clarify this assertion by specifying that public school elementary and secondary education in Canada is almost entirely a provincial issue (except for some aspects of aboriginal education and education in the territories), and that the degree of localization varies from province to province along a continuum from provincial ministries of education, to school boards, to site-based management, to individual classrooms. Sears (2005b) correctly identifies that support from Canadian ministries of education vary among provinces and territories regarding queer/LGBTITQetc. issues and youth – though I am not aware of any Canadian provincial government, including British Columbia, among the “most” he states have “adopted some supportive LGBT policies, particularly in the areas of antigay harassment and suicide prevention” (p. xxxi). Similarly, while I hope his claim that “[m]ost Canadian teacher education programs address LGBT issues” is true, my suspicion is that the experience of the majority of pre-service teachers or teachers who have recently graduated from teacher education programs may not report similarly. Nor do students the have access to gay-straight alliances (GSAs) to the degree to which Sears (2005b) describes as “operate throughout the school systems in Canada.” If by “school systems” he is referring broadly to provinces, then he is likely correct in that somewhere in every province in Canada there is probably at least one semi-functioning GSA accessible to students; if, however, “throughout the school systems in Canada” implies municipality to municipality, then this characterization is false. Sears (2005b) does recognize the “significant support [which] has been forthcoming from professional organizations” (p. xxxi), citing the Alberta Teachers’ Association and Canadian Teachers’ Federation. However, he omits the significant political, financial, legal, and curricular resource support provided to queer/LGBTITQetc. causes by teacher unions and other labour organizations throughout the provinces.
Walton (2006b)'s characterization of the Vancouver and Greater Victoria policies obscures stated support for intersex- and two-spirit-identifying people, both specifically referenced in the school board policies.

Similar loose coalitions forwarded the agenda in the Southeast Kootenay and Gulf Islands school districts which also passed specific policies in 2006, and played a role in the addition of sexual/gender identity references to antiharassment/antidiscrimination policies in the Vernon, Quesnel, and Coquitlam school districts. Walton (2006b) does not discuss these.

Miceli (2005) refers to “LGBT teenagers” as his subject (see p. 5, for example), but only mentions transgender students in passing. The absence here of trans-youth or intersex-youth is much like the absence and only remote possibility of gay and lesbian youth in the 1970s and 1980s research that he describes.

I am not as optimistic as Miceli (2005) is in that regard. For the most part, his depiction of a coherent, influential and pervasive “GSAs movement” is questionable. Problematic too is Miceli’s (2005) unwritten assumptions around the degree of queer/LGBTQ+ youth participation in school-based GSAs where these clubs do exist. What about students who, for a multitude of reasons, do not join GSAs? Do they not have agency as queer/LGBTQ+ youth, agency as youth, and/or agency period? How does he account for the large number of GSAs which are dominated (in demographics and in influence) by white, straight allies?

J is also work which, according to Kumar and Schenk (2006), is crucial for union renewal as unions adapt with ever-changing contexts.

Charmaz and Mitchell (1997), for example, argue that “the proper voice is no voice at all” (p. 194).

Butler (2004b) notes the difficulty of the I to express itself through the language that is available. The I read is in part a consequence of the grammar that governs the availability of all persons in language. I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by it. What this means is that the I is never received apart from the grammar than establishes the availability of the I. If that grammar is “treated as pellucid” (Butler, 2004b, p. 101), then we fail to call attention precisely to that sphere of language that establishes and disestablishes intelligibility. Language is not transparent and pure. Experiences and imaginative leaps that I recount, even those I claim to be my own, are shaped by what language, in its unpellucidity, makes available to me.

2002 February 11 The first VSB Committee III meeting when GAB Youth and the Outreach Coalition presented to the VSB trustees:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/districtinfo/meetings/CommitteeMinutes/CommitteeIII/20020211.htm

2002 May 13 The Outreach Coalition returns at this VSB Committee III meeting:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/districtinfo/meetings/CommitteeMinutes/CommitteeIII/20020513.htm

2002 June 10 At this Committee III meeting specific recommendations made by the Outreach Coalition were accepted by the trustees to be recommended to the full Board of School Trustees:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/districtinfo/meetings/CommitteeMinutes/CommitteeIII/20020610.htm

2002 June 17 Board of School Trustees where the Outreach Coalition’s recommendations were accepted, including a declaration of support for the establishment of GSAs in secondary schools:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/districtinfo/meetings/BoardMinutes/20020617.htm

At the time there were five. Presently, every secondary school in Vancouver has a Gay-Straight Alliance, or similar “diversity club.”

2002 December 17 VSB Committee I meeting. On agenda was recommendation for a task force to be struck to examine LGBTQ issues, but the meeting amended the recommendation to refer to an on-going
203 January 20  The Advisory Committee was officially created by the Board of School Trustees:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/districtinfo/meetings/BoardMinutes/20030120.htm

Committee instead:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/districtinfo/meetings/CommitteeMinutes/Committee2002.htm

Participation of some of these groups diminished over the years, and other groups such as Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS, TransYouth Drop-In, and Options For Sexual Health also accepted invitations to join.

Opposition came from groups such as the Catholic Civil Rights League, the Canadian Alliance for Social Justice and Family Values Association, and BC Parents and Teachers for Life.

Murray Corren (then, Murray Warren), Diana Willcott, Blaine Cook, Sue Cook, and Rosamund Elwin.

That is, Section 76 of the School Act, which reads: “(1) All schools must be conducted on strictly secular and non-sectarian principles. (2) The highest morality must be inculcated, but no religion, dogma or creed is to be taught in a school or Provincial school.”

Minutes from the advisory committee meetings are in the public domain, and include attendees’ names.

Subsequent to this ruling, the school district sought leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. This was denied, and thus the previous decisions in Jubran’s favour stand.

While not explicitly stated in the BC Human Rights Code, gender identity is also read into the act.

2003 December 8  Presentation of draft to Committee III meeting:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/05D176A8-FD00-47DA-9559-8E77C95CC269/4454/03dec08op.pdf

2004 February 9  Presentation of final draft of policy and action plan to Committee III:
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/420066DD-B7E9-41AE-B890-43347E655271/5352/04feb09op.pdf

Recommended to Board by this meeting.

2004 February 16  Board approves policy and action plan, with some minor amendments. John Cheng attempts to adopt the former and not the latter, citing lack of funding, but no one seconds his motion to amend.
http://www.vsb.bc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/E0B2A84F-0802-473E-BF80-1C6D87A20F0A/5416/04feb16op.pdf

A Filipino-Canadian student from Vancouver’s Tupper Secondary School who was murdered in December 2003 late in the evening on school property by students from another school.

Like in any collective bargaining situation, however, things won always come with an opportunity cost of something else which could have been won from the employer.

Lorne Mayencourt sent two emails to me in April 2004 in response to a letter I wrote to him asking that he take a more assertive stance on the issue of homophobia in schools. His first was the “cabal of Liberal government haters” email I refer to; in his follow-up email, he asks to “recall” his previous one. Mr. Mayencourt copied both of these to the editor of XtraWest, who had this to say in an editorial:

I read your email, Lorne, the one you sent out Saturday the 24th to Glen Philip Hansman and copied to me. It was a gem of a letter you sent to Mr. Hansman in response to the one he sent you about the need for your provincial government to actively tackle homophobia and bashing in schools. [...] “As you know,” you write, “I rarely defend myself personally from the attacks by you and your cabal of Liberal government haters. I realize now with regards to this issue that enough is enough.”

Perhaps you changed your mind after sending this email. After all, you followed it up two days later with one noting a “recall” on the original. I wanted to ask you personally, and contacted your office to do so, but you didn’t get back. (Kirkby, 2004)

For the first half of the 2005-2006 school year, I also had still been teaching in a special education program for students with language disabilities.

Jody is using this word somewhat creatively as a way, as I understand, of indicating the crucial role agency plays in any form of activism. In April 2008, I asked her about her use of “monomer” here. She argued that while it might not be the exact, technical sense of the word, she still likes to use it as a synonym for “basis” or “core.” I will respect her usage of it.

The Ministry of Education’s forthcoming resource guide for implementing social justice across the K-12 curriculum, though, is provisionally titled Making Space, Giving Voice — which does imply that agency and voice is something to be “given.”

Asha’s Mums was one of the books in dispute during the Surrey book-banning situation.
NPA trustee John Cheng was particularly critical of Jane because of the decision to participate — claiming he supported the fight against discrimination but criticizing the COPE trustees for “acting out of political correctness” (quoted in O’Connor, 2005). Cheng goes on to say that he “[does not] think it’s good for the corporation to march behind something that the parents would not necessarily like to have their children in, the kind of lifestyle the parade people represent” (O’Connor, 2005, June 8). Ironically, his successors in the 2005-2008 NPA-majority school board continued the VSB’s participation in the Vancouver Pride Parade.

I had met Murray Corren in Montréal in 1999, while I was a pre-service teacher planning on moving to New Zealand. We spoke of establishing a Canada-wide network of queer teachers and allies, and of the frustrations he was having with the Ministry of Education in British Columbia at the time. When my plans changed and I moved to Vancouver a year later, I unknowingly ended up living a few blocks away from Murray and his partner Peter, and gradually became involved, in an advisory and research capacity, in their human rights complaint on curriculum issues.

As Gale (2003) notes, “Changes in government are telling moments for policy actors. They can result in the repositioning of policy actors within policy contexts, a reduction in their status and/or legitimacy as policy producers and sometimes their exclusion from policy-making contexts altogether” (p. 56–57).

These groups include the Canadian Alliance for Social Justice and Family Values Association, the Catholic Civil Rights League, the Christian Coalition of Canada, the Christian Social Concerns Fellowship, Concerned Parents of BC, the Vancouver Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship, Real Women BC, and British Columbia Parents and Teachers for Life — many of whom have been providing on-going support for Dr. Chris Kempling, who continues to give lectures across the province and elsewhere in Canada on the issue of parents’ rights in the face of governments’ compliance with the “pro-homosexuality education agenda.” See www.bcptl.org and www.canadianalliance.org for further information.

As is evident in the material I am presently gathering from each school district in the province via a request under the provincial Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act.

I do not mean to imply that all subjects can do so equally. See Kumashiro (2001).

Hill (2003), for example, is concerned that while performative resignifications “can potentially have some impact,” as an exclusive strategy, she maintains that they are inadequate and flawed — for similar reasons as Schwartzman (2002) who is doubtful that resignification takes into account what she sees as “the importance of social structures of power in making these acts of resistance possible” (p. 437). Resignification, Schwartzman argues, does not occur in random ways, but rather “in the context of an organized movement against some form of oppression or in the context of some other, less clearly defined political struggle” (p. 437). Mills (2003) warns that “just as the efficacy of hate speech cannot be assured through recourse to a notion of the sovereign subject, neither can the efficacy of reappropriation and resignification” (p. 271). Resignification’s effectiveness and realizability, Mills writes, is conditioned by the circumstances in which the attempt at resignification takes place — thus, Mills argues, Butler “overemphasizes the progressive potential of resignification as a political strategy” (p. 272).

Regardless, I do not think that this “paranoid insistence” is merely the domain of nonhomosexuals — as demonstrated in the literature review. For example, while MacDougall and Clarke (2004) briefly touch upon the Kempling case, they do not raise the dilemma of the courts’ essentialist reification of sexual/gender-identity.

My question is along the lines (though less hyperbolic) of one posed by Foucault (1997): “How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant?” (p. xiv)
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157


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Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Loutzenheiser, L.

DEPARTMENT
Curriculum Studies

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT

CO-INVESTIGATORS:
Hansman, Glen Philip, Educational Studies

SPONSORING AGENCIES

THE

Eyes of Interest / Politics of Knowledge and Difference

APPROVAL DATE
MAY 25, 2006

TERM (YEARS)
1

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
May 12, 2006, Consent form / Mar. 26, 2006, Contact letter / Questionnaires

CERTIFICATION:
The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
by one of the following:
Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.