ABSTRACT

Queerly-located inquiry can be disruptive and unsettling as it conceptually contests and problematizes understandings of ‘I’, ‘We’, ‘Us’ as an internal, subjective, or perceptual frame of reference’ (Rogers 1962). Queer work has critically interrogated the performativity of sexuality in and across social life rearticulating textual, historical, and rhetorical understandings of same-sex expressions and representations. This chapter draws on three queerly-operationalized research projects that investigated same-sex sexualities, sexuality-related diversity, equality, and inclusion in educational domains. The author suggests queerly-narrated research provides teachable moments in which doubt and uncertainty have the potential to be a transformative presence for the reconceptualization of scholarship.

INTRODUCTION: FUGITIVE KNOWLEDGE AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PRESENCE.

Differences of identity and affiliation are becoming more and more present in children’s and young people’s life worlds and the growing divergence of subcultural discourses in education have in recent years become significant as a field of study (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, Letts & Sears, 1999, Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2002, Atkinson, 2004, Ellis & High, 2004, Vicars, 2006, Rasmussen, 2006, Kumashiro 2012, Allen & Rasmussen, 2015). In this chapter I draw on three different research projects investigating same-sex sexualities in and beyond educational domains. Each of the research projects locates supercomplexity as the underpinning research paradigm, which presents the concept of différance (Derrida, 1978) for making meaning and for exploring a different kind of truth.

I think with/in The Methodologically Contested Present, a description that characterizes the tension and conflict surrounding the ways in which research and scholarship discursively problematize how knowledge is constructed and represented. I do so to make space for scholarship to engage with what

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(Herda, 1999, p. 2) refers to as intersubjective spaces of understanding in which being in the world ‘is not validated by scientific criteria that measure neutrality, simplicity, or repeatability.

My coming to queer involved growing up in a time and place in which I was constituted as a summoned subject “…defined by [my] position as respondent (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 262) within heteronorming ‘discourses of the social and the individual’” (Fox, 1997, p. 42). I have written elsewhere of my making too much of my particular claims of self: of being subject to “…the imperative of sameness [that] would have me believe that I am making too much of myself when I speak and act as a gay man” (Vicars, 2012, pp 65-65). Becoming “attuned to surveying the conventions, cultural understandings and assumptions of the domains in which I work and live” has been a shaping interpretative location. Sikes and Goodson (2003, p.34) have noted how: “Research practice cannot be disembodied. It is impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or of any stage of the research process”. Being attentive to how my research and scholarship practices, constituted in and by the researcher/researched dialectic, are a be/coming epistemic relation, my methodological orientation has refuted the grand narratives of neutrality and objectivity as an expedient fiction of the research process (Spivak, 1990). I prefer instead to put my trust in the stories that people tell of and off their lives, as they invariably reveal a “complex layering [of understandings] formed and informed through discursive practices and social interactions” (Sikes 2006, p. 523). My genealogy as an educator and researcher is invested in acts of queering formed through an autopoiesis of dissent.

Research and scholarship, it could be argued, are in an ever-complex dialogue with neoliberal policies and practices framing what counts as valid knowledge. I have claimed elsewhere that

Disciplinary subjectification of academic work(ers) by neo-liberal narratives are increasingly re/storying and re/presenting what academic work is or should be. Speaking back…can be a fraught affair connected to both teaching and research evaluations [which disclose] the rituals of power through which we re/encounter (our) selves in the academy. (Vicars, 2019, p.84).

By placing research and scholarship as a provocation and a conscious act of critical deconstruction of the word and the world (Freire, 1998) my queerly nuanced stories of views: “academic [and scholarship] as a situated social practice” critically articulate ideals and ideas that are transformative and for the social good (Vicars, 2019).

Taking a queer lens to unsettle the tacit production of normalizing knowledge claims has involved analyzing and making visible the hetero-norming apparatus of meaning making. It involves what Mills (1940) termed a vocabulary of motive. Queering scholars have looked differently to interrogate normative discourses; challenging and deconstructing perceptions of how knowledge is formed and enacted across a range of hegemonic practices. Scholarship in the “queer turn” has increasingly politicized matters pertaining to sexuality (Warner, 1999, 2012) and has promoted an understanding of how “meaning emerges not from the thing-in-itself but from its relationships to an infinite number of things” (Kincheloe, 2011, p.214). Situated in and shaped by the cultural contexts, social formations and practices, the “queer turn” locates analysis and action as emerging out of a range of writerly relationships (Barthes, 1974, Britzman, 1998) with the everyday and as Kincheloe (2004,) has noted:

As we examine multiple perspectives we attend to which ones are validated and which ones have been dismissed [and] we begin to understand how dominant power operates to exclude and certify particular forms of knowledge production and why (p.16).