ORIGINAL DOCUMENT TITLE: Teachers who interrupt and challenge heteronormativity in the school environment.

REVISED TITLE: 'Well at least they're doing something': Daring to explore, critique and move beyond practices that support heteronormativity.

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This document is a 'work in progress' and will be further developed and incorporated into my PhD. I am currently in the analysis stage of this PhD and welcome any comments, questions and feedback.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

I started my teaching career as a primary teacher working in both Melbourne and London. After this I worked as an English as a Second Language teacher and co-ordinator in both the primary and TAFE sectors.

Currently I am a full-time PhD student at the University of Melbourne studying teachers' discourses in terms of how they challenge and/or privilege heteronormativity within their classrooms and school environment. I also work part-time for the Victorian AIDS Council and do occasional tutoring at University level.
The focus of this PhD research

This document is based on teacher interviews undertaken for my PhD research (in progress), which investigates teachers' attitudes and approaches in terms of:

- supporting and advocating for gay and lesbian youth;
- incorporating gay and lesbian issues and content into their classroom teaching and/or training with staff;
- challenging heteronormativity within their school.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is the privileging of heterosexuality as the normal, natural, assumed and compulsory form of sexuality\(^1\). It is positioned as the 'right', 'ideal', 'legitimate' and 'moral' way to be sexual\(^2\). Heteronormativity can function in stated or unstated ways\(^3\). That heterosexuality is often unchallenged and left unexplained is also heteronormative\(^4\).

Research method

This PhD research (in progress) has involved interviewing four secondary school teachers who described themselves (or in one case described by others) as actively supporting gay and lesbian students in their school. Two of these teachers, Jane and Louise, will be focused on in this document.

Both Jane and Louise were interviewed on four separate occasions over a twelve month period. These interviews were semi-structured and lasted for lengths of between 75 and 90 minutes. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Questions that arose for me in the process of transcribing and re-reading through the transcripts were noted on the transcripts and sent back to the participants for their comments. At times both Jane and Louise also wrote short pieces about critical incidents (relating to what we'd been discussing in interviews) that had occurred to them at school, as well as their thoughts on their involvement in the PhD research.

Background information about Louise and Jane

Louise

Louise has been teaching for over twenty years now in the Catholic system. She has taught in Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. For nine years of this time she was a religious sister. As part of completing her Bachelor of Theology she became "...very engaged..." in Liberation Theology, since she realised that like Jesus, we needed to liberate the oppressed\(^5\). This principle, and others related to Liberation Theology can be identified in the practices Louise adopts and also in how she views the Catholic School system.

Whilst studying Liberation Theology Louise became involved in a gay and lesbian group which ministered to people who didn't feel welcome within mainstream churches. And through this she came to the realisation that she was "most probably lesbian". Louise is 'out' as a lesbian to a small number of staff members, including a colleague (who is lesbian) who she collaborates with on many of the practices she adopts in support of gay and lesbian youth. For the most part though she is closeted about her sexuality presuming that the majority of staff, including the principal would see her differently if they knew. Outside of the Catholic system, she has numerous contacts and involvements with people working in research, teaching, lecturing and youth work relating to sexual diversity.
Louise is presently working at a large Catholic Co-educational school in Melbourne, where she is head of Religious Education, and teaches both this subject and English.

Jane

Jane has been teaching for 16 years within the State School Education system. She identifies as heterosexual. In introducing her I will use some of the words she used to describe herself in July 1999:

"I am 40 years old, have two young children and married in my mid thirties to have children because my partner's family would not have coped without the certificate."

There is a thread of awareness of injustice issues throughout Jane's life:

"I started considering social justice issues at a very young age. I toyed with journalism and law as careers but think I felt I was aiming too high as a girl despite having the marks and parental encouragement...My third choice was teaching partly because I thought I could do a better job than many of my teachers, particularly those who treated students poorly. I had an overdeveloped sensitivity to injustice and the only times I got into trouble were in speaking against authority, usually on someone else's behalf."

"I went through a period of intense belief in Christianity...Things became complicated when my ideas about issues, eg abortion, sexuality, industrial rights etc came into conflict with Church teachings (not necessarily the Gospel). From the age of 16 I have considered myself an agnostic as I think atheism and religious belief both involve too high a degree of arrogance and certainty. I remain very interested in spirituality and the teachings of great religions about equality and justice."

Politically Jane has been involved in many causes, the origins of which she traces to her "Labor voting household" where she "...was taught from a very early age about equality, unionism, justice and that the Liberal Party represented wealth and privilege." She sees herself as a "lefty", having had union involvement and membership in the Labor party, working in the public service for seven years, "...never having much enough money..." and starting her teaching career in the Technical system, sixteen years ago in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Here she came face to face with:

"...reluctant learners, students with learning difficulties, abusive backgrounds, poverty, poor conditions and under-resourced communities. Teachers needed to be resourceful in the classroom in order to help/persuade kids to learn, and resourceful outside the classroom to fight the political battles to gain funding or to introduce innovative programs."

It is here too that Jane's beliefs in unionism and collective bargaining were reinforced, and where she learnt public speaking under pressure, in speaking up for "...students who had little power."

Jane describes herself as a feminist who has "...fought quite a few battles against sexual harassment and gender discrimination..." She says, "I have a working knowledge of theoretical feminism but I have not studied it or read widely in the field."

As a result of having gay and lesbian friends she sees that she's "...always been aware of peoples' sexuality....homophobia was as abhorrent as racism and sexism." Her involvement in making it an issue in schools only came in the last 3-4 years when a gay friend spoke to her about the need for role models for gay and lesbian youth, especially since there were issues around gay and lesbian teachers themselves being 'out' in the school system.
Jane's subjects are history and politics, and she recently retrained as a teacher-librarian, a role she has worked in for the past four years. She was the Equal Opportunity Co-ordinator at her school at the time of the interviews. Her teaching career has been spent in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

**How Louise and Jane understand heteronormativity**

**Louise**

"...the assumption is everyone is, the world is normal, and normal is heterosexual. The family is male, female, all parents are straight. ...All functions of schools....school socials, graduations, sporting teams, everything is directed towards heteronormativity and schools recreate society and the assumption is heteronormativity and to challenge that is threatening because of George Pell's agenda stuff, ...that whole thing of gay people breaking up families and threats to society...So I think there's a lot to break down...question, critique how real is this. Schools need to be called to account, to get real."

Louise sees the huge task associated with challenging heteronormativity, and also reveals the dictates from those high in the Church hierarchy, that can serve to act as warnings not to push too hard.

In relation to 'getting real', Louise places a great deal of emphasis on inviting people to "...educate them [selves] into compassion", getting them to reflect on their own experiences of "...being vulnerable or being abused or being abnormal...". This is necessary since she thinks that "...it's normal for them to make assumptions..." Louise positions heteronormativity within the realm of the normal and the expected, the result of a lack of awareness and experience. People cannot be blamed for this ignorance so Louise delivers messages that sexual diversity is normal and natural and must be supported. She brings the experiences of gays and lesbians into an overwhelmingly heterosexual environment through her class discussions and also reveals the damage that heteronormativity can cause, through stories of the harassment that gays and lesbians face within school and society.

Though notions of 'blame' and 'fault' are not engaged with, people are called to "account" for inequity and oppression:

"I think when you're using...phrases like 'liberty to the oppressed' heteronormativity has to be held to account because it is a part of structural oppression and I think by naming it...it does call them to account without pointing the finger at them."

The notion of being called to "account" is used on a number of occasions in the interviews. In this situation the challenging of heteronormativity occurs within a disciplining framework, where peoples' actions or discourses and the institutional structures they're part of, are evaluated in relation to what they espouse as their beliefs. It becomes a situation of 'are you practicing what you're preaching?' or 'does your school's structure reflect the values it espouses?' The beliefs therefore assumes more importance than an examination of the "structural oppression". Louise does not speak about how heteronormativity functions in terms of the establishment and deployment of values or belief systems.

Being called to "account" is also used to get students to consider how their actions might impact on gays and lesbians who may be in the class. Louise doesn't see this as a "...discipline issue...but an invitation to educate them into compassion." Yet though the student's action is considered, it is in relation to "compassion." The student's investment in
the action and the structural arrangements in the school that support such actions assumes less importance.

I asked Louise whether she saw heteronormativity as "an absence...a not mentioning of certain things":

"No, I think I'm very graced because I always assumed that I was straight and then I realised I wasn't so I don't think everyone has that gift. And I don't think I can blame people for assuming that everything else is straight and that's why I think we need people to name issues...because it may not be in their experience. They may genuinely feel compassion for gay and lesbian kids but they may not understand what it's like. So I know that heteronormativity is an oppressive fact but I don't think it's ever anyone's fault. I think it's a real gift to have to struggle cos it's taught me so many things I wouldn't know...and I think gay and lesbian people have to find ways to invite straight people into our experience by conscious strategies if necessary."

Here the focus is on the individual, how it's not their fault. I can see the need to avoid blaming and accusing. I think that the emphasis needs to be foremost on an exploration, challenging and critiquing of the structures, practices, funding, and training which support heteronormativity. This requires people to be willing to explore, challenge and critique as well as re-work and re-shape their investments. But if heteronormativity is merely a result of ignorance and experience then would this be required?

**Jane's understanding of heteronormativity**

"That everything is interpreted from the point of view of the heterosexual person. So that everyone will grow up, get married and have two kids. And there are binaries, male and female, masculine, feminine, so that everything is interpreted that way and that means that everyone that doesn't fit into the narrow picture is alienated."

Jane explained her role in terms of this as:

"Basically trying to broaden out, get rid of the idea of the binary and get some sort of picture of a spectrum of gender and just challenge peoples' ideas on that, get them to examine what that means and how that can cut people out, and stop people having equal opportunity, the same advantages as others."

Jane shows that this is more of an 'ideal' when she comments that the implications of such an approach are that it would make her "life easier", so that she doesn't have to "temper" what she says. When I asked her to "imagine the possibility of being able to say what you want to in this area..." she re-stated what she mentioned above. Jane's concerns about moving too fast, about upsetting particular people, about not being too direct about gays and lesbians mean that even when she does challenge heteronormative assumptions, and practices, it's in a way that seeks to avoid too much conflict, in ways that people feel safe and comfortable with. Though she feels people learn through being "knocked off balance", they are prepared, and cushioned for any knock, and heteronormativity as a consequence is not shaken too much. Jane speaks of bringing in outside consultants to 'knock people off balance' in inservice training since they can set out to provoke reactions and then walk away from the school. This reveals her concerns about challenging heteronormativity too hard, or in too direct a manner. To do so she believes risks her reputation with other staff and parents, risks stopping any initiatives she's set up and risks her being left without support from her principal "...because they're an agent of the Ministry of Education."
How Louise and Jane see themselves in relation to gay and lesbian youth

Louise

"I have to challenge and be aware of things like language and role modelling, and trying to be inclusive as possible, and treat all types of sexual orientations as normal...That every person is acceptable as they are, that they're 'subjects' not 'objects'."

"I hope that word will filter though that this teacher is prepared to speak up publicly and passionately for gay and lesbian kids."

Louise spoke of various means by which she was supporting gay and lesbian youth.

To students who came 'out' to her she spoke of her role outside the classroom. Here she was a mentor for some, took some out to gay cafes, brought in gay and lesbian newspapers and sometimes directed them to support services.

Within the classroom she spoke of incorporating issues within an "Ethics" unit, of speaking up about the experiences gays and lesbians face in terms of harassment and of speaking out against homophobia wherever it emerged. She spoke of the importance of gay and lesbian role models and highlighted gay and lesbian characters in novels as well as famous gays and lesbians.

In relation to comments about gays and lesbians made by Church leaders, such as Archbishop George Pell, Louise used his comments as basis for critiquing authority in her "Ethics" unit, incorporating stories about gay and lesbian students she knew, and also providing an article written by Muriel Porter, an historian and theologian, which provided a counterpoint to Pell's article. At a whole school level she spoke of making prominent events such as World AIDS Day.

With staff, Louise spoke of including gays and lesbians in prayers and school masses. She spoke of talking about the experiences gay and lesbian students face in school and society. She also advocated for improved conditions for them.

Jane spoke of her role in terms of:

"...representing the gentler side of humanity. ...I'd like them to see the alternative adult world, that a whole lot of people out there do care about people and society and where we're going and equality and all those sorts of issues. The alternative adult is how I'd like them to see me."

Jane also spoke of various means by which she was supporting gay and lesbian youth.

Within the classroom Jane told of how she would advocate for gays and lesbians in response to issues that students raised. She said that she would challenge homophobic remarks. As a teacher librarian she now has less classes but she spoke of making her library more gay and lesbian friendly in terms of purchasing a range of gay and lesbian related resources that she advertised to students. She said that she had changed the catalogue subject headings to include 'gay' and 'lesbian', and had also created displays that included a range of relationships including gays and lesbians. Her reputation in the library had lead to other school librarians ringing her to ask for ideas in terms of gay and lesbian resources.
In her role of Equal Opportunity Co-ordinator she spoke of her work in getting 'sexual orientation' named in the Equal Opportunity policy, and of advocating for improved support for gay and lesbian students with staff through training sessions. She spoke of being a resource person for people in her school in terms of intervening in homophobic incidents that arose in some teachers’ classes, and also in terms of being able to provide advice and resources to staff.

**Discourses that privilege heteronormativity**

Many of the discourses Jane and Louise spoke of within the interview revolved around privileging heterosexuality as the norm. I have chosen to focus on three discourses that assumed prominence in this regard. These are:

- People need to be eased into content and talk about gays and lesbians;
- 'You're pushing the 'gay agenda', or 'you're pushing your own barrow' or 'you're pushing your own bandwagon' or 'you're promoting homosexuality';
- 'Put yourself in the other person's shoes', or 'imagine if you were gay or lesbian...', or 'how would you feel if you were gay and lesbian and...?'.

These three discourses will be explored in terms of the following areas:

- An explanation of the discourse;
- The contexts the discourse is used in;
- How the discourse functions in practice;
- How the discourse privileges heteronormativity, and the problems associated with it.

**Discourse 1: People need to be eased into content and talk about gays and lesbians**

This discourse, and variations of it are used by Jane.

**An explanation of the discourse (in terms of how Jane describes it)**

The assumption behind this discourse is that the mere mentioning of terms, 'gay', 'lesbian', 'homosexuality' evoke strong responses of hostility and negativity in some people. There are a number of possible results: people will shut down and not be open to discussing issues relating to gays and lesbians, they will seek to stop any talk or programs operating in the area, or conflict will arise. And it needs to be recognised that in a context of conflict (around issues relating to gays and lesbians) ensuing Jane sees that her principal "...would probably run scared..." and wonders whether the Department of Education would back her.

Another element to this discourse is that gays and lesbian students themselves, who may be struggling with their sexual identity need to be eased into the area. Too direct or too much of a focus could be counterproductive for them and also for gay and lesbian staff, who may not wish to be too vocal in this area for fear of outing themselves and/or being seen to be 'pushing the gay agenda'.

**The contexts the discourse is used in**

Jane uses this discourse to explain her teaching and training practices with both staff and students. There are however key differences between each.
In relation to students Jane says:

"...you don't go straight in and say to the kids, 'okay we gotta deal with homosexuality and we've gotta deal with it right now.' You know if you do that they clam up, they get frightened, they panic about things."

These assumptions are based on her experiences in classes, where homophobia is "rife", and where in particular with males there is an "explosion" when terms such as 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'homosexuality' are mentioned. In relation to staff though Jane doesn't speak of any negative experiences relating to talking about gay and lesbian issues, though she does speak of some staff being conservative.

In relation to staff, Jane talks about not liking conflict and seeks to avoid it. She speaks of being wary of saying what she really thinks.

"I don't feel safe saying really what I think to the majority of people I'm dealing with. I'm constantly biting my tongue politically....I try to play it down (her views) so you don't scare people too much, you don't alienate people before they've had a chance to deal with the issues..."

When introducing unfamiliar, or possibly 'unacceptable' content matter to people Jane seeks to ease people into the area, establishing their comfort, and their feelings of safety by starting with what is familiar and 'acceptable' to them. Jane says such a practice is also informed by her knowledge of people.

To move too fast, or to be too direct therefore in content matter relating to gays and lesbians is to invite conflict, or to risk what you're doing as a teacher.

"If I try to tackle the issues head on, straight away I feel like I'm going to get stopped or there's going to be community reaction, or the principal is going to run scared...and the program will slow down."

**How the discourse functions in practice**

This discourse serves as the main explanation for the "slow, growing approach" Jane uses to introduce and discuss issues relating to gays and lesbians both in the classroom and with staff. It operates at different levels:

- At a framework level explaining how she plans and organises her teaching and staff training;
- At a personal level explaining her policing of how she talks with staff and students.

Whilst the practices adopted serve to avoid conflict, and being shut down, they also serve to maintain her image as a 'professional' teacher, who doesn't draw too much attention to herself, and who maintains respect from parents and staff.

**A 'people need to be eased in' framework**

In relation to students Jane says:

"...if you say to them, 'alright this year we're gonna look at social justice.' And by the third or fourth lesson down the track you're sort of saying things like, 'well gay and lesbian issues are part of social justice. So you're allowing them to put things in a framework and not scaring them so much, I think.'"

Here concepts such as 'social justice' become a means by which students can be eased into content relating to gays or lesbians. As shown above the content matter is subsumed into a 'social justice' framework which Jane signals to the class will be one of their foci in class that
year. Social justice is seen as less threatening, something that students will be comfortable with. Only after students are secure would gay and lesbian content be introduced. Another concept which content about gays and lesbians is attached to is ‘equal opportunity’.

In relation to staff Jane also uses concepts such as ‘social justice’ and also ‘equal opportunity’ in her role as Equal Opportunity Co-ordinator to ease people into content around gays and lesbians. Here though unlike in the classroom she can’t necessarily state that gay and lesbian issues are “part of social justice” and expect that she can just leave it at that. However she does believe that if staff have limited views of who social justice or equal opportunity apply to they can be convinced of the need for a broader view:

“If people are taken step by step. 1. We agree that all people are equal. 2. Therefore all should have the same rights and opportunities. 3. Therefore they shouldn’t be bullied and harassed or discriminated against. 4. This includes black people. 5. This includes women. 6. This includes disabled people. 7. This includes gay and lesbian people. If not why not?”

How successful is this approach with staff?

“...at the moment no-one’s challenging me too much, they're allowing me to move further and further down the track and say more things. And not one person has stepped out yet and said, 'we can't handle this'. So I feel like the slow, growing approach is working...”

Jane seeks to keep what she’s doing below the threshold of reaction, since if nothing becomes visible there are no ripples and no scrutiny. And since there haven't been any ripples from staff she judges the approach as successful.

How the discourse explains self-monitoring practices adopted during teaching

Aside from the ‘people need to be eased in...” discourse explaining the way Jane organises and plans her classes, it is also used to explain her policing of her own talk in class: "...I often have to temper what I say..." Jane speaks of beginning to talk on an issue only to realise that what she is about to say may well cause upset, discomfort, negativity or hostility from some people. It's like there is an alarm bell that rings within her warning her that she's close to 'no go' terrain.

"I just think that well what I would really like to say to kids is this, oh hang on I better not say that, I better think of a more tactful way to say that, you know not to upset anyone..."

In moments such as this there are hints of internal conflict, where Jane has almost forgotten the discourse of "people need to be eased in..." and is about to operate outside those constraints, saying what she "...would really like to say to kids...". However this is brought to a sharp halt and the concerns of upsetting some people assumes more importance. She says she feels dishonest doing this:

“Well if I'm saying to kids this is my opinion and I'm not giving my full opinion, to the broadest extent of my opinion then I feel dishonest or if I can't let them know a little bit more about who I really am and how I really think...”

Yet her decision to curtail her own talk reveals she is more willing to feel dishonest than to face negativity or hostility.

Investments in this discourse in terms of the teacher role

Also weighing heavily on Jane, in terms of how she speaks in class, is her image as a teacher, in terms of parents and other staff. Her reasons for this are fears of being shut down, or:
"...the parents will say, 'don't listen to her she's a radical', or 'what she says is nonsense', or your colleagues are going to get worried about what you're saying in the classroom. I think that's what makes you say, 'okay I better say this in an acceptable way'..."

In seeking to maintain credibility as a teacher, Jane tones down, eliminates or re-works aspects of herself, investing in ways of being that keep her indistinguishable from other teachers. Of utmost importance is having a teacher identity that is respected and is seen as competent (not seen as "radical" or talking "nonsense"). So even though her "...gut feeling is to say, 'this is absolute bullshit, it's ridiculous, why are we pussyfooting around. We just say there is diversity in society, why carry on like this..." there is a 'but':

"...but I know there are enough conservative staff members who would react badly and there are parents who would react badly against that for it to be shut down."

How the discourse privileges heteronormativity and the problems associated with it

The "slow, growing approach" explained and justified by the discourse, "people need to be eased into content and talk around gays and lesbian" is heteronormative in a number of ways.

It buys into notions that homosexuality is to be feared, something that people need gradual acclimatisation to unlike heterosexuality. Though Jane may speak of the broad community, all are treated as needing acclimatisation even though it may only be a specific subset of the whole community. In this respect it gives greater focus to the presumed anti-gay and anti-lesbian people. Fear of them dictates the pace of progress and how content about gays and lesbians is spoken about.

Jane speaks hypothetically about engaging with the frightened, panicking students, and seeking to unpack some of their fears and exploring their investments in particular positions. She doesn't detail any actual experiences of doing this though. In focusing on students' reactions Jane shows that issues of control in the classroom are of importance to her, signalling a lack of confidence in her own ability to handle 'scared' students.

What sort of teaching practice do we get, if it is reliant upon not being too challenging, and is based on the permission of the presumed negative section of the community ("they're allowing me"). There is a risk of assimilation, if the aim is to not draw too much attention to what's being done. Jane is in effect saying that without permission this is as much as I can do:

"Poor is the man whose pleasures depends on the permission of another"

(Kravitz and Chavez et al 1990)

Jane says that "...not one person has stepped out yet and said, "we can't handle this." Success in terms of her teaching practice is based on the lack of opposition from a presumed negative section of the community. The heteronormative parameters that Jane has set up around gay and lesbian issues are solidly fixed in place. Without pushing gay and lesbian issues very hard she faces little challenge, therefore she can read her practices as being okay and can continue on in the same manner.

The use of 'social justice' frameworks as a means of easing people into content and talk about gays and lesbians

This approach sets up an "...innocently ignorant general public" ("the normative folks") who will be persuaded by "...the truth of the minority...to welcome the diversity of others..." (Britzman 1995:159). This is supposed to lead to a transformation of prejudiced views.
Jane assumes people to be rational, not considering the need to work through the investments people have in their own discourses and discriminatory attitudes or behaviours. Ellsworth (1989:308) argues that knowledge cannot be taken on board when "...I am not free of my own learned racism, fat oppression, classism, ableism, or sexism."

Jane assumes that given a social justice framework and particular knowledge, then students or staff will be less scared, or they can be eased into talk about gays and lesbians. Yet these frameworks or knowledge may not serve a student or teacher particularly well, they may conflict with their peers' values. It is unrealistic to expect that people will just take on board values which threaten their relationships with others. To expect that people will give up the pleasure and benefits associated with power is also unrealistic. Misson (1996:117) argues that for students to take on board anti-homophobic discourses we must find a way to show how these students can gain from taking up these discourses, otherwise they may well ask 'what's in it for them'.

And why do gays and lesbians have to be linked to social justice? Heterosexuality is often a given within schools. It doesn't have to justify its space and dominance through reference to a framework of social justice, for as Jagose (1996:17) notes:

"Heterosexuality....has long maintained it's claim to be a natural, pure and unproblematic state which requires no explanation."

The 'idea' of 'social justice'

Jane sees that teachers in general subscribe to ideas of 'social justice':

"I think we can fairly safely judge most government and Catholic schools are quite happy to have 'social justice' as one of their goals. I think that's fairly established. I don't think many staff would argue against the idea of 'social justice'."

The idea of 'social justice' is seen as more prevalent among teachers than the community in general who she sees as moving away from ideas of 'social justice':

"It's the people who don't subscribe to social justice at all and there are heaps of those people in our society. You hear them on the radio everyday, people who subscribe to competition and whoever's there first wins. And that's my worry with the community too, that feeling that we get in a Kennett driven Victoria, is that social justice is out the window."

"So I can think about teachers in terms of social justice, I find it much harder to think about the community in terms of that."

These ideas need to be contrasted with recent research focusing on 750 same-sex attracted youth throughout Australia (Hillier, Dempsey et al 1998:33, 35, 73). This research found that "...school is a more violent place for these young people than the streets", which "...represents a serious violation of these young people's rights to safety and of the duty of care of school authorities."

Arguing people across to a broader view of 'social justice'

Jane sees that teachers are easier to persuade to include gays and lesbians as part of 'social justice' than the rest of the community:

"I assume that their view of 'social justice' is fairly narrow, looking after the poor people and not being racist, even sexism is only partly there...but I don't think that matters cos it's fairly easy to argue and broaden social justice out. If
someone subscribes to a fairly narrow view of 'social justice' and says it's a worthwhile thing. It's fairly easy to argue out from there."

I asked Jane after interview #3 to explain (in writing) how she would argue teachers across to a broader view of 'social justice'. She wrote down seven principles:

"If people are taken step by step.
1. We agree that all people are equal. 2. Therefore all should have the same rights and opportunities. 3. Therefore they shouldn't be bullied and harassed or discriminated against. 4. This includes black people. 5. This includes women. 6. This includes disabled people. 7. This includes gay and lesbian people. If not why not?"

Misson (1995:30) says there are serious flaws in the type of approach Jane suggests. He says that claims of equality with respect to homosexuals are untrue:

"Homosexuals are not equal (and that's particularly so if you are a gay or lesbian teacher in the state of Victoria at the moment: The Government says you're not equal.

He says:

"One doesn't want hopeful statements in equality: one wants to see how the inequality is structured and perpetuated so that something can be done about dismantling it."

Ellsworth (1989:315) talks about the setting up of her university anti-racism class. She describes how at the beginning of the class, she and the students had committed to certain principles to live and work by (in class). These were 'ensuring equal opportunity to speak', making the class 'a safe space' and 'equal power in decision making'. Through the course of the class they came to see these principles as "myths". By buying into these "myths" Ellsworth says they had given these "myths":

"...the power to divert our attention and classroom practices away from what we needed to be doing. Acting as if our classroom were a safe space in which democratic dialogue was possible and happening did not make it so."

There was a need to develop practices which addressed issues such as power. Jane's focusing on particular principles likewise gives power and status to these ideals. This takes space away from what needs to be done, that is engaging with the underlying interests and investments that prop up prejudice and oppression.

Another aspect of the principles Jane espouses is that it assumes a connection and relationship between different types of discrimination. As Warner (1993:xxix) states any one of these areas of discrimination "...can do without the others and might have more connection with political conflicts less organized by identity." There are many points of difference between these areas in terms of their histories, how they're viewed and understood by people, how they're considered and treated within structures, and the part they play within identities. Warner (1993:xxix - xx) suggests a moving away from the pure focusing on gender and race for example to finding other points of commonality in relation to their political struggles.

The power dynamics within the scenarios Jane describes

To set up a situation of arguing staff to a broader view of 'social justice', is to leave it up to heterosexuals to decide whether to allow their view of 'social justice' to include gays and lesbians. As they're eased into the area and are talking about their ideas about social justice, talking about those areas they feel comfortable with, ultimately they decide whether to extend such principles to gays and lesbians. Such an approach leads to a position of gays and lesbians being subservient to, and reliant upon the generosity of heterosexuals, whilst the framework of 'social justice' remains premised on heterosexuality. Connell (1995:229-30) argues for a more complex conceptualisation of 'social justice' one that involves "equalizing access", contesting masculine hegemonies, sexism within institutions and
structures, and "...ending the stigma of sexual difference and the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality..."

In order to challenge heteronormativity there is a need for talk and content around gays and lesbians to exist outside the gaining of permission from heterosexuals. There is also a need to re-think the use of 'social justice' frameworks, or as Connell (1995:229-230) suggests, a need for a reconceptualising of 'social justice' in a manner which challenges the current power structures and status quo.

There needs to be exploration, and "clear articulation" and documentation of the goals, priorities, risks and potential of education about gays and lesbians (Ellsworth 1989:303). And all of this needs to occur outside of the current systems that serve to perpetuate injustice towards gays and lesbians.

Discourse 2: "You're pushing the gay agenda", 'you're pushing your barrow', 'you're pushing your own bandwagon' or 'you're promoting homosexuality'

An explanation of the discourse

This discourse is used to challenge teachers who depict gays and lesbians in a positive light. Positive talk or content about gays and lesbians is to be seen as 'inappropriate' and not to be given too much, if any attention. One of the underlying premises is that gays and lesbians are seeking to take over school spaces to push their own cause.

This discourse is invoked to warn teachers that they're talking too much or in too direct a manner about gays and lesbians. This must be stopped and more time must be given over to the discussion of more 'appropriate' or 'important' issues.

This discourse is used to explain the constant self monitoring and policing that Louise and Jane apply to their own talk and behaviour.

The contexts the discourse is used in and how it functions in practice

Within the classroom there is a concern that students may feel, 'here she (the teacher) goes again, raving on about gays and lesbians', and they may tune out of the discussion:

"...I treat it very much that being gay or lesbian is just another aspect of being a person. It's not 'OH LOOK OUT OVER HERE! (shouting) If you make too big a deal of it...all the time...kids think, she's a psycho and they just ignore her..." (Jane)

Jane is concerned about her credibility with the class, how she's perceived by them. To go on too much about gays and lesbians could mean being considered extreme by the students and ignored. This could impact on how seriously she's taken as a teacher. And if she is considered extreme it will be more difficult to engage them with any discussions relating to gays and lesbians.

Another concern Jane has is that gay and lesbian students may be embarrassed with all the attention:

"I would rather give the message in small doses, to actually say what I mean but not every minute of every period everyday cos I think that would be embarrassing kids in the classroom and p'haps creating a negative situation, 'oh she's just pushing her own bandwagon here..."
In terms of staff, Louise and Jane both express concern that staff will feel 'here she goes again'. They assume such feelings will impact on the willingness of staff to engage with gay and lesbian related content. There is a concern also that they will be seen as only ever talking about gay and lesbian issues, leaving them open to being labelled as "psychos" and "ideologues":

"...I think raising issues can only go so far because people will then say, 'well there she goes again pushing her barrow' and they brand you an ideologue, all she raves on about is gay and lesbian kids." (Louise)

"I have to be careful too. One of the guys at the Conference (A Catholic Church National Conference on 'Jubilee') was saying ideologues only push the one barrow and there's more in life than homosexuality so that's something that I have to be careful about too." (Louise)

In this final quote homosexuality is not considered in relation to heterosexuality or other sexualities. No other forms of sexuality are mentioned, there is a silence about them. Homosexuality is presented as an absolute, and free-standing. It can then be looked upon as an object.

Both Louise and Jane see that they have 'agendas' which they seek to cover up:

"I think you have to be a bit devious especially if you've got a personal agenda which I have in the school, and say well this is too important to be absolutely straight about it." (Louise)

Jane sees herself as a "barrow pusher" though in reflecting on one of the interviews she shows her concern with being linked to the 'agenda' discourse:

"I'm a bit worried that my classroom sounds teacher directed and that the anti-homophobia agenda is mine, whereas in reality the agenda is there and arises without fail every year."

It is worth noting here that Jane describes her agenda in terms of challenging homophobia. She does not describe it in terms of challenging heteronormativity.

Part of Jane's classroom strategy is to wait for the issues to arise, rather than directly initiate the issue herself:

"...normally I wouldn't bring up an issue, usually I would grab an opportunity to bring up an issue in response to something that's been said. So it's almost like a waiting game cos you know something's going to be said eventually." When Jane does want to make a point about gays and lesbians she doesn't dwell on it. She says that she makes her point and moves on. This way the students don't think she's going on and on about it, and she protects her credibility and status as a teacher:

"I don't crusade all the time cos then you get labelled as somebody who's only got one barrow to push."

Louise is more concerned about the discourse being invoked by staff, than students. This means that she is constantly self policing what she says and does (particularly relating to curriculum content and discussions in class), wondering whether she is entering the territory of the 'gay agenda':

"It's just too hard to have to think so critically about everything you say in public or to think am I doing homosexuality as an issue in Ethics because it's my agenda or is it a valid issue to cover in Ethics? All this self monitoring, it's just so tiring."

What is of importance here is Louise's sexuality. The 'gay agenda' discourses when applied to gay and lesbian teachers can be used to label them as extreme, seeking to appropriate the classroom space and influence students with their political agendas. Used in this way the
discourse can serve to act as very effective tool to marginalise gay and lesbian teachers. Louise therefore draws upon various strategies in order to justify any space that she does allocate to gay and lesbian issues:

"I'm a bit of a chicken, I'm still very afraid that I will be outed by my gung-ho attitude so I often explain myself away by my work at a HIV/AIDS accommodation place."

Working in an HIV/AIDS ministry she says has:

"...given me a foot in the door as a respectable thing...It gives me an expertise I can talk about without giving myself or other people away."

Louise can therefore draw on notions of 'charity', 'justice', 'compassion' and 'care', which fit within the Catholic School 'ethos', to justify her talk in this area. Another strategy she uses is to refer to gay and lesbian friends she has, telling stories of their lives and her relationships with them. It's not because she's lesbian (which remains unspoken about) that she's speaking about gays and lesbians, which can be an assumption people have, it's because she has gay and lesbian friends.

The authority of the discourse

"...the assumption (in schools) is heteronormativity and to challenge that is threatening because of George Pell's (Archbishop of the Catholic Church in Victoria) 'gay agenda' stuff and I think a lot of people think like that."

(Louise)

There is a concern from Louise that this discourse is invoked by a leader within the Catholic Church. It could therefore be seen to have some clout with some staff and parents.

Similar to Louise, (though with a different authority base - State Education) Jane is aware of the 'gay agenda' discourse being spouted by those higher in authority, such as politicians:

"...in the school I'm in now I'm directing the policy (Equal Opportunity) and a group of people subscribe to the same views as me and if you wanted the right wing sort of politicians would say 'a bunch of lefties have hijacked the school ethos' and it's incorrect."

This discourse is positioned as functioning with credence at a high level which serves to warn her not to push gay and lesbian issues too often or in too direct a manner. Neither Louise and Jane mention any examples of being accused of 'pushing the gay agenda' yet these examples of where they've heard, been told of or imagine authorities talking about such agendas clearly impacts on their behaviour. As a result rather than being policed by others, they police themselves.

How the discourse privileges heteronormativity and the problems associated with it

The self policing and cautioning within this area buys into notions that minorities are not to take too much space away from the dominant groups. I'm aware of how I've policed myself in relation to my tutoring at university level:

(Notes from my Journal August 1999)

As I tutored in the course relating to health issues today I became really aware of feeling quite self conscious everytime I went to mention the terms, 'gay' or 'lesbian'. I kept making sure that I mentioned 'cross-cultural' issues and 'gender' issues before I said 'gay' or 'lesbian' again, so that I couldn't be accused of pushing the gay and lesbian stuff too much. I found myself being apologetic nearly everytime I said 'gay' or 'lesbian'.

(A few days later...)
The teacher of that class I tutored a few days ago told me today that students had said that they'd really enjoyed hearing and talking about the sexuality stuff in class but they just wished that Greg would stop apologising every time he went to mention gays or lesbians.

So I had internalised a negative position with regards to talking about gays and lesbians. Even though I had never actually apologised, the students saw my actions and some of my discourses as being apologetic. I can see why. I had learnt to excuse myself for even mentioning the words, let alone taking up too much time talking about them. I'd learnt to know my place. I had patronisingly assumed that the students wouldn't cope with such talk, that I'd have to excuse myself so that they (and I) would feel more comfortable. I was in effect catering to those who I thought would be prejudiced, trying to soothe them so there wouldn't be any trouble. I assumed there would be trouble without even checking this.

I can therefore relate to Jane and Louise buying into the 'gay agenda' discourse but there is a need to question it, exploring why we're buying into it and how it serves us as well as gays and lesbians in general. There is much to be learnt by asking whether it's a case of us self-censoring because of our own internalised homophobia rather than actual experiences of negativity. For in adopting this negative position we are not catering for students (as in my tutorial) or staff who want the information and are annoyed with the 'pussyfooting', and apologising around the content matter.

Another issue relating to the 'gay agenda' discourse is that it buys into the idea that content about gays and lesbians is only of relevance and interest to gays and lesbians themselves. It sets such content as separate to heterosexuality, which therefore positions heterosexuality as "natural" and "common sense" by comparison. There is a need to show how this content and these issues impact beyond gays and lesbians, in terms of how students not only police their mannerisms (how they walk, talk and gesture), but also what they wear and how they perform in and engage with particular curriculum areas such as English and Literature. All of this to avoid being labelled 'gay' or 'lesbian' and/or to fit within particular versions of masculinity or femininity. There is a need in this regard to explore hierarchies of masculinity and femininity, and to go beyond the binaries of masculine versus feminine and male versus female. This is important in terms of recognising that there are possibilities and realities beyond, between and outside of these two categories.

A critique of particular approaches Louise uses

The use of the 'I've got gay friends' discourse whilst enabling Louise to introduce content to the class at a personal level, positions gays and lesbians as existing outside the reality of the school classroom and the school itself. As a consequence the school environment remains sharply drawn as heterosexual space, with only heterosexual inhabitants. Even in a moment of gay and lesbian content being introduced, heteronormativity is functioning very powerfully.

The use of her work in an AIDS ministry to justify her talk about gays and lesbians links gays to HIV/AIDS, possibly reinforcing for some people that their prejudiced views are therefore justified. It also means that gay and lesbian content is being justified on the basis of the dominant group extending charity and compassion to the unfortunate 'other'. It's not a positive framework for gay and lesbian students to see their sexuality being examined within.

What about the 'straight agenda'?

I recently attended a sexuality in education seminar. I had written an article for the organisation running the forum and commented to a person how refreshing it was that the...
journal was open to a diverse range of opinions and sexualities, and how I looked forward to contributing more articles:

(Notes from my journal August 1999)

He says to me that the only limits they (the organisation) would put on me was in relation to them avoiding becoming a single issue organisation. There are lots of organisations that focus on specifics he says.

I detect that I'm being labelled a 'single issue' person, as though this is all there is to me. I sense, I smell a whiff of the term 'gay agenda' in terms of me taking up too much space with my 'issue'. I quickly think of a way to use it to challenge him, saying:

"...yes I suppose though being holistic in your approach you'd have to be careful that you didn't just push the heterosexual agenda, and that when we're talking about sexuality we need to think broadly and recognise there are a range of sexualities."

He quickly agrees, and draws upon a discourse which shows himself to be very inclusive in his language around sexuality.

I reflect later:

Just wait for it, just when I think it's going well, there'll be a 'but' coming or something to tell me that 'I needn't start to feel good'. 'We're not going to let you feel that there's a chance to do too much...You're only able to do this stuff cos we're letting you.'

I'm starting to think about the need to engage with the 'gay agenda' discourse, and to question and problematise the heterosexual dominance, questioning why it is that the term 'gay agenda' has prominence but not 'straight agenda' or 'heterosexual agenda'. I'm starting to wonder why teachers buy into this heteronormative position particularly when there is no mention of anyone ever using this claim against them. And what about questioning and critiquing this whole discourse in the form of 'so what if I am taking up space talking about gays and lesbians'.

Sears (1999:5) notes that education in this area is about "...creating classrooms that challenge categorical thinking, promote interpersonal intelligence, and foster critical consciousness." In order to move towards improving equity for gays and lesbians there is a need to take up more space, to appropriate more resources, to have more funds allocated and to have more training for teachers because these are all skewed heavily towards the favouring of heterosexuality. This means establishing issues and content relating to gays and lesbians as valid, important and necessary, as well as fun, exciting, and interesting in their own right. Also of importance is exploring pleasure, desire and passion in relation to being gay and lesbian, moving as far away as possible from notions of shame, guilt and negativity that are often associated with being gay or lesbian.
Discourse 3: 'Put yourself in the other person's shoes', 'imagine you were...', or 'how would you feel if...?'

An explanation of the discourse

This discourse, and variations of it ('imagine if you were...', 'how would you feel if...?') are used to set up a situation where the prejudices and discrimination faced by the 'other' group (gays and lesbians) can be considered and ultimately empathised with. People are asked to imagine what it would be like to be a member of another group. They are asked to consider the feelings of the 'other' group in relation to specific prejudiced behaviour, talk or situations.

The contexts the discourse is used in

The discourse is invoked by both Jane and Louise to deal with incidents where students express prejudice towards gays and lesbians. And it has become the sole means by which they deal with such situations as Jane notes:

"I don't know how else you could possibly approach any important issue in society...it's simply saying, 'if this happened to you, how would you feel? And if you don't like the way that feels have you got the right to impose that on someone else in society."

Louise too doesn't "...know how else to get through to them" (students). She has tried simulations but has recently found that students don't enter into them too well, and she feels guilty about the time taken with creative activities. She does however, mention the value of utilising peoples' stories. The 'put yourself in the other person's shoes' discourse therefore assumes a major focus in the PhD interviews, and particularly with Louise is central to a moral framework that she espouses.

In this section of the document I will just be focusing on Louise.

How the discourse functions in practice

The functioning of this discourse can be best seen through describing a scenario that occurred in Louise's classroom.

The class had been talking about gays and lesbians and one male student had made some homophobic remarks. At this point Louise responded with "imagine you were gay or lesbian". Normally it would be expected that once the student had imagined the gay or lesbian person, they would realise and verbalise how terrible it would be for the gay or lesbian person to be exposed to the negative remarks that they'd just made. This should cause the student to reflect on the repercussions of their prejudiced attitudes and in future then they should hopefully think before they acted likewise.

What happens when the discourse doesn't work?

The predetermined nature of the process became visible when the student responded to the discourse invoked by Louise with "I wouldn't care." Louise persisted with the discourse but shifted away from a gay focus as though it would more likely engage him, "...imagine your last surname was used as a common insult around the school. How would you feel?" He responded again with, "Oh I wouldn't care."

Louise's response is indicative of how students are expected to go along with such a discourse:
"Now at that point I thought I've lost him. I don't know what to do with this. I felt like hitting him."

Louise stopped speaking. Other students in the class however started verbally "attacking him", "saying don't be so stupid....and making this kid face up to a common human experience and that is feeling worthless." The male student, under pressure from the rest of the class to comply with ("face up to") the discourse was forced to play the situation out to its pre-determined result, eventually saying that "...well yeah it wouldn't feel so good."

**How this discourse privileges heteronormativity and the problems associated with it**

Though Louise may teach that there are a range of sexualities among people, this practice suggests that there are not. All students are given the label heterosexual, and the 'other' is gays and lesbians. Gays and lesbians are positioned as outside the classroom, and outside of the experiences of those within the classroom and heterosexuality is "...normalized as natural" (Britzman 1995:153).

This discourse is not used to establish an alternative position from which to explore homophobia. In fact there is no exploring of homophobia at all. As soon as any homophobia surfaces the approach is to quell/suppress/usurp it. It is a way of getting the student who resists to shut up. It is a means of silencing.

Here is an opportunity where the students and Louise could explore how individual actions contribute to the perpetuating of heteronormativity within schools and society. Here is a chance to explore heteronormativity within the broader context of the school environment and outside of it. They could also examine how sexualities are "...constructed in relation to one another" (Eyre, 1997:196).

Imagine yourself as someone who's taboo and disliked

Why would a student want to imagine being someone whose sexuality teachers tread cautiously around, not willing to talk too often or for any extended lengths of time about. Why imagine being someone whose sexuality is positioned as taboo, whose sexuality is afforded ridicule. And why should a student imagine being gay or lesbian when their school environment doesn't require consideration of anything bar heterosexuality, where acceptance is based on being read as heterosexual. As Misson (1996:122) says, "...it's not particularly logical to resist heterosexism and homophobia if one's constitutive desires and sense of self are bound up with those discourses." Defending or reiterating one's own heterosexual masculinity may well be critical for this male student's sense of self, as well as a means of concealing his own vulnerability. To clamp down on him could create a situation whereby "...discriminatory attitudes or behaviours may even reappear in more entrenched or violent forms since they can now be used to defy authority" (Cohen cited in Redman 1996:171).

Misson (1995:31) notes "...the problem is in the dominant culture and it's ideological process..." This is where the focus needs to be rather than getting students to feel for what the gay or lesbian person is going through, he says. While the situation is set up as an imposition of discipline there is very little chance for much expansive exploring of the topic beyond the polemics of two positions, that is taking either a supportive or opposing stance towards the male student for his homophobic remarks. It's like a binary has been set up, 'us' (the students) versus 'the resistant student', so it becomes a matter of point scoring, rather than moving away from the personal to an exploration of the issues involved.

**The 'fine line'**
It can be a difficult situation for teachers, in terms of how far they should "...push the politically correct line when it is believed that everyone has the right to their own opinion" (Harrison and Hay 1997:17). Epstein (1993:143) speaks of how feelings can be driven underground becoming part of the "school counter culture", if students are not challenged in a constructive way. It is a "fine line" that teachers have to walk in this regard.

Redman (1996:171) meanwhile speaks of an "uncomfortable tension" for teachers "between the need to address the oppressive consequences of heterosexual masculinities and the need to respect the lives of those with whom they are working". In this situation with Louise the "oppressive consequences" are being addressed in a disciplinary manner, as she says:

"You cannot, I will not give you a licence to do violence in this room....you do not know what harm you're causing with the words you use."

In unpacking this with Louise it becomes clear that of utmost concern here is the effect of homophobic comments on students she thinks are gay and lesbian, those who know or are related to people who are gay or lesbian, as well as herself:

"Well kids say 'well I'll never be in that situation. I'm not gay.' I can't argue with that. And yet you know at the same time I can see a kid in the back row who I think is gay going very red and looking very uncomfortable and trying to make it such that there isn't anything horribly homophobic said by this kid."

"Everytime I see a display of homophobia in the class I think I subconsciously look around the class and think who is this hurting. Ultimately it's hurting me but I think in every class whether there are gay kids in there or not, there are kids who know gay people, kids whose parents might be gay and there are kids who are questioning."

To call students to "account" for their words and actions is a means of seeking to quickly stop such talk in order to protect students, and/or to lessen the impact of homophobia on them. By doing this the "oppressive consequences" are not explored, possibly leading to them being driven underground. Mac An Ghaill (cited in Redman 1996:175) speaks of how heterosexual masculinities are "...deeply embedded in the specificities of local conditions and historical moments." There is a need to engage and work with the various ways in which masculinity and femininity are being played out, and silenced in the classroom. In this moment the student hasn't been given the opportunity to talk through his thoughts or his reactions. There has been no exploration of the investment this student has in his attitudes, discourses and behaviour, let alone the investments of the other students and the teacher in the class. Louise speaks of 'really listening to the kids' but what about listening to the student who is resisting. She says that there is little space afforded to him:

"I don't think these sorts of kids get much space actually in the class. They tend to be beaten down and I'm as guilty of that as other kids."

Another important dimension to this situation is Louise's feelings towards this student:

"I guess part of me too is a bit afraid of this kid because he is SO masculine and SO seemingly assure of himself..."

This points to the need for teacher training which addresses how to work within situations that are seen as confrontational, or those where students express views that conflict with teachers' values. Harrison & Hay (1997:25) reporting on teachers involved in the pilot phase of an STD's/ AIDS Prevention Education Program, say:

"Teachers at several schools felt that they needed to improve their skills in facilitating discussions, particularly in relation to handling boisterous students or not cutting students off who were being offensive."

Is this discourse seen as successful?

In evaluating this situation Louise shows a range of responses. There is some pleasure:
"...the passion of these kids to cut through the rubbish that this boy was spouting...was great to see..."

"...they were passionate about making this kid face up to a common human experience and that is feeling worthless. And whether it's homophobia or harassment I think every human being has that experience of feeling worthless and I just could have applauded these kids for trying to get through this kid's thick skin."

Louise often speaks about her frustration with people who don't measure up to ideals. Here is a moment though to savour, when she can reassure herself that all is not lost:

"....it's easy to get dispirited as a teacher but when you really listen to the kids there's goodness there and there's a willingness to stand up when it counts."

Bogdan (1993: 350) however questions "...the presence of a mutually reinforcing class dynamic as a barometer of productive learning." What of the students taking up positions which afford them kudos from the teacher, or to merely avoid the collective attack that this student encountered. Misson (1996) speaks of how students are quite able to speak and argue particular anti-homophobic discourses in the classroom whilst outside the classroom it's a completely different matter.

Louise's measure of success in terms of the resistant male student is his relenting or giving in and siding with the opposition. There is a sense that he's been defeated (see McWilliam 1999:8):

"Whether he backed down out of self preservation or because he'd learnt something or whether he was sick of the argument I don't think it matters. I think ultimately that you just have to trust that something from that experience will just stay with him and the other kids."

'You just have to trust': Hopes, beliefs and frustration

This discourse of "you just have to trust..." is used on other occasions where Louise speaks of hoping that something of what she does in the classroom will stay with her students, for as she says, "...I know something from that experience stayed with me..."(a female student standing up to the resistant male student):

"I mean in the end you just have to say well maybe one day he'll think differently or maybe one day he'll meet someone who is gay and he'll see a different face to it."

It is the sphere of hope that Louise is operating within, seeking to reassure herself, to keep herself going when there is evidence that her approach is not really working for some students within the classroom (let alone outside of the classroom).

"Sometimes I catch myself acting like I did that day and thinking, 'I think I've lost it. I'm beginning to preach at them.' But I go away from those times really frustrated cos I don't know how else to get through to them."

"You can't force him to change....so he goes away thinking 'oh yeah that was a waste of time' and I go away feeling really bruised and angry and frustrated."

Louise describes this frustration in terms of "...oh you're no good as a teacher, give up." And she speaks of feeling frustrated in terms of "...the state of the human condition." With Louise describing the Catholic school system as "...such an unfriendly environment...", one which "...isn't giving [her] light", the sustaining of beliefs such as those mentioned earlier are important to her remaining within the Catholic system:
1. "I don't think I'd teach if I didn't think that people were basically good..."
2. "...I believe it's only through facing our neediness and our own emptiness that we can learn..."

These beliefs assume priority over the evidence in front of her, with the male student's behaviour being seen as problematic in relation to them.

Immediately following on from her beliefs she says:

1. "...and it really disturbs me when a young adult refuses to walk in someone else's shoes."
2. "...so when this kid said he didn't care I just got really frustrated cos I know that he would care."

Louise speaks of a number of occasions where she feels frustrated, where people's actions do not accord with her beliefs, ideals or hopes about how people should behave or treat each other. On one occasion she put out Red Ribbons for people to buy for World AIDS Day and alongside the ribbons she placed a bowl for donations. She put in a dollar to show what level of donation was expected and somebody stole it. She speaks of other occasions of students where students have been anti-gay or anti-lesbian, and of an incident where a student:

"...called me a bitch, used words like shit and fuck in front of me and eventually stormed out of the office, telling me to shut-up as he left."

She speaks of teachers being the "worst" in terms of dealing with content or issues relating to gays or lesbians. And she refers to people within the Catholic System espousing 'justice' and naming particular groups who require and deserve such 'justice' whilst avoiding any naming of gays and lesbians.

Fine (1992:122) notes:

"Enormous energy must be required to sustain beliefs in equal opportunity...and to silence nagging losses of faith when evidence to the contrary compels on a daily basis..."

Though Fine (1992:122) speaks in relation to equal opportunity, the same idea could be applied to Louise's beliefs in people. "Enormous energy' is being invested in the sustaining of such beliefs, ("you can I hope win them over by common goodness to each other"). And with incidents continuing to mount that call into question these beliefs, she speaks of "...preaching at them out of frustration" which she "know[s is] not good education..." and refers to herself as sounding like a "bible basher". She says that it's peoples' lack of understanding or experience that leads them to not realise the importance of doing something for gays, rather than it being anyone's fault.

Louise becomes quite emotional as she speaks of numbers of friends leaving the system and her being left behind. She tells of the "costs" of working in this area in terms of the "exhaustion" and "depression". She speaks about how she gets behind in her work, drinks and runs herself down. She says "...it just seems like you're hitting your head against a brick wall so often".

**The issue of sexuality in all of this**

Another important aspect to all of this is how Louise's sexuality comes into the picture, where any comments made about gays and lesbians affect her personally:
“There are moments when I'm with this guy and I just feel like saying, ‘well you know the person you're saying that about is me. I just feel like, when I'm with him, I feel so worthless. So I guess, well I think it's impossible for me to be objective cos everytime one of the other kids speak up for gays and lesbians they're speaking up for me, that's how it feels.”

Here is a moment where heteronormativity weighs heavily on Louise. In earlier interviews she had made it clear that she would be seen differently if it were publicly known that she was lesbian. And so a whole range of feelings, thoughts and experiences remain locked away from her students that could give them a clearer picture of who she is, explain more about the stances she takes and provide an 'out' role model for gay and lesbian students. Whilst in this instance the homophobic remarks of the male student are eventually shut down, an important aspect of heteronormativity remains, that of teachers being required to be seen as ‘heterosexual’ or else having a sexuality that is not spoken of. It is a double sided message for gay and lesbian students who see a teacher standing up for them, speaking positively about sexual diversity, but also a teacher who they may suspect as being lesbian, not being willing to come 'out'.

**Conclusion**

Louise and Jane for the most part are not challenging or exploring heteronormativity, due to a range of concerns and also investments they have in their current roles and practices. There is no evidence of their going beyond impersonal, polite discussions which are non-threatening particularly to the most vocal opponents.

For those of us working in education there is a need to consider how heteronormativity is supported through particular practices. We can then begin to re-work and re-shape our practices whilst also considering how heteronormativity impacts on our own self policing in terms of our behaviour, thoughts and talk.

In many seminars I attend the discourse of "well at least they're doing something for gays and lesbians" seems to put such teachers' practices and discourses (such as those explored in this document) beyond challenge. As Davies (1996:238) says, there is a need "...to evaluate the political and moral grounds for consenting to one discursive construction rather than another", particularly where these take up too much space, and serve to conceal or keep other discourses out of the picture.

There is a need to allocate far more space to those people who have and continue to find ways around barriers, those who are challenging heteronormativity, such that structures, curriculum resources and practices are re-worked, adapted and improved. There is a need to explore how they think about the issues, the methods and discourses they adopt and how they got to where they are. As Davies (1996:34) says: "...very little will happen to disrupt old patterns unless those who were oppressed find ways to gain a sense of agency and control over what is going on." Far more attention must be paid therefore to these people who disrupt "old patterns". They provide the possibility of access to a range of meanings, discourses, experiences, and practices not subservient to heteronormativity.
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End notes

5 See McWilliam (1999:9) for a discussion about the teacher as a "liberator of the oppressed".
6 Letts 1999.
8 See Rofes (1998) for a discussion and critique about his own self censorship within the classroom and in his published writing.
9 See Rofes (1998:14) for an exploration of how he sacrificed aspects of his identity as an openly gay teacher in order to "...fit into the world's sense of what is appropriate conduct for a teacher."
10 See Mills (1996:318) for discussion of how "consensus discourses" operate to ensure "...the image of a teaching group which is committed to the same goals."
11 See Epstein and Johnson (1998) and also Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1996:54) for a discussion of teacher identity.
13 See Epstein & Johnson (1998:25-6) for a discussion about gays gaining "conditional tolerance" through leaving "...unchallenged the dominant sexual and other categories - heterosexuality, marriage, coupledom..." or through not flaunting their sexuality.
15 See also Weedon (1997:79-80).
18 See Pattman (1986 cited in Redman 1996:171-2) for a discussion and critique of strategies used to address sexism with boys. Redman (1996:172) cites Pattman's findings which "...suggest that the 'rational values' promoted in the lesson do not necessarily shift the boys' feelings or their investments in their own peer group values..." The student's "...peer group values 'feel right' or make 'imaginative sense' in a way that the 'rational' values promoted by the lesson simply do not."
21 See Morgan, W. (1996:119) for an at length exploration and critique of the setting up of Victorian Equal Opportunity law in relation to gays and lesbians. Morgan explores the debates that occurred, the power figures involved and key sections of the law. See also Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee (1997) "Inquiry into Sexuality Discrimination", Commonwealth of Australia. This report examines Anti Discrimination Legislation around Australia, and documents the limitations within such legislation.
24 See Pallotta-Chiarolli (1998) for a discussion about Jacqui Griffin a teacher in NSW who took the Catholic Education Office in Sydney to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for refusing her application to teach in Catholic Schools because of her public position as Co-convenor of GaLTaS (Gay and Lesbian Teachers and Students) and other media appearances. As part of the case the commission searched for evidence in scrapbooks that Jacqui Griffin kept of newspaper articles and other media pieces, "...to see if they could find one line where Jacqui was promoting what the CEO (Catholic Education Office) considered 'immoral homosexual activity'. They waded through page after page on
her public political activities and conceded that there was nothing in the scrapbooks that 'promoted homosexuality'. They found loads of work on anti-homophobic violence, care for gay and lesbian students and teachers" (Pallotta-Chiarolli 1998:29).

See Pallotta-Chiarolli (1995:76) where she discusses how a poster she'd displayed in her Secondary School's staffroom of "silhouettes of two men facing each other, their arms around each other's shoulders" was graffitied with 'you are promoting homosexuality in the school'.

See Pallotta-Chiarolli (1994) for a discussion of the you're "promoting homosexuality and being anti-heterosexual" discourses.

See also Sears (1999:4) who speaks about what can lie behind the accusations of a person "...having an agenda".

25 See Sears (1999:3-5, 10-11).
29 Notions of "justice" and "compassion" are drawn upon by Archbishop George Pell in the article, 'Sex abuse cases cost Catholic Church $2m' (written by Martin Daly) in The Sunday Age, 21/11/99.

30 See Bickmore (1999:17).
31 See Martino (1999:139-140, 143) where teachers utilising the book "Two Weeks with the Queen" by Morris Gleitzman, explain their knowledge about gays through saying that they have "...close friends who are gay" (p.143).
34 Curran 1999.
40 Renew 1996.
43 Misson 1995.
46 See Harrison, Hillier and Walsh (1996) for a discussion about teachers exploring 'pleasure' and 'desire' within sexuality education.
48 Martino 1999.
49 Eyre 1997.
52 See also Britzman 1995.
57 King & Schneider 1999.
59 Epstein 1993.
60 See Redman (1996:177).
62 See also Harrison 1999.
63 Harrison & Hay (1997:17) speak about teachers involved in a STDs/AIDS Prevention Education Project (Pilot Phase), feeling "...that exposure to a different point of view may start them [students] thinking differently." See also Rofes (1998:19).
64 See Fine (1992:122).
65 See Davies (1996:43) and Curran, Crowhurst & Halliday (1998:32) for discussion about the importance of naming particular groups in policies and discussions.

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This document is a 'work in progress' and will be further developed and incorporated into my PhD.