

The material and emotional labour of parents of gender and sexuality diverse children negotiating school systems. Findings from the ARC-funded Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) Research project

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This paper draws on the parental voices of gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) children and their experiences of material and emotional labour in navigating the Australian public school system for their child. Based on data gathered for the ARC-funded project (DP 180101676), “Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS): Parental experiences and schooling responses”, the paper illuminates the additional work that these parents undertake to increase their child’s inclusion in schools and to protect their child from frequently problematic schooling cultures. These cultures, inarguably, are the result of a politically-mediated educational climate which renders teachers and schools both fearful of, and uninformed about, gender and sexuality diversity inclusions. Recent moral panics around the inclusion of GSD-related information in the school curriculum such as, but not limited to, the protracted Safe Schools Coalition Australia hysteria, and more current endeavours by conservative politicians to make GSD-related topics banned from schools and teacher education courses, have exacerbated teachers’/schools’ anxieties about these issues. The resulting silencing and invisibility around GSD-related topics increases labour for parents of GSD children.

The data for this paper were based on one of the qualitative components of the broader research, namely an online forum, for parents of GSD children. The forum specifically aimed to understand parents’ experiences of negotiating the schooling system for their child/ren. 16 mothers participated, producing over 120 posts. These were thematically analysed by the researchers. Key themes arising which were of relevance to the notion of emotional and material labour which are explored further in this presentation included: checking in; seeking external support; educating the educators; dealing with bureaucracy; curriculum surveillance and monitoring; providing resources; and engaging with other parents. A considerable amount of parental labour was the direct consequence of inadequacies within the school context to support GSD children. These inadequacies were apparent in, but not limited to, administration, curriculum, pedagogy and policy, as well as schools’ approaches to addressing bullying and harassment based on GSD identity. These findings illustrate the criticality of both pre-and inservice teacher education about GSD young people as well as greater inclusion of GSD-related issues in curriculum, policy and practice.