

Rainbow students as parrhesiastes

Hayley McGlashan¹

¹ The University of Auckland

Traditional power relations in schools work to exclude sex-, gender- and sexuality-diverse youth. However, there has been a significant rise in the visibility of LGBTQI+ matters globally. This could be a result of the increased advocacy and activism by the rainbow community and allies, the expanding online queer community or the growth of queer–straight alliances (QSAs) in schools. Regardless of this rise in visibility, many schools remain uninviting spaces for queer youth.

In this presentation I draw on the findings from a research project which examined the experiences of sex-, gender- and sexuality-diverse youth in a high school in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. The key question guiding this research was: *How do queer youth navigate their intersectional and fluid identities in schools and how do schools support them in doing so?* In order to answer this question, I undertook a year-long critical ethnography in a high school and immersed myself in the school's QSA group, sexuality education classes and in the wider school.

I draw on the theoretical toolbox of Michel Foucault to explore the relations of power that were evident in the site of research and, indeed, the heteronormative and cisnormative systems and discourses at play. Judith Butler's theoretical concepts of gendered identities, in particular performativity, the heterosexual matrix, and the notion of intelligibility, are crucial to this discussion and my attempts to understand the experiences of queer youth in school.

The findings of this research suggest that when schools have QSA's that are co-facilitated by rainbow staff and students then feelings of safety and inclusion are increased for LGBTQI+ students. Furthermore, LGBTQI+ students participation in QSA's increase student led educational and activist rainbow initiatives, ultimately recreating normative power relations in schools.

In this presentation I will discuss how the rainbow students in this study embodied the notion of parrhesia and used the power available to them to resist heteronormative and cisnormative discourses working within their school.