Is It Time (Yet) to Shelve LGBTIQ Topics? The Contextual Adequacy of (De-)Essentialism as an Educational Strategy

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Abstract

The debate on the relationship between queer theory and identity politics, the hitherto dominant research framework with strong application potential, was expanded by establishing queer theory as a starting point for studies examining sexual and gender diversity in education. The point of contention became the question of the purposefulness of strategic essentialism, with a strong emphasis on the many pitfalls of insufficient intersectional understanding of identity, where sexual and gender diversity is but one dimension. Various pitfalls of de-essentialism also became the subject of analysis. With such polarities in mind, in this article we present a part of the data collected within a research project aimed at LGBTIQ[1] inclusiveness of educational institutions.[2] The aim of this article is to analyse potential advantages and disadvantages of using a theoretically progressive strategy of de-essentialism in a heteronormative educational context. Data collected in four focus groups conducted with teachers in a number of Zagreb secondary schools show that, in their attitudes and daily educational practices concerning LGBTIQ topics, research participants are positioned at different points of the spectrum, varying from essentialist to de-essentialist, while the exact positioning is strongly determined by context. The concluding part of the article provides guidelines for future research.

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[1] In the context of this research, we use the LGBTIQ acronym as an umbrella term for sexual and gender diversity, not distinguishing the identities represented by each letter of the acronym.

[2] We would like to thank our colleague Ana Širanović, who participated in the articulation of the project draft, conducting of the focus groups and initial thematic analysis, but not in conceptualizing and writing of this article.

INTRODUCTION

According to the document *Human Rights in Croatia: Overview of 2019* issued by the Human Rights House Zagreb (2020), peer violence against LGBTIQ students persisted as a significant problem that year, further complicated by the lack of support for reporting harassment in schools themselves, while the generally precarious social climate for the members of LGBTIQ community is well documented by several Croatian empirical studies which illustrate the heteronormative positioning of Croatian society (see the review in Bartulović et al., forthcoming). Such lived day-to-day reality of LGBTIQ individuals, as usual, lags behind the theoretically progressive frameworks dominating recent academic considerations of sexual and gender constellations, which focus on the critique of stability of sexual and gender identity and continuous efforts to deconstruct the heterosexual/homosexual binary (Lovaas et al., 2006, Gamson, 1995/1998, Sedgwick, 1990, both quoted in Lovaas et al., 2006). Some authors consider this focus of queer politics on the destabilization of the described dichotomy and the fluidity of identity to be a failed project which insufficiently addresses the existing heteronormativity, associated with different systems of constructing otherness (e.g., capitalism and race) (Cohen, 1997, quoted in Roberts, 2016, 2-3). The described tension is the theoretical context of this article in which the emphasis on the specifics of LGBTIQ identity is considered through the *essentialism vs. de-essentialism* dichotomy, questioning the advantages and disadvantages of advocating for its poles in a heteronormative educational context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Essentialism as an identity strategy based on "the belief that social categories possess innate, immutable, and nonoverlapping 'essences' (Keller, 2005; Williams and Eberhardt, 2008)" (Yao, et al., 2019: 483) has equally outspoken critics and advocates. The critics focus on the function of essentialism in rationalizing the *status quo*, that is, the unequal treatment of members of certain social groups who are seen as bearers of inherent characteristics which distinguish them from other social groups (Yzerbyt et al., 1997 quoted in Verkuyten, 2003). Observing these differences as natural and biologically determined,

and not as socially or historically constructed categories is seen as particularly problematic (Rothbart and Taylor, 1992 quoted in Haslam and Levy, 2006). Throughout history, such *us-them* positioning has generated various forms of discrimination which have systematically denied humanity to *Others* (Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2001, both quoted in Diesendruck, 2020), the most glaring examples of which are slavery and genocide (Diesendruck, 2020). Giroux (1998, quoted in Kopelson, 2002) also contributes to the critique of essentialism, finding fault in its exhaustion through increasing visibility and other strategies of integrating marginalized social groups into the existing social order, without addressing the issue of social justice, or the very causes of subordination/superordination. Moreover, by creating the illusion of group homogeneity (of all women, all African Americans, etc.), essentialist positioning makes it impossible to recognize intra-group differences and the resulting secondary relations of subordination/superordination (e.g., of women of different skin colour and economic status within the "natural and static" category of the woman) (Crenshaw, 1993, quoted in Leachman, 2016; Kopelson, 2002).

If we apply these general objections to essentialism to issues of sexual and gender diversity, we can observe a trend of them being hyper-emphasised, while losing analytical and political perspective on issues related to other identity markers of the LGBTIQ community, prioritizing the experience and interests of affluent white lesbians and gays (Willse and Spade, 2005, quoted in Leachman, 2016), and limiting the insights into the complexity of those LGBTIQ identity issues which are not necessarily defined by the sexual and gender dimensions of identity (Renn, 2010). The assimilation-mediated reproduction of the heteronormativity of society is an unintended consequence of this hyper-emphasising the sexual and the gender while minimizing other identity markers. Duggan (2002, quoted in Robinson, 2016, 1) conceptualises this as "homonormativity," meaning "a political strategy used within sexual minority communities that reinforces heteronormative institutions and mores," such as monogamy, marriage, and reproduction, the right to which gays and lesbians seek to achieve by emphasizing that they differ from heterosexuals *only* in the dimension of same-sex attraction and partnership (Robinson, 2016, our emphasis). Such efforts, which some authors term *normalization*, seek "to pull previously excluded categories of persons into acceptability, thus sustaining the mental and social structures that are anchored in exclusion" (Roberts, 2016, 2). In the educational context, this contributes to the assim-

ilation of LGBTIQ identities into the dominant *normal* matrix (Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020), neglecting the analysis of those mechanisms which produce hegemonic, static, addresses of power relations devoid of proper sexuality and gender understanding (Roberts, 2016). Jennings (2015) sees the possibility of overcoming the described problem in the anti-essentialist representation of transgressive LGBTIQ identities within the curriculum, while recognizing the risks of such an approach which, due to moving away from classical assimilationism, can make it difficult to accept sexual and gender diversity.

The studies presented here approach essentialism as a negative, that is, potentially oppressive concept. Verkuyten (2003, 373), however, cautions that "critical analyses tend to ignore the possible emancipatory aspects. Essentialism is not by definition oppressive, just as anti-essentialism is not by definition liberating." The author bases this thesis on the results of a study focused on the different ways in which ethnic Dutch and ethnic minority people use essentialist conceptions of social groups, pointing to the contextual determination of the effectiveness of different (de)essentialist strategies (Verkuyten, 2003). More specifically, in this study ethnic minorities occasionally employed essentialism as a protective mechanism for minority group rights from the assimilation tendencies of the majority population (Verkuyten, 2003), thus demonstrating its cohesive function and protecting the uniqueness of a particular group (Diesendruck, 2020). Moreover, when a pronounced egalitarian approach threatens the distinctiveness of a particular group, it can intensify its members' separatist tendencies and thus actually increase prejudice against them (see Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2017), which requires a critical consideration of the challenge of "premature" egalitarian positioning, that is, of recognizing the potential of "transitional essentialism": "essentialist positions need not be permanent, and might instead be viewed as temporary safe havens wherein marginalized subjects can bolster esteem and foster community. In short, Qualley sees universalism, essentialism, and binary thinking itself as phases to '*pass through*' in the development of self and philosophy" (Kopelson, 2002: 29).

If we apply the stated potential benefits of essentialism to the issues of sexual and gender diversity, what is noticeable is its strategic use in the fight for the rights of LGBTIQ people situated in the political domain of society where identity politics is used as a mechanism for achieving desired changes (De Ridder, Dhaenens & Van Bauwel, 2011), by employing the *us versus them* narrative (Fetner, 2001, as quoted in Leachman, 2016). This focus on increasing visibility

AICITIA Iadertina

in the academic domain has resulted in studies aimed at making the experiences of LGBTIQ people visible, documenting the LGBIQ inclusivity in higher educational institutions and researching the identity and experiences of LGBTIQ people (Renn, 2010). Although, as was previously mentioned, from the perspective of queer theory these study foci can be critically considered as a mechanism which reproduces the binary logic (Gamson, 1995/1998, Sedgwick, 1990, both quoted in Lovaas et al., 2006) which, in order to ensure the civil rights of LGBTIQ individuals, does not question the homonormative exclusion (Cover, 2012, Duggan, 2002, 2003, Harvey, 2007, Warner, 1993, 2000, all quoted in Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020), "they are critical for uncovering persistent, systemic disadvantages based on identities and group membership, as well as for measuring progress where it is occurring. Climate studies provide crucial evidence for holding institutions and systems accountable." (Renn, 2010: 136). Precisely along these lines, Allen (2015) holds that in countries which lack a tradition of LGBTIQ identity research, recognizing and naming injustices based on sexual and gender diversity is an important first step towards opening them up to queer theory and practice. Namely, empirical data show that LGBTIQ students in a large number of educational institutions still experience various forms of abuse and discrimination (for a review, see Bartulović et al., 2021), which fails to be documented as a result of advocating the abandonment of LGBT studies as research starting point. In addition to that, neither is the effect that anti-discrimination politics and other forms of increasing LGBTIQ inclusivity of schools based on identity politics well documented (Renn, 2010). This brings us back to the previously addressed fact that thinking about the appropriateness of (de)essentialism strategies in promoting LGBTIQ inclusivity of any system is strongly contextually determined and that even prematurely progressive anti-essentialist views could have negative implications.

METHODOLOGY

Taking these polarities, as described here, as a point of departure, the principal research question we will attempt to answer below is whether the attitudes and practices of the participants in the study are dominated by an essentialist or de-essentialist understanding of LGBT topics and how appropriate this is to the educational context they participate in. The participants in this study are

employees of four secondary schools in Zagreb, 27 in total, whose reflections were collected in the school year 2019/2020 by conducting focus groups using the original protocol developed by the authors for the purpose of this research and processed through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This initially yielded five, and after revision, four topics. In this article, we provide an overview of the final, fourth topic, while a more detailed description of the methodology, including ethical principles that were taken into account during the preparation and implementation of the study, can be found in Bartulović et al. (2021).

RESULTS

If we look at the data collected through the focus group process integrally, what is noticeable in study participants' practice is the presence of de-essentialist positioning towards LGBTIQ topics, even though only one focus group is strongly saturated with anti-essentialist discourse, while in the three remaining ones essentialist strategic use of sexual and gender identity is more often advocated. We begin the presentation of the results with an overview of the anti-essentialist positions of all participants who believe that being a member of the LGBTIQ community is not the basis for special treatment within the educational process:

A human being is a human being. Now, you either are a human being or you're not, so…
This is as if we're making it a matter for discussion why, I don't know, you wear glasses, or why your hair is brown.
I absolutely agree, that is, they're not children with any kind of disabilities, with no kind of special needs so that we'd have to single them out in any way, so that we'd need to be taught how to work with them. So, they are children who are, and now I'm going to say this, use this one word, which is silly…
You don't want to say it out loud. *laughter*
Yes… they're normal. I'm sorry, I mean, but I see no need why anyone would have to be taught how to, I don't know, how to work with those kids…

following which they likewise see no need for members of the professional team to directly communicate their LGBTIQ inclusivity nor do they think it

AICITIA Iadertina

justified that the needs of LGBTIQ students are dealt with predominantly by a professional team:

I think that, for a student, it doesn't say anywhere: "This is exactly what I'm here for."

Exactly, it's not likely she [the student counsellor] will say: "This is exactly what I'm here for." She wouldn't stress this…

Yes.

… but she would say: "I'm here for anyone in need." So, she won't say: "I'm here for the depressed…"

In that case, I think that each and every one of us has the responsibility to decide how to deal with that. If they are only treated by a professional team, then it might again look as if they're some strange, some foreign segment of the school, that they're in some way, one might say, weird, that there is something wrong with them.

In accordance with the de-essentialist approach described within the theoretical framework, participants perceive sexual and gender identity as identity markers, which, if singled out somehow, would imply the necessity of making a number of other minority group identities visible, the justification of which the participants find questionable:

I don't know if I'm wrong, but it's just one group, and there are other social groups which are marginalized, so are other topics. Which means, next to that specific poster, we should have other posters as well.

that is, they believe it unnecessary to single out LGBTIQ topics in the course of teaching, given that it would present the teacher with the need to address a potentially infinite number of diversity markers:

Would there be other groups then… blacks, Serbs, those who like turbo-folk, those who dress in black… Those are categories all the same, only this one is sexual, right? Then everyone else should be specifically included in everything.

You know, let me just say one more thing, it's not good to separate the LGBT too much from other types of discrimination. So, whether someone's an atheist,

which would mean religious discrimination, national discrimination – Serbs, Jews, whoever else, and so on (…) This is why we recommend this should be studied integrally.

Certain focus group participants assess such an understanding as compatible with the progressive way in which LGBTIQ topics are understood by the students themselves:

For them, LGBT is no longer an issue.
Yes.
And that is actually an accomplishment… what is tolerance? I always say it's not just saying I support something; I think it's okay, but that it actually stops being such an issue. So, there's no need to talk about it anymore because it's something that's, you know, okay.

some of whom even express their feeling overwhelmed by these discussions, which is why if they're included in the teaching process, this might produce a counter-effect:

I wanted to mention that this school is already in a position where the kids tell me – teacher, haven't we heard a bit too much about that? In a sense where they say – well, why talk more about that now, we got the rights we wanted. So, when a kid says – this all seems to me a bit over the top now. I even heard that comment from the kids, you know. So even when you try to touch upon that topic, they say…
Yes, yes.
Sometimes it has a countereffect, singling such things out too much. It's something that's there, we live with it, and that's okay.
The kids already have an attitude – it's my sex life and I don't see what it has to do with what I'm being taught. Or so to say. I've heard that quite often these past two years.

It's a done deal, yes.

They consider the matter shelved; you know. But, of course, it's the way things are viewed in our school and by the kids I work with.

A|C|T|A Iadertina

For example, when discussing with students whether an artist's sexual and gender identity should be emphasized while interpreting a certain work, the same focus group pointed out that students themselves are of the opinion that this information is irrelevant for the perception of the work, that is, that it should not be included in the textbooks.

All the examples described consider instances of not mentioning LGBTIQ topics to be an indicator of a school's LGBTIQ inclusivity, meaning that they are perceived as so established and *normalized* that they can now be placed in the null curriculum with an air of progressiveness, rather than taboo. It is important to note that this view was dominant in one of the focus groups, which we return to in the discussion.

In the remaining three focus groups, the heteronormative and even the hostile school culture was more often mentioned:

Everyone has this general attitude that they should all be shot or sent to a penal colony, or something of the sort.

I know that, the first time I was shocked, around the time I was starting to teach, when this one kid openly told me he would never help a homosexual because he was… and then, not to repeat these really horrid things, I mean… it really was quite shocking.

…me too, for example, if I were one of the students carrying such, within themselves, such conflicted attitudes – whether to declare something like this openly or not – I would never declare it. Not even all of the teachers would understand, they would be prejudiced…

… yes, yes…

… so why would I make my own life miserable by having this teacher look at me differently… and, let's face it, they would…

But in some forms, when they knew about someone being… they wouldn't even have to be it, they might only be somewhat feminised, or follow different standards, others were known to be cruel to them.

What seems to me, what I'm trying to say, some kids have these overreactions, while others react in a completely normal way, and I think this depends on the overall climate within the form itself. Sometimes you get forms where children are predominantly aggressive when it comes to these issues and then, it seems, all other children retreat in front of such attitudes.

which is to say, in such a school environment:

I think it's the very, the very boundaries of the school, yes, the very context of the school. And when they move towards ***, I wouldn't like to guarantee for someone's safety.

But the same ones would, for example, have issues at the student accommodation, so they'd have to ask to be transferred somewhere else because they're, I don't know... there was this one kid who had his bicycle burned, I don't know what they did in the end.

The above quotes describing hostility within the school environment illustrate how teachers focus on the microclimates of individual forms of students, which suggests the need for a cautious assumption that access to LGBTIQ topics and persons within each department will present a reflection of general LGBTIQ inclusivity of each school.

Due to all of the above, when minimizing the negative effects of the described school/form cultures – which are, according to our assessment, dominant for the three schools included in this study – participants often resort to essentialism as a pedagogical protective strategy, pointing students to the fact that sexual and gender identity is an important identity marker which, same as certain other markers, can form the basis of oppression:

I remembered finding myself in another conflict situation when such exchange of views happened, let's say, one of them said he'd put all of them in concentration camps, and another one said "well, don't say that, it's not humane". And in fact, it works well for me to find a group which shares this radical attitude, to find a group to which someone like that belongs, maybe a group that likes to wear a certain type of trainers, you know, and ask him: "How would you feel if Pete came and told you that someone should beat you up because you wear Adidas trainers?" just, you know, in a manner of speaking, as an example. But I find something he really likes, something that is definitely part of his identity, and then we usually get a bit of introspection going on. And if it is not the case that he is, let's say, completely, completely, I mean, radically convinced and does not veer from this attitude of his... There are, there are ways to get them a little, simply to put them in someone else's shoes.

Yes, I mean, you do have to react to something like that, I have a few students

AＣＩＴＡ Iadertina

who I, I don't even think it's malicious in their case, they have such, such atti-
tudes, and I always try to tell them to put themselves in other people's shoes…
everyone has a trait on the basis of which they could be discriminated against,
everyone. And how would you feel if you were discriminated against on the basis
of this or that trait…

In one of the focus groups, participants pointed to the fact that individual markers of diversity cannot be ignored in the educational approach by citing an example which illustrates that the point of students' non-acceptance within the form collective can be a seemingly banal distinctive feature, such as hair colour.

Working in the previously described heteronormative contexts, hostile towards LGBTIQ students, participants in the study, aware how limited the scope of individual teacher-ally interventions is, advocate the need to explicitly introduce sexual and gender identity topics into the curriculum, because precisely prescribing the obligation to speak about such topics is what will contribute to increased tolerance:

As soon as such an issue is in one of the textbooks, then it's – aha, this is a text-
book which has been prescribed, which is here for us, which the government sanc-
tioned, or the ministry, and so on and so forth. This is what I'm talking about, I
mean, I'm talking about some kind of a top which needs to approve something in
order for it to be in the textbook, in the schoolbook which is prescribed to them
there. Now, would a teacher, who agrees or disagrees with it… she should give a
lecture within a specific situation which explains that it is the same as a differ-
ent religion, different skin colour, that too is the same. We need to simply get to
that level as a society. There, that's what I think. And that can certainly be done
in small steps. Because when it's imposed on someone, when it is in someone's
curriculum, that is, when it's part of someone's teaching plan, then this somehow
either equalizes things, positions them in a more tolerant way, and that's it.

Although they see essentialism as an appropriate strategy for systematically educating teachers and students about LGBTIQ topics, that is, making educational institutions more inclusive, following the previously described benefits of de-essentialism, participants in one focus group note that identity politics interventions can lead to a potential ghettoization problem:

I think that we should certainly somehow, I don't know how exactly, but within the system certainly through some parts we should develop this topic, that is, raise awareness about it. But then again, not to be too intrusive, in the sense that they shouldn't be too marginalised… I don't know, I honestly don't know, I'm not an expert on these issues.

When we consider the transcripts of focus groups and the quotations singled out here as a whole, it is possible to conclude that many elements (although not all and not equally in all four schools) of school culture and the society in which the micro-context of the school is immersed are without hesitation perceived as homophobic. When we add quotations which indicate the possibility that teachers and adequate institutions themselves through their attitudes and decisions contribute to the forming of such an environment, unfavourable to the LGBTIQ individuals:

The ministry… let's be honest… they will never introduce this because we're living in a society from I-don't-know-which century, but if you see, I mean, there are these issues and regardless of their attitudes, regardless of the fact that a large majority definitely has negative attitudes, they are truly well accepted… we don't have… we've never had any problems, but the problem is primarily in the way… How are you going to change anything if there are people within our own staff room who say: "You know, that's only a phase, they're experimenting, it's what's cool these days…".

perceiving LGBTIQ identity as a transitional phase on the way to fitting into a heteronormative social ideal, we consider it justified to conclude presenting the results with the title question – has the time truly come to shelve LGBTIQ topics or is such positioning premature in the described contexts?

DISCUSSION

Although certain positive developments in schools' LGBTIQ inclusivity have been observed over the past decade (McCormack, 2014 quoted in Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2021), recent research shows that they still present hostile environments for a large number of LGBTIQ students. As shown by a large-scale

AICITIA Iadertina

GLSEN[1] survey conducted in 2019 in all fifty states on a representative sample of nearly seventeen thousand students aged between thirteen and twenty-one, "the overwhelming majority of whom routinely hear anti-LGBTQ language and experience victimization and discrimination at school. As a result, many LGBTQ students avoid school activities or miss school entirely." (Kosciw et al. 2020: xviii), to which teachers themselves sometimes contribute with their pedagogical choices (see Bartulović et al., 2021). The results presented in this article show that in three out of four schools included in the study, educational employees recognize the hostile cultural elements of the institutions in which they are employed, which is often paired with advocating essentialist strategic use of sexual and gender identity in the fight for LGBTIQ persons' rights (De Ridder, Dhaenens & Van Bauwel, 2011), aimed at increasing the visibility of LGBT subjects, that is, turning schools into inclusive, safe spaces (Kosciw et al. 2020). In particular, participants in our study suggested including LGBTIQ topics in the curriculum or asking students to put themselves into "LGBTIQ shoes", taking into account the remarks articulated in literature on how (temporary) essentialism can function as a mechanism for protecting minority group rights (see in Allen, 2015, Kopelson, 2002, Verkuyten, 2003). However, we believe that the potential of such an approach in the three schools included in the study has not been used sufficiently – and so participants point out that, for example, they did not think about the need to create an inclusive spatio-material environment, offer LGBTIQ-themed library titles, and the like. Given that these specific schools' culture is described as endangering for the LGBTIQ students, it seems that not implementing essentialist practices is a form of reproducing the general social attitudes towards LGBTIQ persons, that is, not taking advantage of a pedagogical activity's transformative potential.

On the other hand, the fact that certain students feel overwhelmed with LGBTIQ topics, as was described in one of the focus groups, is related, as the participants pointed out, to the specific culture of the school where taboo was removed from sexual and gender differences several generations ago. The participants in this focus group shared a clearly recognizable de-essentialist position, that is, the attitude that LGBTIQ students are not special in any way and that working with them does not require specific pedagogical competencies. Such a position does not fall into the trap of hyper-signifying sexual and gen-

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[1]   Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

der identity, the negative implications of which are described in the article's introduction (Duggan, 2002, quoted in Robinson, 2016; Jennings, 2015, Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020, Leachman, 2016). This, however, simultaneously creates the trap of LGBTIQ identity-based oppression underestimating, equating sexual and gender identity with characteristics such as hair colour, having to wear glasses or musical preferences, which in a heteronormative macro-context (of the entire society or the state) can contribute to relativizing the collective experience of oppression for an entire social group. If we add examples that warn that the position of LGBTIQ students may depend not only on the culture of the whole institution but also on the microculture of individual forms of students, the need to consider the relationship of congruence on the line of form culture/school culture/society culture becomes clearer. That is, what becomes clear is the need to thoughtfully choose a strategy appropriate to the context of each pedagogical location, which recognizes that pedagogical relationships with students are determined by variables that transcend institutional culture, even when it is markedly inclusive.

It seems important to note that in the course of the study, the issue of differentiating specific positions within the LGBTIQ continuum never arose. This must be largely conditioned by the design of the study, which did not anticipate this research question, although the fluidity of the discussions in each focus group left, as we estimate, enough space for it to be addressed at the participants' own initiative. The fact that this did not happen might be in line with the results of related studies that deal with the asymmetry of power within the LGBTIQ acronym, that is, the dominance of advocating for the rights of white middle-class gays and lesbians (Willse and Spade, 2005, quoted in Leachman, 2016). In this sense, it would be interesting to check how much the normalization strategies of not paying any special attention to sexual and gender identity correspond to the needs of, for example, transgender students.

CONCLUSION

Results presented in this article show that study participants' attitudes and daily educational practices towards LGBTIQ topics are positioned at different points of the continuum from essentialist to de-essentialist. Which point of this continuum they will occupy is determined by a large number of different

factors, among which the factor of school culture could be clearly detected in our study, where the propensity for de-essentialist strategies was most noticeable in the statements of teachers who described the culture of their institution as, for the Croatian context, above-average in its LGBTIQ inclusivity. Although the participants in the study state various advantages and disadvantages of essentialism, an interesting finding is the fact that the focus groups have never addressed the dangers of a premature shift towards de-essentialism described in the introduction, hence the question of the level of theoretical awareness of focus group participants in thinking about their pedagogical actions. We have the impression that the lack of a dialectical relationship between the theoretical and practical dimensions of dealing with LGBTIQ topics may result in the use of de-essentialism as an alibi strategy which presents their explicit addressing as obsolete or redundant, without carefully monitoring the effects of avoidance of addressing the issue in their micro-contexts.

Several research and educational-political implications arise from what has been collected here. Participants in the study often focused on their own understanding of (LGBTIQ) students' attitudes, experiences and needs, which is significantly related to the design of the study, but the presented (assumed) perspectives are not supported by empirical research that would address the congruence of teachers' and students' perspectives in individual schools. This is why we deem it important that future studies of different scope (nationally representative as well as smaller studies) describe the relationship of compatibility of LGBTIQ inclusivity assessment in educational institutions from the perspective of teachers and (especially LGBTIQ) students. For example, action research would open up the possibility to collect data on LGBTIQ inclusivity of individual institutions, while encouraging teachers to think about different aspects of the problems identified, which is an aspect of professional role for which educators need to be adequately prepared in early stages of education. The availability of empirically tested tools which enable the assessment of various aspects of LGBTIQ inclusivity of schools (spatio-material environment, teacher disposition, student safety, transparency of procedures, etc.), which could be used periodically and portray the progress of the institution itself, would contribute to the successful implementation of the proposals made here.

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Je li (već) vrijeme da spremimo LGBTIQ teme *ad acta*? Kontekstualna primjerenost (de)esencijalizacije kao odgojno-obrazovne strategije

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Sažetak

Ključne riječi
heteronormativnost,
inkluzivnost odgojno-
obrazovnog sustava, queer
teorija, seksualna i rodna
različitost

Etabliranjem queer teorije kao polazišta za istraživanja seksualne i rodne različitosti u obrazovanju proširena je debata o njenom odnosu s politikom identiteta, dotad dominirajućim okvirom istraživanja, snažnog aplikativnog potencijala. Točkom je prijepora tako postalo pitanje svrhovitosti strategijskog esencijalizma, uz snažno naglašavanje svih zamki nedostatnog intersekcijskog poimanja identiteta, čija je seksualna i rodna različitost tek jedna od dimenzija, ali su predmetom analize postale i različite zamke deesencijalizacije. Na tragu tih polariteta u radu donosimo prikaz dijela podataka prikupljenih u istraživačkome projektu usmjerenom na LGBTIQ inkluzivnost odgojno-obrazovnih institucija. Cilj je rada analizirati moguće prednosti i nedostatke korištenja teorijski progresivne strategije deesencijalizacije u heteronormativnome odgojno-obrazovnom kontekstu. Podaci prikupljeni u četirima fokus grupama provedenima s odgojno-obrazovnim djelatnicima zagrebačkih srednjih škola pokazuju da se sudionici istraživanja u svojim stavovima i svakodnevnoj odgojnoj-praksi spram LGBTIQ tema pozicioniraju na različite točke kontinuuma od esencijalizacije do deesencijalizacije, pri čemu je točna pozicionalnost snažno kontekstualno determinirana. Zaključni dio rada daje smjernice za buduća istraživanja.

A|C|T|A Iadertina