

Queering the Curriculum: A Toolkit Approach

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Why would we do this?

We want to enhance understanding of the issues faced by young people. This is also about minimising isolation and enhancing acceptance within our student body. We want students to feel safe and supported, with the message “this is an environment where you can be yourself”. You may think that is not an issue in our school. However, the world is changing, these topics are becoming much more open to discussion and young people are starting to feel more confident with showing who they really are....

Who is this for?

Teachers who aim to create a safe environment where each student feels represented and heard.

How do we do this?

We can approach this through a process known as “queering”. This is a way of studying the world (in this context the classroom), questioning and challenging heteronormativity and other structures that contribute to the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ students.

Are you ready?

Step One: visit [the empathy bank](#)

We have spent time interviewing people and asked them to reflect on their experiences in secondary school.

It can be helpful to put yourself in the shoes of a student who identifies as LGBT

Visit our Youtube Channel: The Empathy Bank

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3EuVoS2RedIm7rchip5aRA>

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Step Two: research

Why not make a simple **google form** asking students to submit their research interests or for curriculum developments that reflect their identities?

Chances are some of these suggestions will be interesting additions to enhance inclusivity within your curriculum - worst case scenario you now have lots of suggestions for classroom activities.

We have made a google form you can amend to your needs, here:

<https://tinyurl.com/QCurr>

Step Three: check out some examples,

Look for subject appropriate examples within our guide for tips to tweak your resources. This could be as simple as switching the pronouns in a word problem: He played with his Dolls

Possible Questions

Which parts of the lessons have reflected your personal identity?

Which historical characters (insert appropriate subject reference here) do you most identify with?

If you could choose a topic within the current unit that would interest you and reflect on your perspective what would you choose?

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Subject: **Biology** Level: **MYP4-5** around Testosterone, it's role in the body and the political nature of testosterone in female bodies.

Opener: Introduce “Joan” to the class – a superhero with very particular abilities, she’s supercharged with testosterone. Use Joan as a starter to a discussion about our understanding of testosterone as an inherently male trait.



Development: Students learn about the key roles of testosterone in the body, mapping out the Anabolic (growth related) and Androgenic (secondary characteristics) on a map of the body.

Further Investigation: Students are invited to investigate the case of Caster Semenya, a runner who has been banned from competing in several events due to the presence of abnormally high levels of testosterone in her body.

Follow up questions for students:

1. Was it fair that Caster was banned based on this criteria?
2. Why is it necessary or unnecessary to categorise bodies in sport? How are these categories constructed?

Figure 1.0 Sample Questions

How is this related to queering the curriculum?

This lesson relates to the body, our perceptions of the body and the pressure that society puts on people to conform to gender norms. This can also be framed as a discussion of biology mixed with social science and the overlap between the two.

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Subject: **Economics** Level: **Dp1-2**, IBDP Syllabus link: Alternative goals of firms (HL Only)

Framed around a discussion of the intersection between profit maximisation and corporate social responsibility with a view to illustrating the complexity of this relationship.

The recent news items around Primark and their attempts to expand their corporate social responsibility measures in 2019 serves as an interesting and appropriately complicated case study. This included a broad scale production of rainbow themed items and an attempt to buy a space in the annual Amsterdam pride parade. The combination of profit maximisation and attempted image rebranding was unsuccessful and the company was disinvited from participating.

This case study could also be used to fuel a discussion of corporate ethics.

Source:

Boon, Lucas. "Primark Niet Welkom Op Pride Amsterdam." Marketing Tribune , 22 July 2019,
www.marketingtribune.nl/algemeen/nieuws/2019/07/primark-niet-welkom-op-pride-amsterdam/index.xml.

Follow up questions for students:

1. How does this argument reflect changing attitudes of corporations?
2. What is pink money? What is the economic value of pink money proportional to GDP in the US?
3. Why do you think the parade organisers made this decision? do you agree? Why? Why not?

How is this related to queering the curriculum?

The acceptance of queer (and other) cultures often leads to commodification of queer practices. We can discuss the outcomes of societal acceptance with our students and enhance critical thinking skills as we evaluate corporate practices.

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Subject: **Maths** Level: **MYP1-2**, MYP Appropriate Concept: Converting fractions and percentages

For this topic I refer you to Rands' (2009) mathematical investigation on income of married couples. Framed around MP1 appropriate concepts such as converting fractions and percentages

Students were given a number of different profiles of couples of varying sexuality and required to calculate discretionary income based on a number of variables.

Follow up questions for students:

1. Which couples made the most money?
2. Which couples made the least money?
3. Why do you think this is?
4. What other factors might contribute to a wage gap?

How is this related to queering the curriculum?

This is an interesting way to challenge hegemonic concepts of marriage. Moreover income inequality between genders is reflected in couple income and can lead to a discussion of inequality, as well as invite students to explore other concepts such as the intersection of sexuality, gender, and class.

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Subject: **Language Acquisition**

Level: **MYP4-5**

Phase:3-4

MYP Appropriate Concepts: Empathy, Context

Assessment Link: D Using language in spoken and written form

Using a combination of Edpuzzle and Youtube a fun, challenging and multidimensional activity is to assign each student a 30-90 second clip (depending on ability - there is also room for differentiation in queering)of a date from the show 'First Dates'. Use a diverse body of couples and give them out at random.

Remove the sound function from the video and ask the students to construct and perform a dialogue in the target language.

This activity can be adapted to a number of units and contexts.

An example we really enjoyed practicing with is Joe and Tadhg from "First dates Ireland" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtX4JR05Li8>

How is this related to queering the curriculum?

Providing students within a diverse selection of examples can challenge homophobia in a controlled environment and provide a safer atmosphere for students to express their identities.

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Subject: **English Language Literature** Level: **DP1-2**, IBDP Syllabus link:

Suggested topic list translation: *Kafka On the Shore*. Ch: 18-21.

Borrowed from: Kristen Pollard (2019).

In Japanese, speech patterns associated with feminine identities are referred to as onna kotoba (女言葉, "women's words") or joseigo (女性語, "women's language"), and those associated with masculine identities are referred to as danseigo (男性語, "men's language"). Some of the features of feminine identity speech include:

- speaking in a higher register
- using more polite forms and using polite speech or honorifics in more situations
- referring to themselves and those whom they address more formally
- omission of the copula da
- the use of personal pronouns such as watashi or atashi among others

Readers of the Japanese text would notice these aspects of Oshima's speech and see that they are gender queer from the time they are first introduced, whereas English readers have to wait to find out

Follow up questions for students:

1. What function do you think Oshima serves in Kafka's journey?
2. Kafka wonders if Oshima could be his sister, but also feels a slight attraction to them. What, if anything, does this say about Kafka and his own search for identity?
3. Why does Oshima confront the two visitors to the library about their gender identity? How does this reflect Japanese society?
4. Is Oshima's gender identity important to the story? Is he treated fairly by our heterosexual, male author?
5. How can an author fairly and accurately represent a queer perspective within their writing?
6. What is the significance of the Greek myth that Oshima tells about people who were M-M, F-F, or M-F and were split in half by the jealous gods?

How is this related to queering the curriculum?

This lesson provides students with an academically challenging context in which to reflect upon issues of identity and is also directly related to their understanding of the literature.

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Subject: **Geography**

Level: **MP5**

MYP Appropriate Concepts: **Time, place and space**

Assessment Link: **Criterion D, critical thinking**

The politicised nature of maps is a topic that should be explored by all geography students, this can be framed around our typical understanding of maps as fact based mirrors of the geophysical landscape.

An investigation can start with researching different map projections.

Alternative means of mapping can then be discussed, common geographical methods such as mental mapping and perception mapping.

Finally students should each be given one type of alternative map to investigate under the terms: social context, political context and intention of map maker. The book *Infinite City*, shows a selection of informal maps of San Francisco, spanning issues such as queer public space and number of evictions per year. Students can compare and contrast these maps to demographic information about San Franciscan neighbourhoods to compare the experience of different populations.

Map ideas:

- Solnit, Rebecca, et al. *Infinite City: a San Francisco Atlas*. Univ. of California Press, 2010
- Monarchs and Queens Map, source: <https://monacaron.com/studio/monarchs-and-queens>
- Demographics: <https://sfurbanplanning.weebly.com>

Follow up questions for students:

1. Does a map always reflect reality?
2. How are power dynamics reflected on maps?
3. How are marginalised populations represented/misrepresented through mapping. Find examples.

How is this related to queering the curriculum?

Informal mapping has long represented a means of community building and maintaining safety among queer populations. Sharing secret maps of queer friendly space was common practice among gay men in the 1950s in the US. This can help students understand the challenges faced by marginalised communities.

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Subject: **PE**

Level: **MP1 -MP3**

MYP Appropriate Concepts: **Change, perspective**

Assessment Link: **A: Knowing and understanding, C: Applying and performing**

Alternative team sport games for the Physical Education class.

Alternative sport games have the power to teach us how to deal with a more-than-binary experience of the world. For example: the three sided football is a game played with adding a third team to a soccer game. This methodology gives room for collaboration in team sport. Even if the element of competition is still present, then two teams can team up on the field against another one, creating a situation where your enemy and allies are constantly changing.

The three team format can be adapted to any team sport games by just adding a third goal to a field. Counting the score: a team receives minus one when a player from another team kicks the ball in their goal. The winner is the team that has the lowest minus by the end of the game.

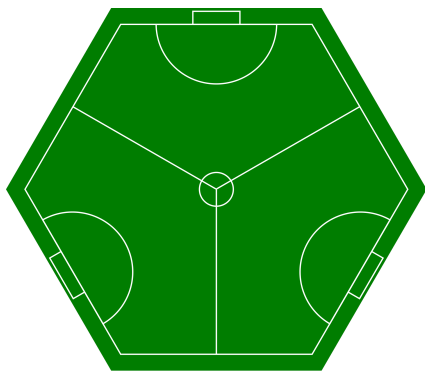


Diagram of a three sided football pitch by Asger Jorn.

Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_sided_football

How is this related to queering the curriculum?

Many traditional sports games -as soccer, basketball, handball, volleyball- are based on a binary ideology of 'us' versus 'them'. Re-formatting the idea of one team against another can upend the culture of competition that reinforces the need to target an enemy while at the same time reproducing the norms of categorising bodies under fixed categories.

Step Five: Start queering the environment

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Queering the environment: Creating a space which feels safe and supportive to LGBT+ students.

1) The pride flag.

The rainbow flag is a distinct symbol of support for the LGBT+ community. Ask teachers who feel comfortable doing so to display the flag in their classroom to show support and their LGBT+ ally status within their classroom.

2) Either download or create your own posters to show that your classroom or other areas in the school are a 'Safe space' for LGBT students. You can find an example here:

https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/GLSEN_Safe_Space_Poster_2019.pdf

However, this would be all the more effective if you asked students to design them, potentially as a project in Art, Design or as part of a lesson linked with LGBT+ issues within your subject. Alternatively, you could ask the GSA members to design a small sample and get them printed and offer these to staff members to put up in their classroom.

3) As a part of a big event (such as Purple Friday) or during the week in which you deliver sessions to all students in school about LGBT issues and challenging homophobia, ask students and staff to **sign a giant rainbow flag and have it on display somewhere prominent within the school community.** (Ours is hanging up in the entrance to the school library, for all to see).

4) During big events such as Purple Friday or during Pride month, decorate key areas in the school with appropriate decorations. For example, use purple balloons throughout the school hall and cafeteria. Hang rainbow bunting in these same spaces or in the school reception. One of our favourite events is raising the rainbow flag on the school flag pole, with students and staff who want to support the LGBT+ community within our school.

5) Include images of LGBT+ individuals who are relevant to your topic, in your classroom decoration. For example, you could show posters of the following in different subject classrooms:

English - Oscar Wilde/ Alice Walker/ Ifti Nasim

Maths - Lynn Conway/ Robert Mac Pherson

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Physics - Savannah Garmon/ Tim Atherton

Geography -

History - Bayard Rustin

Art - Frida Kahlo

Biology - Michael Dillon

Music - Janelle Monáe/ Sam Smith

Drama - Laverne Cox/ Ezra Miller

- 6) Have a visible stand in the school library with LGBT+ friendly books and magazines

Step Six: Challenge homophobic language in your classroom

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What is homophobic language?

Despite leaps and bounds in the reduction of homophobic behavior in general in society, homophobic language is still common in schools.

The vast majority of young LGBT+ people have heard the phrases: **'That's so gay'**/ **'You're so gay'** in school, amongst other homophobic terms. A more modern addition to these phrases is **'no homo'**; a phrase which highlights that the speaker is not gay if they have said something which could be considered to make them appear 'gay'.

The language is often dismissed as harmless and people use it assuming that it has no effect on anyone. However, the problem lies in that it is generally used in a negative manner. For example 'Oh my God, your top is so gay', or 'don't be so gay'. The terminology is used as an insult, often without the person expressing the phrase even linking it in their minds, to a particular sexual orientation. It tends to be used without people thinking about the meaning and as a result, is very often left unchallenged by staff or other students. However, the words are constantly associated with being **negative, bad** and **inferior**.

As a result, young LGBT+ people are often exposed to language in schools and sports clubs, which makes them feel bad about a large part of their identity and makes a clear connection that being gay or LGBT+ is unacceptable and will be shunned. It is easy to believe that this does not continue to happen, both here in Europe and at this point in time. However, young LGBT people that we have worked with have been very clear that they do continue to hear this language both at school and in other group activities with peers of their age outside of school. This has also been confirmed by members of staff.

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Studies have shown that a major barrier for teachers accessing queering as a practice is a lack of awareness of appropriate varied resources.

Check out our (in no way exhaustive) list of potential sources for teachers to enhance inclusivity in the classroom:

- Hooks, b. (2007). Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom. London: Routledge
- Paim, N. (ed.) (2019) Taking a Line for a Walk. Assignments in design education. Leipzig: Spector Books
- Plemmons, A. (2005). A Critical History of Binary Wayfinding. Race, Space, Culture. Available at: http://www.appratt.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/pratt_binarywayfinding.pdf
- Pommarico, A. (ed.) (2018). Pedagogy Otherwise. Ecoversities Available at: <http://ecoversities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Pedagogy-Otherwise-Reader.pdf>
- Quindós, T. and González-Miranda, E. (2015). An anatomical question: Pictogram design associated with female gender. Translated article Bilbao University of the Basque Country. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/eme.2015.3383>
- Radical Education Forum and Ultra-red (2010). Radical Education Workbook. Available at: <https://artseverywhere.ca/artseverywhere/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2012-Radical-Education-Workbook-1st-Ed.pdf>
- *Creating an LGBT-inclusive secondary curriculum*. (2019, November 18). Stonewall. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/creating-lgbt-inclusive-secondary-curriculum>
- *Virtual Resources*. (2019). GLSEN. <https://www.glsen.org/virtual-resources>
- *Queering the Curriculum*. (2018). Teaching Out. http://www.teaching-out.org/Programs/Queering_Curricula.html