## Queering Literacy Teaching: Analyzing Gay-Themed Discourses in a Fifth-Grade Class in Brazil

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# Queering Literacy Teaching: Analyzing Gay-Themed Discourses in a Fifth-Grade Class in Brazil

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Following queer theory and critical discourse analysis principles, my aims in this article are to analyze gay-themed discourses in literacy contexts and to suggest a way of queering literacy teaching. In the first part, I focus on ethnographically generated data from a class of fifth-graders in Brazil. The analysis shows that homoeroticism was openly discussed by the pupils in off-task classroom discourses and in focus-group interviews, but in on-task classroom discourses led by the teacher it was an issue that was not to be raised. As a consequence, I argue that there is a need for openly incorporating gay and lesbian themes into classroom discourses and for queering literacy teaching. This can be done by introducing a view of discourse as a social practice, which makes it possible to analyze the ways in which sexualities are discursively constructed, thereby implying that there are differently situated ways of constructing sexualities rather than a single essentialist manner. In the second part, I introduce principles for a pedagogic discourse analysis to which literacy teachers could make recourse in order to show the discursive nature of sexualities. This approach is exemplified by an analysis of the discursive construction, in a Brazilian magazine article, of a man as gay.

Key words: queer theory, literacy, gay-themed discourses, interactional positioning, critical discourse analysis

Many researchers have drawn attention to the reflexive nature of contemporary social life. Giddens, Beck, and Lash (1997), for example, have argued that society continually talks about society itself: we are daily confronted with a world of intensive reflexivity in which the interrogation of social forms, as well as their consequent

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re-descriptions, are an everyday act. To a large extent, this reflexivity seems to be explained by the fundamental role that discourse plays in the world today. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) point out that, because we live in densely semiotized societies, changes in contemporary life are, partly, constituted in language. Likewise, Santos (2000, p. 74) says that "we live in a world in which nothing of importance is done without discourse." One could therefore argue that our social world is, in many ways, being rethought and reconstructed discursively. New ways of reconfiguring social meanings are challenging traditional discourses about genders, sexualities, love, and so on (Giddens, 2000). Several issues which, in the past, were discussed in the private sphere or under covers, so to speak, are now the subject matter of everyday conversation in public life or are taken to the living-room, as it were, in many parts of the world. Many meanings about gay and lesbian sexualities, for example, traditionally understood as a discourse of the private life, are increasingly present in the domain of public discourses such as the media.

Given this shift, educational discourses have been at pains to include, in their agendas, a discussion about specific social identities such as gays and lesbians or other-than-heterosexual social identities (e.g., Britzman, 1996; Louro, 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998). In many educational systems, such as those in Brazil, multicultural themes such as ethnic and sexual identity issues are now officially included in curricula (see, e.g., Ministério da Educação, 1998; Moita-Lopes, 2003; Rich & Cargile, 2004). Since 1998, state-sanctioned curricula in Brazil have argued for the inclusion of multicultural themes in all school subjects and have explicitly shown a concern with sexuality (Ministério da Educação, 1998). In fact, in state-published educational guidelines there have been calls for anti-homophobic education (Junqueira, n/d; Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos, 2004). In light of these developments in official curricula, there is a need for ethnographic research which shows how sexual-identity themes are being taken up in actual classrooms. The research reported on in the first part of this article attempts this sort of analysis, using ethnographically generated data to show how discourses about gays were circulating in the context of a fifth-grade literacy classroom in Rio de Janeiro. The analysis shows that in off-task discourses and focus-group interviews, homoeroticism[1] was a topic that pupils raised readily and discussed openly as they interacted; however, in on-task discourses led by the teacher, the topic was avoided. The teacher seemed either unwilling or unable to address gay themes in the classroom context.

It seems therefore necessary to consider how teachers can incorporate into their educational practices ways of specifically addressing sexualities. In literacy contexts, this can be done if teachers are made aware of a socioconstructionist view of language and social identities so that in classrooms sexualities are shown to be discursively constructed. Such a view of sexualities implies that they can be constructed or re-described on different bases, depending on discourse participants, their ideologies, values, purposes, and so on. In the second part of the article, I exemplify this view with a sample of a pedagogic discourse analysis of a text from the Brazilian me-

dia (a context in which homoeroticism is discussed openly). I argue that this approach provides the means for queering school literacy practices by showing how sexual identities (homoerotic and others) are constructed in discourse.

## THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITIES

Biological explanations for sexuality have been crucial in essentializing it and very influential in orienting mainstream as well as specialists' discourses from the latter part of the 19th century onwards (Sedgwick, 1994). Such discourses have been very apt at assigning particular descriptions to specific sexual desires and in revealing the common features and experiences shared by each part of the homosexual/heterosexual binary. The "homosexual," as described in these discourses, was considered a member of a "species" (Foucault, 1979a) in a move that proclaimed deviance from heterosexuals.

Foucauldian researchers (Goldberg, 1994; Louro, 1997; Sedgwick, 1994) have drawn attention to how this homosexual/heterosexual binary has been institutionally crystallized through medical, legal, educational, and scientific discourses in the construction of discursive subjects as homosexuals and heterosexuals. Foucault sought to de-familiarize "seemingly natural categories" such as homosexual and heterosexual "as constructs, articulated by words and discourse" (Jones & Porter, 1998, p. 5). This view has made it possible to refer to the invention of homosexuality and of heterosexuality as discursive social historical constructions (Katz, 1996; Plummer, 1981). Following this perspective, I share the view that "sexuality is a product of the meanings socially available for the exercise of this human activity" (Heilborn, 1996, p. 137).

It is not possible therefore to reveal the essence of what gay, lesbian, straight, or other sexual identities are like and there is no definite and definitive sexual destiny for anyone. However, this is not to say that people may not choose particular sexual identity projects for all kinds of reasons, including political ones. Sexuality is thus dynamic, which implies that we may construct different objects of desire in different periods of life or in different discursive practices: we may position ourselves differently through the performance of different sexual identities. Human sexuality is plural and labels such as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and so on cannot account for it (Freire Costa, 1992). Furthermore, sexuality has to be considered in relation to other social identities such as social class, gender, race, ethnicity, and so on, which crisscross our discursive construction as an amalgam of social identities in particular discursive practices (Bradley, 1996; Weeks, 1994). Perhaps sexuality is not so much an accomplished social act as one which is "continually in the making" and which can therefore be discursively constructed and reconstructed in different ways, as Hall (1990, p. 233) points out in relation to cultural identities.

In accordance with queer theorists (Ringer, 1994; Sedgwick, 1994; Seidman, 1996), I am therefore exploding the limits of the binary that distinguishes straight from gay or lesbian, because I understand sexualities cannot be restricted to it. This dichotomy cannot account for the fluid nature of sexuality or for the several dimensions of its performances. Consequently, it is crucial to resist any attempt to normalize heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of discursive sexual performance. Implicit in a discursive view of sexualities is the theoretical perspective that discourse has a constitutive nature (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). The integration of such a view into literacy teaching is a way of queering school literacy practices because it may help to de-naturalize heteronormativity by analyzing discursive practices that construct heterosexual (Moita-Lopes, in press) and non-heterosexual identities (as shown in the second part of this article). I draw on the notion of heteronormativity to refer to the view that heterosexuality is the compulsory norm of sexual relations, and as such constitutes the basis of society, whereas other types of sexual desires are thought of as illegitimate and abnormal (Epstein & Johnson, 1994; Ingraham, 1994; Sumara & Davis, 1999). Queering literacy teaching is, therefore, a way of challenging discourses which essentialize sexualities while drawing attention to the discursively constructed nature of social life.

## SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES

School literacy contexts involve social practices in which participants are learning both what counts as literacy and how to discursively construct ideologies, values, and identities. This view, which is related to an ideological model of literacy (Street, 1994), implies that in literacy practices (in school and in other contexts) participants are learning about the social world, about who one is and who others are; consequently, such practices may be understood as arenas of social identity construction (Fecho & Green, 2002; Gee, 1994).

In school literacy practices, as participants "talk about text" (Maybin & Moss, 1993), they are learning to position themselves in relation to the writer of the text they are reading as well as to the other participants (the teacher and the classmates). As such, they are constructing social meanings about sexuality, among other identities, through their interactional positionings (which will be illustrated later in this article). Thus, in school literacy contexts, teachers may take the opportunity to raise awareness of literary practices through the analysis of the discourses which construct sexualities. By queering literacy teaching, teachers may offer a possibility of destabilizing essentialized meanings about sexuality and may make visible multiple views of social life.

In the next sections, I situate the research context and methodology, analyze gay-themed discourses in a classroom context, and then introduce an approach to a pedagogic discourse analysis through which literacy practices can be queered.

## THE RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHOD

This study is part of a larger research project concerned with the analysis of the discursive construction of social identities (races, genders, and sexualities) in literacy practices within a school context. Under investigation were Portuguese-as-a-mother-tongue classes in which literacy teaching was the central aim; the classes were at the fifth-grade level and were set within a public school in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The focus of the data analyzed in this article was the classroom circulation of discourses about gays. Most often the classes involved reading and talking about texts chosen by the teacher from a set of texts that I had given her on issues related to racial, gender, and sexual identities; however, she did not end up choosing any of the texts on sexualities, as discussed below.

The teacher was a 33-year-old woman, with a Master of Arts degree in Portuguese language, who volunteered to participate in the research project. The 38 pupils (17 girls and 21 boys) were between 12 and 14 years old. Most pupils were middle or lower middle class while some were working class. They were very easy going and did not seem to mind our presence. The group was not particularly quiet, which is typical of pupils of that age in Brazilian schools. Besides the interactions conducted by the teacher (on-task), other interactions were simultaneously going on in the classroom (off-task) about all kinds of topics, including—but not limited to—those voiced by the teacher.

I generated the data with the help of two female undergraduate research assistants, within an ethnographic mode of inquiry. Over a 4-month period we audio-taped a total of 20 hours of on-task discourses and 64 hours of off-task-discourses by using five tape-recorders simultaneously in the classroom (see Alton-Lee, Nuthall, & Patrick, 1993). The research assistants and I made field notes, which were crucial elements for research instrument triangulation, as the analysis below shows. We also recorded 4 hours of focus-group interviews (see Morgan & Krueger, 1998) in three sessions when the pupils had some free time. In these sessions, I interviewed 7 pupils (4 boys and 3 girls) of different ages, ethnicities, and academic standards, who were selected by the teacher. The objective of the interviews was to clarify some of the issues on social identities that had been raised in class. The pupils would sit in a circle, read a few lines of our class transcription data previously selected by me, and talk about the data. The interview format was similar to the talk-about-text events pupils were used to in the classroom.

In the data analysis, I adopted the following procedures. First, I read through the 88 hours of data transcription to gain an overall understanding of the data. Secondly, I coded the data by sifting through the different "topic frameworks" (Brown & Yule, 1983, p.73) as regards issues related to races, genders, and sexualities. As I did so, I separated out the interactions related to each topic framework. Thirdly, for the purpose of this article, I carried out an analysis of the interactions related to sexualities in terms of participants' interactional positionings. To illustrate the

analysis here, I include but one interaction of each type of interactional context in which the discourses were generated: on-task, off-task, and focus-group interviews. Thus, this article examines only a few instances among many in the data that focus on sexualities. The interactions included here are, however, typical of what is found in the data.

## INTERACTIONAL POSITIONINGS

In order to understand how the pupils and the teacher were positioned in gay-themed discussions, I analyze their interactional positionings. Positioning has been defined differently in the literature in different fields—cultural studies, discourse analysis, social psychology (Moita-Lopes, in press). There has been, however, a strong tendency to follow what is generally understood as the Foucauldian view: positioning is the way we situate ourselves in discourse as a product of sociohistorically given meanings (Fairclough, 1992; Hall, 1990; Hollway, 1984) and, in this sense, as Hollway (1984, p. 236) argues, "discourses make available positions for subjects to take up." That is to say that out of existing discourses, people choose some meanings and not others in which to invest.

Following some researchers in social psychology (Bamberg, 1999; Davies & Harré, 1999), positioning is defined here as how participants in discourse interaction locate themselves in relation to one another and in relation to what is being said or narrated. Positioning captures the view that when participants come to discourse engagement they act under both given sociohistorical meanings, as in the Foucauldian tradition, and under meanings they themselves generate. By so doing, they are discursively constructing themselves and others in the discursive practices in which they are situated. As Davies and Harré (1999, p. 52) indicate, "with positioning, the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time they are a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions."

## EXAMINING OFF-TASK AND ON-TASK DISCOURSES

In my field notes of the first class I attended, I report on an off-task interaction in which a boy referred to a classmate by using an expression which implied that the classmate, Paulo,[2] was gay: "A boy said that a character in the story was like Paulo: a flower[3]" (Field Note, 1997). Pupils had been reading a story about a boy who helped his mother with housework and who therefore contradicted traditional gender roles about who should do domestic work. The boy who made the comment about Paulo was positioning Paulo as gay and himself as heterosexual vis-à-vis the character, Paulo, and the other participants in the classroom. It is also possible that he wanted to let me know from the beginning that there was a gay boy in that classroom.[4]

In Interaction 1 below, another off-task interaction, the issue of homosexuality comes up again. João and Pedro are talking to each other when their attention is drawn to Mário, whom they figure is doing something he is not supposed to be doing.

Interaction 1, Class 2[5]—Off-Task:
"That's What a Little Fruit Would Do"

> João:    I think this class is boring./ What are we going to do over the break?/ I want to play football with group 5./ They are good players. …//
> Pedro:   Look at Mário./ He is reading *Capricho* [a magazine marketed to girls]./
> João:    That's what a little fruit would do./ Doesn't he know better?//
> Pedro:   [whispering] Mário, Mário //
> João:    He is gay./ Look at his mouth!/ [still talking to Pedro] Mário, you're gay, aren't you?
> Pedro:   Mário will play with us./ He is good at football.//
> João:    How about we invite some others?//
>          (See Transcription Conventions following the References.)

João and Pedro are deliberately positioning as gay another boy who, by reading a "girls' magazine," is, in their view, breaking the boundary between gender and sexuality by slipping into a gay social identity. As the conversation develops, it appears that the two boys are mocking Mário in particular because he is a football player and, as such, is ordinarily one of them. This sequence, along with the above discussed field note, indicates that boys in this class are well aware of homoeroticism. Indeed, it is by expelling homoeroticism from within themselves that they perform masculinity and, in so doing, sustain hegemonic group identity (Connell, 2000). These are two instances of gay-themed discourses in off-task practices in which such a theme is recurring. However, in on-task practices the circumstances are quite different.

Later that day, the teacher is exploring a narrative entitled "Respecting Difference" (from a reading skills textbook [Moita-Lopes, 1998]),[6] which the pupils had read and discussed in a previous class. The main topic of the text has to do with ethnicity. The teacher is assigning a task by dictating it and the pupils are taking down questions to which they will later write answers in their notebooks.

Interaction 2, Class 2—On-Task:
"Can I Discuss any Kind of Prejudice,// Homosexuality?"

> 1    T: Number 3 / Report on a situation in which someone/ in which
> 2    someone/ has acted/ has acted/ in a biased way./ Repeating./ Report
> 3    on a situation/in which someone has- has acted in a biased way.//

4    Juca: Teacher, / in question 3/ can I discuss any kind of prejudice,//
5    homosexuality?//
6    T: ( )Listen,/ I want you to give a report in a respectful manner./ If we
7    are going to be disrespectful,/ what was the purpose of last Monday's
8    reading of the text,/ today's discussion,/ and what is the purpose of the
9    discussion we are having now?// If we are going to be disrespectful,/ I
10   am going to put my books away/ and go home,/ we are wasting time
11   here.//
12   Rico: You're such a brat/ Why are you talking about this now?
13   Tiago: Teacher, go a bit slower!//
14   Ps: ( )
15   T: Question 4, shhh.//
16   Tiago: Slow down, teacher!/ Slow down.//
17   Ps: ( )
18   Tiago: Slow down, please!//
19   T: ( )
20   Tiago: I am behind.//
21   T: I hope you make a respectful report.//
22   Rico: Great!/ Great!//
23   T: What was the purpose of today's discussion?//
24   Rico: No purpose! No purpose!// [The T does not seem to hear Rico.
     Pupils start writing the answers in their notebooks]

This interaction again shows that pupils are interested in talking about homosexuality. When the teacher provides an opportunity for the pupils to give a report on prejudice, Juca jumps at it, immediately raising the issue of homosexuality (lines 4–5). The fact that Juca is actually asking for permission to discuss it implies that this is not the kind of issue they usually talk about in class. However, the teacher's reaction to the pupil's question shows her discomfort about dealing with the issue (lines 6–11, line 21). Since the title of the narrative is "Respecting Difference," it is particularly ironic that the teacher should mention issues of respect/disrespect when a pupil wants to talk about homosexuality. She later told me, in an untaped informal conversation, that she was aware of the relevance of this topic to the pupils, but did not know how to deal with it in class.

In her interactional positioning vis-à-vis the pupils, the teacher is de-legitimating homoeroticism as a classroom topic. One of the pupils, Rico, reinforces the view that bringing up the issue in class is inappropriate: he criticizes Juca for having raised it (line 12). Both the teacher and Rico, as a reflection of school-legitimated discourses, may be said to be making sexuality invisible (Mac An Ghaill, 1994) in their positionings whereas Juca, on the other hand, is possibly resisting their positionings by bringing it up. However, Juca may have brought up the topic not so much because he himself wants to discuss it, but because he wants to con-

front the teacher with her positioning about this issue. It is likely that Juca, as a participant in on-task discourses, has already learned to expect that sort of positioning about homosexuality on the teacher's part. Thus, both the teacher and the pupils sustain a particular "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1979b) in which homoeroticism figures as a taboo topic or as deviance. Since what is considered normal gets defined through what is not considered normal, producing homosexuality as "not a normal topic" serves the interests of normalization.

However, during the focus-group interviews, sexuality became the central topic. It should be noted that it was always the students—never the researcher—who raised this topic. Gender was the topic I raised at the beginning of Interaction 3 below (see lines 1 and 2) in following up a previous discussion. However, Raul moves from that to talk about a boy in class, whom he constructs as gay. This boy was Paulo, who was not a participant in the focus group and who had been referred to (in the first class I observed) as "a flower." During this focus group session (and others), the pupils interactionally position themselves in relation to Paulo by constructing him as deviant and themselves, as a consequence, as heterosexual.

Interaction 3, Focus-Group Interview 2:
"He's a Raving Queen"

1    R: You said that men cannot do incorrect things./ You sound as if
2    women could do wrong things,/ are women inferior beings?//
3    Raul: No!/ It is something to do with our morality,/ right?/ A kind of
4    habit [we've] acquired in our lives//You're out somewhere,/ and
5    there's a person sitting there,/ you wouldn't believe it,/ the guy's quite
6    well dressed,/ well groomed /and I don't know what else / and he
7    suddenly opens his mouth and says: Uhhh! [speaking effeminately]
8    R: Ah!//
9    Raul: Know what I mean?/ He comes and talks to you/ [speaking
10   effeminately] like a woman/. What would you think?/ Man,/ this guy
11   must have a problem./
12   Ps: Me too.//
13   Raul: My gosh!/ This is not normal!//
14   Ps: ( )
15   Raul: Like this boy in our class./ He speaks in a totally different way,/
16   know what I mean?//
17   Ps: Walks in a different way.//[some pupils speaking simultaneously]
18   Bete: He wiggles his ass.//
19   Raul: We tried somehow to play with him, /but // to me this is wrong. /
20   The guy is 12 years old.//
21   R: How old are you?//

22    Raul: I am 14,/ but when I was his age,/ I wouldn't go somewhere/ and
23    use that funny voice / and wiggle my ass.//
24    Bete: And the worst thing about it/ is that he is a gossip!//
25    Raul: Right! Right!//
26    Bete: He tells everything to everybody./ We can never trust him.//
27    Raul: He can never see anything that//
28    Pedro: He's a raving queen.// [They go on talking about possible reasons
      for Paulo's behavior. In particular, they blame it on the way his mother
      spoiled him.]

In replying to my question about differences between men and women (lines 1–2), Raul starts telling a hypothetical story about sexuality (lines 4–13), in which he depicts a man whose behavior he despises. Although Raul never actually uses the word "gay," this meaning can be inferred from Raul's linguistic and physical enactment of effeminacy. In so doing, Raul positions himself interactionally as hegemonically male in relation to the character of the story he is narrating and thus to the other participants in the interview session. As before, gays are used as alterities against whom hegemonic masculinity is constructed. These first lines can, in fact, be taken as the prologue to the introduction of the story about Paulo (line 15).

This time, however, in the co-narration of the story about Paulo, participants (Raul, Bete, and Pedro) go into the details of what, in their view, Paulo is like. They interactionally position Paulo as a physically, psychologically, and socially disabled person by describing the way he speaks, walks, moves his body, and gossips about people (lines 15–26). The story is brought to a conclusion with the comment that Paulo is "a raving queen" (line 28). The pupils are refusing to accept someone whose body and psychology cannot fit a model of what is expected from the essentialized view of male gender within which they operate. That is to say, they are expelling the non-conforming social being that Paulo represents from within themselves by activating their repertoire of homophobic discourses.[7]

The analysis shows that pupils in off-task discourses and in focus groups were constantly thematizing homosexuality, but that in on-task discourses homosexuality was a non-topic, perhaps due to the already mentioned "regime of truth" which bans discussions of homoeroticism from disciplinary institutions (schools, army, church, and so on) despite the official inclusion of multicultural themes in the curriculum. Meanwhile, one pupil, Paulo, was being destructively constructed through the interactional positionings pupils occupied vis-à-vis him, one another, and the researchers. The analyses of these classroom interactions indicate that teachers need to be willing and able to address homoeroticism in classrooms.

If discourse has a constitutive nature and sexuality is a result of the meanings one has access to, then a possible way of addressing the implications of the pupil/pupil and pupil/teacher interactions discussed above is to adopt a

socioconstructionist view of discourse. This approach to school literacy practices would be a way of bringing to the forefront the centrality of language in contemporary social life as a site for intensive reflexivity. This approach should also help to situate school practices sociohistorically by aligning them with contemporary re-descriptions of social life, which include issues related to sexualities. This can be done in literacy classes by asking pupils to analyze the discourses about homoeroticism (and, in fact, about other sexual identities) to which they are being exposed in the media and in other institutions (family, classroom, church, and so on). This perspective may raise awareness of the need for reconfiguring meanings about sexual identities in view of "the regimes of truth" that the media as well as other discourse orders make available. In my view, this is a way of queering school literacy contexts by drawing attention to the pupils' own socioconstruction processes of their sexualities and of others', at school and elsewhere.

## QUEERING SCHOOL LITERACY CONTEXTS: A DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The approach outlined above is framed here in terms of a pedagogic discourse analysis, which teachers can incorporate into literacy teaching and which may help to draw pupils' attention to the constitutive nature of their own interactional positionings. The focus in this section is on the analysis of classroom texts (in their oral, written, and visual semiotic modes) which center on the construction of sexualities in order to de-construct them. A possible way to do this is to understand texts as discursive practices situated in the social world, as in the tradition of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992, for example), in the sense that any text implies people (writers, speakers, editorialists, reporters, and so on) doing things through language to projected interlocutors (readers, listeners, TV audience, and so on), in history, culture, and institutional life. The analysis therefore tries to take into account how the discursive practice is produced and interpreted within micro-level as well as macro-level social-historical-institutional contexts.

Pedagogically, this can be done by adapting a social-practice approach to teaching foreign-language reading, as outlined by Wallace (1992), to the analysis of the socioconstruction of sexualities in texts. I propose that a particular sexual identity constructed in any text can have its fabricated nature highlighted by asking the questions below of the text. These questions will situate the text in the context of its production and interpretation. It should be noted that the level of the metalanguage used in the questions would have to be modified by teachers in relation to particular groups of pupils.

1. Which type of sexual identity is focused on in the text? Why? Whose sexual identity is it?

2.  When was the text published?
3.  Where was it published?
4.  Who are the writers / speakers in the interaction? Who are the potential readers / hearers (projected interlocutors)? Are their sexualities indicated?
5.  Are other social identities indicated in the text?
6.  In which social space is the re-constructed discursive practice taking place?
7.  How are actors constructed in the text in terms of systemic choices (e.g., lexical, syntactic, morphological), visual choices (e.g., colors, photographs, space arrangements, and gestures in videos), and sound choices (e.g., soft music, noise)?
8.  What text type is used? How is it organized and why?

In order to exemplify this pedagogic analysis, I analyze the following text, published in the most popular weekly Brazilian magazine, *Veja,* about an Army colonel who was caught by the police while having sex with another man in his car in a dark street in Rio de Janeiro. I have chosen this text because it was published in a very influential magazine in Brazil, available at any newsagent, which teachers often use as a source for media texts for their classes. Also, this text is typical of how mainstream media in Brazil tend to view homoeroticism. Although teachers would have to evaluate the adequacy of particular texts in relation to their pupils' discourse repertoire, this text would seem to be appropriate to the fifth-grade pupils in this study given their age group (12–14), the discourses in which they were already circulating, and the fact that homosexuality is openly discussed on Brazilian TV in 5 p.m. shows. Yet this same text may be inappropriate in other fifth-grade classes in Brazil, which generally comprise younger learners (ages 10–11), and perhaps in other parts of the world. Even so, the approach suggested here can be adapted to other texts about sexualities, which teachers may find more suitable to particular groups. It should also be noted that although few studies address the need to queer educational contexts at the elementary or primary level, Letts and Sears (1999), in their pathbreaking edited collection, argue that elementary school children are involved with sexual meanings and that therefore such meanings must be dealt with in classroom contexts.

## A WORLD HAS FALLEN APART[8]
By Paula Autran and Raquel Almeida—*Veja,* October 2, 1996

[The text is illustrated with a black and white photograph of the backs of shirtless military men, jogging in a queue.] Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. does not have electronic rights to this article. Please see the print version.

In what follows I apply the questions outlined previously to this text in order to show how it constructs homoeroticism. The answers below are suggestions and not the only possible ones; this approach does not imply that all meaning effects that

this text may bring about are made explicit by my analysis below (or, in fact, by any analysis). What is presented is oriented by the above-discussed theoretical principles as regards the discursive construction of sexualities. In the classroom therefore the focus should be on creating opportunities for pupils to analyse, and to justify their analysis of, the ways in which homoeroticism is discursively constructed in the text, just as heterosexuality is constituted in other texts. The overall aim is to develop awareness of how discourse operates in the construction of sexualities and of the need to learn to resist their essentialization.

Some possible answers are as follows:

1. *Which type of sexual identity is focused on in the text? Why? Whose sexual identity is it?* The text centers on a homoerotic social identity. Specifically, it refers to a police event: a high-ranking Army officer was caught having sex with a man inside a car on a street. This made the news because people are not supposed to have sex in public and it was considered surprising that a colonel would be involved in gay sex. A possible further issue here is: why does the text center on the homoerotic social identity of the colonel and not of his lover?

2. *When was the text published?* This text was published on October 2, 1996, in the same week when the event occurred, which may indicate that it was likely to have been publicized in other media as well. If so, teachers might wish to bring in other texts about the same news event in order to discuss this question: How do various media texts of this same event (or of a similar event) compare in terms of the construction of homoeroticism?

3. *Where was it published?* The text was published in *Veja,* a weekly middle-class magazine, which is readily available and widely read throughout Brazil (with over one million subscribers). The projected readership is therefore national. How does *Veja* compare with other more local magazines? Would a gay magazine have constructed the colonel in the same way? What about a Catholic magazine?

4. *Who are the writers / speakers in the interaction? Who are the potential readers / hearers (projected interlocutors)? Are their sexualities indicated?* The writers are two women journalists and the projected interlocutors are the men and women (and children) who read *Veja.* While the sexual identities of writers and readers are not identified explicitly, unmarkedness typically indicates heterosexuality. If the projected interlocutors were gay and/or lesbians (e.g., readers of a gay/lesbian weekly), would homoeroticism be constructed in the same way?

5. *Are other social identities indicated in the text?* The fragmented nature of social identities is identifiable in the text. Homoeroticism is crossed by gender (male), professional (an Army colonel), and family (father, husband, and grandfather) social identities. The binary homo-hetero is therefore fractured here. Also, it can be inferred that the man whose social identity is being constructed as homosexual is middle-class (an Army colonel who owns an expensive car—a Verona) and white (since it is unmarked, in Brazil he is more than likely to be white). An in-

teresting point here is that there is a potential for de-essentializing homoerotic so-cial identities in the text by exploring the fragmented construction of the colonel. He is not only homoerotic but also a middle class white "straight-looking" male, an officer, a husband, a grandfather, and so on. This fragmentation therefore may clearly show that there is no homoerotic essence, particularly if his discursive con-struction is compared with that of the man he was caught having sex with: a young "gay-looking" tradesman.

6. *In which social space does the constructed discursive practice take place?* It takes place in a police station, a site where those (such as the colonel) who break social norms are taken. Why wasn't a differently situated discursive practice cho-sen (for example, an interview with the colonel about his sexual practices)?

7. *How are actors constructed in the text in terms of systemic (e.g., lexical, syn-tactic, morphological) and visual (photographic) choices?* Two types of lexical choices are used in the text to characterize three different social identities. Profes-sional and family social identities are indexed through lexical items which classify the colonel positively: "enviable CV," "excellent student," "rank of general," "re-spected officer," "well thought of," "commander-in-chief," "dedicated father," "ex-emplary husband," "proud grandfather," and so on. However, the lexical choices which index homoerotic sexual identities are quite the opposite: "dark corner," "backwaters," "drunk," "help from a psychiatrist," "from a voodoo-chief," "a gay manner," "serious transgression," "declaration of indignity," "dead," and so on. These choices construct the colonel in his homoerotic persona in a negative man-ner or as someone who is ill, emphasizing the contrast between good and evil. As regards visual choices, the article is illustrated with a photograph of shirtless men, lined up one behind the other, which contradictorily (or perhaps not?) draws atten-tion to both military virility and homoerotic sexuality.

8. *What text type is used? How is it organized and why?* The text is a journalis-tic article, organized in the form of a narrative, i.e., the writers are telling a story about a colonel who is constructed as homosexual. They use a lot of verbatim in-formation—the characters' words are supposedly the ones included in the text ("We were in the right mood … "; "My life has come to … "; "… had a gay manner … "; and so on)—which provides the narrative with a realistic dramatic tone. Why didn't the journalists choose to write an essay on contradictory social identities co-existing within the same person, for example? Possibly, this choice is driven by the fact that the dramatic narrative more aptly conveys a sensationalist tone, which may attract readers. The opening paragraph presents the main character as a pro-fessional man and a family man—two social identities that are depicted as compat-ible—while subsequent paragraphs interject the "unexpected" or marked identity of gay. The evaluation of the story, in the last two sentences of the last paragraph, returns to the main character's professional and sexual identities, depicting these as co-existing but conflicting, thereby implying that good professionals, and good husbands and grandfathers, must be heterosexual. It is noteworthy that in the last

sentence the journalists criticize the Armed Forces, which seems to be in contradiction with their views in the rest of the text. Might they be appealing to more liberal readers here?

By showing how homoeroticism is constructed in the text above, this type of pedagogic discourse analysis may make pupils aware of the role of discourse in the construction of sexualities. If this text were analyzed in comparison with another published in a gay magazine, for example, pupils might more easily discern how ways of constructing homoeroticism differ according to different writers and projected readerships: thus, there are different meanings available in society for the construction and performance of sexualities.

## CONCLUSION

Both the *Veja* text and the classroom discourses above share the same essentialized views. *Veja* seems to be actually helping to crystallize conservative and, perhaps, homophobic discourses dispersed in society, as identified in the classroom discourses. In fact, the way Paulo is described in his classmates' interactions is not different from how the Army colonel is constructed in the journalistic text. While, in the classroom discourses, the teacher is not prepared to discuss homoeroticism, the pupils seem to think it is quite adequate to construct Paulo in such a destructive manner. Likewise, in the media literacy practice, the journalists seem to think it is quite adequate to describe the colonel the way they do. Although the last sentence of the *Veja* text draws attention to the anachronism of military regulations which drastically punish the military officer because of sexual desire, in the previous sentence his sexual identity is constructed as erroneous and deviant since it is semantically marked as a concession ("despite the fact that he may be homosexual or bisexual"). Thus, the exclusion of homoeroticism as a legitimate sexual practice is naturalized.

The analysis of texts that construct homoeroticism (as well as other types of sexualities) in literacy contexts may be a useful way of bringing into the classrooms the discourses of the reflexive society in which we live and, more importantly, it may help to de-essentialize sexualities by developing awareness of their discursively constructed nature. Although the media may circulate texts such as the one above, they also make available other texts that contradict heteronormative discourses, such as gay magazines articles, news about recent civil rights amendments for gays and lesbians, talks with contemporary sociologists, interviews with gay politicians and artists, and gay and lesbian internet sites and blogs. In the contemporary world, the variety of discourses about sociabilities (including heterosexualities) that circulate in our everyday lives has to be analyzed in the classroom. Such analyses in classroom contexts may be a way of implementing of-

ficial multicultural curricula, which, in many parts of the world, increasingly include a concern with sexuality-related issues.

However, since there are many constructions of social forms available nowadays, it has become crucial that we learn to legitimate some discourses and refute others. I do not believe that we live in a world in which anything goes or in which no value system is better than any other (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Rosenau, 1992). In view of the many alternative meanings available for identification in contemporary life, it has become paramount in our everyday practices—in schools, for example—to learn that some meanings are preferable. I would argue that this choice of meanings should be based on an ethical principle that excludes those meanings that cause human suffering or do harm to others (see Mushakoji, 1999). Such a principle has to be made central in contemporary school literacy contexts due to the relevance of discourse in our times. Queering literacy contexts can be a way of re-constructing the social world on a more ethical basis by de-essentializing sexualities, so that literacy education can contribute to the creation of alternative social futures. Such futures are not restricted to, but certainly involve, issues of sexuality.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## ENDNOTES

[1]I prefer to use the term "homoeroticism," which encompasses plural performances of same-sex desire, rather than "homosexuality," which harks back to "the vocabulary of the 19th century" (Freire Costa, 1992, p. 11) and has historically been associated with illness, abnormality and perversion.

[2]For confidentiality, all the pupils' names used in the article are fictional. Except for Bete, all other pupils quoted in this article are males.

[3]For the purpose of this article, the data were translated from Portuguese into English. The Brazilian Portuguese equivalent to *a flower* and *a little fruit* (from Interaction 1, which follows)—namely, "uma flor" and "uma frutinha"—are used here to position boys as gay.

[4]Since I had told the teacher and the pupils that I was interested in finding out the kinds of things they talked about regarding "differences between people," this boy's comment about Paulo could be interpreted as an attempt to raise an issue that would interest me. Alternatively, his comment could have been prompted by the story that the class was reading.

[5]Class 2 refers to the second class that I observed.

[6]This text, selected by the teacher from the set I had given her, deals with multicultural issues (and was written in Portuguese).

[7]Although the teacher did not seem to be aware that the pupils repeatedly talked about Paulo in this manner, it is possible that she did not want to discuss the topic of sexualities in class (or to use texts that I had given her on this topic) because she was afraid the pupils might focus on a particular pupil's sexuality. The discourse analytical approach outlined in the next section may be a pedagogic device for deconstructing these homophobic discourses (as well as other discourses on sexualities) in the classroom by showing their discursively constructed nature.

[8]This text has been translated from Portuguese to English for the purpose of this article.

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## Transcription Conventions

T   teacher
R   researcher
Ps   several pupils speaking at the same time
( )   inaudible
…   unfinished utterance
/   short pause
//   long pause