

Reimagining my transition into the teaching profession: Autoethnographic reflections from a gay beginning teacher

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There is growing recognition of the important role that beginning teachers' identities play in their lived experiences of joining the teaching profession. During this intense period of change, finding a school culture which supports a beginning teacher's developing identity and feelings of self-efficacy is crucial for a positive transition. However, for gay beginning teachers, heteronormative school cultures and practices can often contribute to a difficult and detrimental transition experience.

This autoethnography explores my lived experience as a gay beginning teacher in a rural Australian context where my sexuality was not accepted. I draw on personal journal entries from my first teaching appointment to understand how the social and relational factors of my context influenced my experience and understanding of my identity. When analysing these entries, I relived a number of difficult memories which are presented in the form of three evocative narratives.

To draw out my emic and embodied understanding, these narratives are read in relation to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological concepts of the body-subject and the habitual body. It was found that when my habitual body deviated from my students' preconceived expectations for a teacher, their homophobic abuse worked to alienate and 'straighten' my body-subject. Moreover, when I approached my colleagues for support, they advocated for a disembodied understanding of practice that positioned my sexuality as a personal problem to be solved alone. It is argued that the onus for addressing homophobic school cultures cannot be placed singularly on gay teachers and that there is a need for school communities to adopt a more embodied approach to supporting gay beginning teachers.

Additionally, this paper advocates for the value of autoethnographic scholarship when reimagining research on LGBTIQ+ inclusion in Australian schools. Not only did this autoethnography provide me with closure on my first teaching appointment, it provided the means to articulate my embodied experience for those who do not have the epistemological privilege of being a gay beginning teacher. If academics can address the unique practical and ethical considerations that arise from autoethnographic inquiry, we may be presented with a unique opportunity to further reimagine how educational research is conducted with LGBTIQ+ teachers.