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Windows of opportunities: Nordic perspectives on sexual diversity in education

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Abstract

The Nordic countries have often been depicted as progressive societies regarding sexual diversity and gender equality. These progressive changes in sexual minority issues, however, have not brought about radical changes in educational policies in addressing gender and sexual equality in schools. Both compulsory and upper secondary education often lack coherent protection of queer students. The same applies to specific policies on queer issues within the education system; they are hidden in the depths of many national curricula. In fact, a discrepancy exists in broader social policies supporting equality based on sexual orientation in the educational context. The main objective of this article is to investigate this discrepancy and justify it. In doing so, we will discuss in detail the educational policies and practices on sexualities currently operating in the Nordic area, particularly in Finland and Iceland. We analyse curricula documents, legislation, research reports and other data from our own research projects, including ethnographic interviews, observation data, survey data, and written material.

Keywords

Sexual minority rights, sexuality, core curricula, educational policy, Nordic context

1. Introduction

The Nordic Countries have often been depicted as progressive societies regarding the issues of gender equality and sexual diversity. According to the latest European Values Survey (2008) and the World Value Survey (2015), the Nordic countries rank among the highest in Europe in their acceptance of sexual minorities. Gender equality is also ranked highly, at least according to the latest report by the World Economic Forum (2015). This ranks four of the five Nordic countries among the top four gender equality countries. Moreover, in respect to legal frameworks and protection of sexual minorities, the Nordic countries rank among the 10 highest countries (ILGA Europe 2015). All five countries have an equal marriage law, and legislation to criminalise discrimination based on sexual orientation in the workplace, including educational institutions.

In Nordic welfare states, the education system is mainly public and free; public education is secularised and emphasises (gender) equality, democratic thought, and human rights (Lehtonen 2012a). Queer issues and non-heterosexuality, however, are either hidden in many national curricula (see Lehtonen 2016; Røthing 2008; Røthing and Svendsen 2009), or not enacted at all. Queer students and teachers are not very visible in schools and educational institutions (Kjaran 2017; Lehtonen 2004; Lehtonen et al. 2014). Moreover, some researchers have suggested that institutional processes are widespread in many Nordic educational institutions, which police and silence non-heterosexuality, and sustain a discourse of heteronormativity (see e.g. Alanko 2013; Ambjörnsson 2004; Blom and Lange 2004; Kjaran and Jóhannesson 2013, 2015; Kjaran and Kristinsdóttir 2015; Lehtonen 2010, 2012b, 2016; Røthing 2007, 2008; Taavetti 2015).

The discrepancy in broader social policies involves policies supporting sexual equality, and policies in the educational context (see e.g., Kjaran and Kristinsdóttir 2015; Lehtonen 2016). The main objective of this paper is to investigate this discrepancy and account for it. The investigation will involve a detailed discussion of current educational policies on sexualities, drawing on examples from Finland and Iceland. They are two peripheral countries of the Nordic family, sharing similarities of history and societal development in the latter part of the 20th century. Both took a specific Nordic approach to modernity in the early 20th century, by adopting the socalled "Nordic model", a standard term since the 1980s both in political and academic discourse (Antikainen 2006; Christiansen and Markkola 2005). Gender politics and civil rights to sexual minorities have evolved progressively in these countries in the latter part of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century.

In this paper, we put forward two research questions:

1) What kind of educational policies and legislation are in place in Finland and Iceland regarding sexual diversity?
2) How are these policies and laws enacted in practice in compulsory and upper secondary education?

2. Theoretical perspective

This paper draws on queer theory (Jagose 1996), particularly the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Steven Seidman (2010), Michel Warner (1993), and Deborah Britzman (1995, 1998), who emphasise challenging and transgressing heteronormativity; the binary construction of gender and sexuality; and opposing the hegemonic regimes of gender and sexuality. Butler (1993) refers to this as 'the heterosexual matrix'. Queer theory provides analytic tools to make sense of gender

and sexual justice in an educational context, particularly regarding the investigation of the impact and effects of institutionalised heteronormativity (see DePalma and Atkinson 2010; DePalma and Atkinson 2009; Kumashiro 2002; Martino and Cumming-Potvin 2014a, 2014b, 2015).

We engage with critical theory in terms of policy analysis. Our definition of educational policy incorporates any principles and government policy-making in the educational sphere, including various laws or regulations on education and in the curricula (see e.g. Heck 2004). In this sense, educational policy is understood as text that is "encoded and then decoded via actors in complex ways" (Ball 1993, 3). Ball claims "policies are textual interventions" (Ball 1993, 12) put into practice, on which different school actors need to act, by translating and interpreting various policies into their own educational context. In that sense, school actors have a certain agency in terms of educational policies. They are simultaneously constrained by policy, however, as "we do not do policy, policy does us" (Ball 2015, 2). Educational policy can also be defined as discourse, by which actors think and talk about their "institutional self", thus forming a "regime of truth" (Ball 1993, 2015). Educational workers and students are therefore constructed and subjectified by various policy discourses; consequently the effect and influence of educational policies is mainly discursive. For example, pedagogies and educational content (e.g., textbooks and instructions) are discursively affected by dominant policies, which can both stimulate and limit any possibilities for change. This particularly applies to sexualities in schools, addressed by this article, as dominant policy discourse tends to be heteronormative, with actual practices in education even more so.

3. Methods and data

Our data consist of official documents (laws, regulations and the curricula documents) and information gathered about the outreach work performed by LGBTIQ rights organisations in Finland (Seta) and Iceland (Samtökin78). We also use data from our own ethnographic research projects, including interviews of young people, teachers, and employees of LGBTIQ organisations, observation data, and written material, as well as survey data of young people and teachers. Notably, the intention of our analysis is not to compare the two countries regarding sexual diversity in schools. Rather, the aim is to use these two cases as examples of how schools can be reluctant to enact policies and incorporate sexual diversity in the curriculum, despite progressive laws and regulations on these issues.

The data were analysed by using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2001). According to Teun A. Van Dijk (2001), critical discourse analysis "primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk 2001, 352). Accordingly, critical discourse analysis draws attention to the different modalities of power. Its two main objectives are: firstly, to disclose hidden power relations both within the discourse and the social actions of dominant group(s); secondly, to transform prevailing social practices, by disturbing the dominant discourse (Collins 2000; Van Dijk 2001). We achieved our former objective by identifying recurring themes in the documents: how they intertwined and how arguments were presented, and by paying particular attention to any processes of normalisations and silences.

Questions asked included: what was hidden (excluded) and thus not expressed in the documents concerning sexuality and gender identity, and how were norms and normatives sustained and (re)produced. The latter objective suits queer theory, which

guided our analysis of the data. Queer theory entails a critical perspective of truth and objectivity, whereby one tries to disturb and deconstruct the dominant discourse of gender and sexuality (see, e.g., Hammers and Brown III 2004; Warner 1991).

4. Findings: The Case of Finland

4.1. Core curricula and legislation

LGBTIQ rights in Finland have increased slowly during the latter part of the 20th- and the beginning of the 21st century. Sexual diversity was not specifically addressed in educational core curricula documents until 2014, when a new national curriculum for compulsory education was approved. For the first time, the naming and inclusion of sexual orientation in the Finnish national core curriculum occurred for compulsory education (children aged 7-16). This was an important step towards increasing queer visibility in educational settings. The introduction of the core curricula document only mentions the word "sexual orientation" once (POPS 2014, 14). Its mere listing as a prohibited reason to discriminate against people among other grounds in the Finnish Constitution or anti-discrimination law does not provide adequate information on dealing with issues of sexual orientation in education. It refers to the antidiscrimination law as something that should be considered when planning education in schools. Equality, justice, safety, human rights, inclusion of minorities, equity and non-discrimination are also discussed as core values or aims of education. Assuming sexual orientation is included in these discussions throughout the text is thus possible, even if that is not clearly stated. Gender diversity is handled more concretely, as the curricula document states "basic education […] adds knowledge and understanding on gender diversity" (POPS 2014, 18). It also mentions that during compulsory education, students' understanding of their gender identity and sexuality

develops, and along with its values and practices, the learning community advances gender equality, and supports students in constructing their identities (POPS 2014, 28). The new core curricula for general upper secondary education (LOPS 2015) does not mention sexual orientation or gender diversity in its introduction. It refers to gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation, however, and mentions the need to plan for equality and anti-discrimination, as well as the need to advance equality and antidiscrimination in teaching and counselling.

In addition to recent curriculum changes, the Equality and Non-Discrimination Act was renewed in 2014 (came into force in January 2016), to strengthen equality and non-discrimination in education, workplaces and elsewhere. Accordingly, all schools and educational institutions must have a plan to address gender equality. The framework of this renewed legislation covers trans people, illustrating innovation and progression, as well as groups under a greater threat of discrimination, such as sexual minorities. Equality and non-discriminatory measures, based on either gender or sexuality, should therefore be advanced at both compulsory and upper secondary educational levels. Previously, equality planning was demanded only for upper secondary and higher education institutions; the new legislation is more progressive and offers some protection to vulnerable groups, such as queer students and teachers.

Despite the clearly stated law on equality and anti-discrimination planning being in existence for over a decade, many educational institutions do not comply with the law and have not changed the relevant policies. Furthermore, they are neither monitored nor held accountable by the government. Institutions with a plan do not necessarily implement it satisfactorily, that is, by having all partners (teachers, staff members and students) involved in the formation of the policy (Ikävalko 2016).

Whether all compulsory and upper secondary education institutions can implement the aims related to sexual diversity in the new national core curriculum is still unclear. So far, there are no procedures in place for this, and according to the Finnish Ministry of Education, “there are no specific compulsory courses or modules on LGBTQ issues and sexuality … but some courses and subjects address sexuality and LGBT issues” (Formal email from the Finnish Ministry of Education, February 2016). The National Board of Education published a guidebook (NBE 2015) on how schools can advance gender equality, and include gender diversity in compulsory education. The guidebook covers gender diversity issues progressively, and mentions LGBT youth as a vulnerable group concerning bullying and harassment. No guidebook has been published by the State on sexual orientation issues.

4.2. Educational practices and opportunities for change

In this section, we analyse three approaches on how to include queer students and issues in education: firstly, curricula material (e.g., textbooks); secondly, teachers and their motivation to change their practices; and thirdly, the educational outreach of LGBTIQ rights organisation Seta. These “windows of opportunities” have existed for decades, with some progress in all fields prior to the new changes in legislation and core curricula documents. There is still work to be done, however.

Textbooks often cover queer issues only marginally, typically reinforcing heteronormativity and gender normalisation (Lehtonen 2003, 2016). Sexuality and queer issues are normally addressed in physical and health education courses, mainly from 7th to 9th grade (children aged 13 to 15), according to Taavetti, a researcher at the youth project of Seta. She also mentioned that some upper secondary schools have had optional courses on sexual diversity offered by individual teachers. In a survey of 1861 young people, a non-heterosexual respondent told “school teaching is mostly

really heteronormative" (Lehtonen 2016). Recent research on textbooks revealed queer topics are often inadequately dealt with in most books; mostly they are covered in Health Education books in the sections on Sex Education (Lehtonen 2016). This strategy marginalises the topics, relating them only to sexual behaviour and health or sickness. It does not question heteronormativity in Languages, History, Science and other subjects. Textbooks still guide teachers in their choices in teaching; transforming the instruction material to both question heteronormativity and clearly include more relevant material from the perspective of sexual diversity would be a vital change.

Based on the survey in the teacher trade union magazine 'Opettaja', the attitudes of teachers towards sexual minorities and their rights at first appear positive concerning legislation (see Lehtonen 2012b; Lehtonen et al. 2014). Of the 1002 respondents, about 70 per cent indicated they approve of marriage for gay and lesbian couples and of granting them adoption rights. In their responses, most teachers indicated they would not consider schools a safe place for non-heterosexual youth if their sexuality were common knowledge. Teacher respondents belonging to sexual minorities were notably more sensitive to the range of sexuality existing in educational institutions. In that sense, teachers belonging to sexual minorities could be considered a resource in schools. They are often expected to hide their sexuality, however, which makes it difficult for them to reach out to non-heterosexual colleagues and students.

Of all the respondents, 84 per cent indicated they did not require more information about matters related to sexual orientation. Of non-heterosexual teachers, 64 per cent, in other words significantly fewer, responded accordingly. These numbers are quite high, especially when considering the general view of respondents

that they consider their school to be an unsafe place for non-heterosexual youth to disclose their sexuality. This is a problematic contradiction: the great majority of particularly heterosexual teachers do not want more information to use in correcting deficiencies in instruction or to change the culture at their school, to make it safer for sexual minorities. In a youth survey (Lehtonen 2014) a non-heterosexual respondent demanded a change for school culture and more training for their teachers:

> *In student counselling, there must be enough knowledge on gender and sexual minorities and the personnel should be trained in these matters. Every teacher should also be on the map regarding these issues, and they will need training.*

While teachers and curricula material do not adequately address queer issues in compulsory or upper secondary education, one option for schools or teachers is to request training from Seta. Based on Lehtonen's ethnographic interviews with Seta employees, approximately 200 educational activists work in Seta, making 200-300 visits to educational sites annually. Every year, therefore, thousands of people can hear an activist or an employee from Seta talking about LGBTI issues. Of the 60 000 young people in Finland, Seta annually provides training on LGBTI issues to around 5-10% of each age group. Seta continues to play a significant role in constructing the idea of sexual and gender diversity in the Finnish education system. The aim of outreach work according to the Educational Secretary of Seta is not just to fill the gaps in young people's and teacher's knowledge, but rather to mobilise them in transforming the entire education system. The free educational outreach visits were repeated year after year at the same schools; however, teachers rarely took responsibility subsequently for changing the curricula or questioning its heteronormativity. Insufficient resources prevent the transformation of the entire

system; Seta typically just responds to the superficial needs of schools, consisting of information that "fills in the gaps". Instead, knowledge could or should criticise the heteronormative practices of the school, or help teachers develop their own abilities to include sexual and gender diversity in their curricula and pedagogical interactions. Seta is in active partnership with some ministries, but during the interview the Secretary General of Seta told "there is still a long way to go" before the situation is satisfactory. She stated that even if Seta visits schools, and even if some schools ask for these visits regularly, the underlying structural problem still exists in the education system:

> *The requirements of our curriculum documents are not demanding enough, nor are the requirements for teacher training. Though many people are pleased that someone is dealing with issues of sexual and gender minority youth in society, there are many who think that it is the business of Seta alone. That makes it unequal in a way, while with that kind of thinking, the youth belonging to the majority would get support, service, information and teaching from the public services.*

5. Findings: The Case of Iceland

5.1. Core curricula and legislation

In Iceland, the implementation of new legislation began in 2008 for both compulsory and upper secondary school (The Compulsory School Act, No 91/2008; The Upper Secondary Education Act, No 92/2008). This legislation stipulates content by referring to the national curriculum and the main objectives of schooling. The main objectives of compulsory school are to promote students´ "participation in a democratic society". The legislation for compulsory school, however, does not explicitly define whether equality includes sexuality, gender or disability. This is not the case with legislation for the upper secondary school. Both legislations emphasise schools having an anti-bullying plan and a coherent policy to prevent "physical, verbal and social aggression". However, they are both silent about discrimination based on sexuality, gender, or both, and do not stipulate any measures, special needs or protection for this vulnerable group. Moreover, neither the concept of sexuality nor gender is mentioned at all in the legislation for both school levels. This is addressed in the new national curriculum guide, released in 2011, which corresponds to the 2008 legislation. Consequently, a gap exists between the legislation itself and the national curriculum based on that legislation (see also Kjaran 2017).

The new national curriculum guide consists of three books, one for each school level. Each book contains a section explaining the so-called fundamental pillars of education. These cross-curricular pillars are literacy, sustainability, democracy and human rights, equality, health and welfare, and creativity. To elaborate on the fundamental pillar of equality, its broad definition is "an umbrella concept" including any possible dimension of inequality. It lists 13 such dimensions,

e.g., gender, class and sexual orientation (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011). The Ministry further argues that one goal of equality education should be a "critical examination of the established ideas in society and its institutions to teach children and youth to analyse the circumstances that lead to discrimination of some and privileges for others" (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011, 20).

Gender is given priority in the pillar text; for instance, a relatively lengthy section refers to the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, no. 10/2008. "Nowhere in school activities, content, or in working methods, should there be any obstacles for either gender" (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011, 20). Here, the emphasis is on gender equality within education, rather than through education. In the second last paragraph of the fundamental pillar text, "studies of gender and sexual orientation" (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011, 20) first appear in a discussion, whereas some of the other dimensions are listed later. In a list of new disciplines for schools to learn from, gender studies and queer theory are listed before "multicultural studies and disability studies" (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011, 20), without the alphabetical listing inviting that order. This text in The National Curriculum Guide includes not only issues of "sexual orientation", but also acknowledges queer studies, both as a resource and a possible course subject, which is relevant to this study. Educators now have some official policy (regulation) to refer to in their work, giving them the opportunity to offer courses or modules that disrupt the normative (dominant) forms of knowledge and encourage critical thinking among their students.

5.2. Educational practices and opportunities for change

Three “windows of opportunities” to include queer students and issues in education analysed here are: firstly, curricula material (e.g., textbooks); secondly, teachers and their motivation to change their practices; and thirdly, the educational outreach work of LGBTIQ rights organisations Samtökin 78. Textbooks used in Icelandic schools (compulsory and upper secondary) rarely mention or incorporate queer issues; usually they are dealt with in textbooks and learning materials addressing Sex and Health Education. According to a recent report (Másdóttir 2015), however, the content and scope, as well as the teaching practices of curricula material are rather heteronormative, focusing mostly on reproductive sex and heterosexuality. Other sexual practices, including non-heterosexuality, are only briefly mentioned, and in that sense, are marginalised. Furthermore, teaching practices are generally not queer inclusive. According to Kjaran´s research, upper secondary school sexualities and gendered bodies are mostly constructed within the limits of heteronormativity (Kjaran 2017). Although these teaching practices tend to be institutionalised, and views expressed by teachers unintentional, they are a reminder of the gap between policy and practices (Kjaran 2017; Kjaran and Kristinsdóttir 2016). We consider these teaching practices opportunities, as textbooks and other learning material are a potential vehicle for change in terms of incorporating queer issues and questioning heteronormativity. The national Curriculum Guide has the same potential, with its emphasis on equality as one of the pillars of schooling, by offering subjects such as queer and gender studies to students.

Some upper secondary schools are pro-active, and teach gender studies courses as optional subjects. At least one upper secondary school incorporates queer themes into a course about the Holocaust, by focusing on the workings of

heteronormativity and the persecution of gays during the Nazi period (see Kjaran 2017; Kjaran and Jóhannesson 2017, forthcoming). The continuation of the course after the teachers who created it left the school illustrates the popularity of the course and the module. The following excerpts from an interview with a non-heterosexual student confirms its popularity:

> *I had never heard about these issues in compulsory school, or in any other course at my school until now. You know there has never been any discussion about homosexuality at this school, so this was something new ... It was so nice to finally have some kind of cause to stand for ... hearing that my classmates were now talking about this even after class. It was really interesting and nice to hear that.*

Only a few schools have included gender equality courses or modules on queer issues in their school curriculum; most education on queer reality and issues is accomplished by the outreach work of Samtökin 78. The educational workers of Samtökin 78 held lectures in 20 primary schools and 9 upper secondary schools in 2015, mostly in and around Reykjavík (Samtökin 2015). As the total number of primary schools in Reykjavík is 45, this is quite a small proportion, also considering a formal agreement made at this time between the city of Reykjavík and Samtökin 78. This kind of education was not obligatory, however, and consequently was not conducted regularly, and schools inconsistently offered it. The manager of Samtökin 78 expressed her views:

> *It is dependent upon individual teachers and schools whether they include this kind of education in the classroom or school curriculum. A coherent policy is lacking on this matter, and schools, for example, rarely request education on these issues for teachers and educational workers.*

Similar to the implementation of the new curriculum previously discussed, it is up to individual teachers and schools to include queer themes in their classroom practices. Moreover, as expressed by the manager of Samtökin 78, teachers themselves are rarely educated on these matters, and therefore, are not likely to incorporate these issues in their classroom curriculum or practices. This is also true for the School of Education at the University of Iceland. Until 2017, no courses were offered on queer issues or queer pedagogy. This also applies to other teaching universities in Iceland. This is gradually changing, however, and in the future, hopefully more teachers will be more comfortable and knowledgeable about incorporating queer themes in their classroom practices. In that sense, these windows of opportunities just need to be opened more widely, to make schools more inclusive and diverse, irrespective of sexuality or gender.

6. Discussion: Windows of opportunities within heteronormative limitations

Both Finland and Iceland have some official education policies on queer issues, although these policies rarely pose questions about the heteronormative limits of sexual normativities (see e.g. Rooke 2010). Britzman (1995) is a leading theorist in queer/critical pedagogy. She has argued that schools and educational workers need to develop a deeper understanding and knowledge of queer theory to interrupt

heteronormativity and develop anti-homophobic education. Moreover, she has argued that "schools [in general] mediate the discourses of private and public work to leave intact the view that (homo)sexualities must be hidden" (Britzman 1998, 192). This also applies to the level of policy making and the educational system in general. As this paper discusses, however, Finland and Iceland have focused on the national curriculum approach. The incorporation of Nordic welfare values into education means students are, at least *de jure*, given equal educational opportunities in the compulsory education system. This is irrespective of social class, location or economic position, and to some extent, gender. The resulting reductions in inequality in education are particularly visible in compulsory and upper secondary education; the inequality level is one of lowest of the OECD countries (OECD 2015). Regarding the inclusion of sexual diversity or equality, however, educational policies lack both scope and content. The educational system generally seems to maintain silence around non-heterosexuality, mentioning it only vaguely in policy documents, such as in the core curriculum. According to DePalma and Atkinson (2006), who draw on Butler's (1993) theoretical framing of gender and sexuality in their work, claim this kind of silencing of queer realities and policing of the boundaries of heterosexuality, sustains "the heterosexual matrix in action" (see Butler 1993, 346). Gender equality and sexual diversity is only partly included in the national core curriculum for compulsory and upper secondary education. Moreover, policy changes, aiming to include queer themes and subjectivities, have only recently been stipulated (2011 in Iceland and 2014 in Finland). This indicates the discrepancy between a progressive society concerning queer visibility and rights, and a conservative school system (Kjaran and Jóhannesson 2013).

Blackburn (2012) argues it is not enough to only include discussion or themes about queer reality in the curriculum, without going further into the underlying power structures that sustain and legitimate heterosexuality as good behaviour in a hierarchal moral ranking of sexualities. Currently, the curriculum often depicts queer subjectivities as the deviant Other. To approach these issues in a more critical way, teachers and the school system in general need to engage students with queer-themed texts more actively and offer "multiple opportunities for students to read texts with such themes" (Clark and Blackburn 2009, 13). In other words, to interrupt heteronormativity, teachers need to engage their students in critical thinking and make them aware of how the processes of Othering and privileging are legitimised and maintained by social structures and dominant ideologies (Kumashiro 2002). This is barely addressed in current curricula and educational policies, and even less so in the everyday life and practices of teaching and schools. Thus, teachers and educational workers have a limited space to incorporate queer themes in their classroom curriculum, due to the lack of a correct and explicit perspective in policy text, curricula material, and teacher education.

Windows of opportunities can be spotted, nonetheless, offering possibilities to question heteronormativity and include queer themes in classroom practices and schools. Firstly, the Icelandic national curriculum, especially at the upper secondary school level, makes it possible to teach queer theory as an independent subject. Britzman (1995) has argued, that queer theory "offers methods of critique"; consequently, it can potentially inform pedagogical interventions, and interrupt heteronormativity. Some schools offer courses on gender equality; in one upper secondary school, a module on the pink holocaust has been incorporated into a general course about the holocaust. However, this kind of initiative depends on

individual teachers, who have few pedagogical tools to work with. Hence, those who want to interrupt heteronormativity in schools, address the production of normalcy, and create an anti-oppressive school and classroom, must navigate hetero-normalising contexts of the current National core curriculum and educational policies. Most education on queer realities and subjectivities is therefore often carried out by the educational outreach work of local LGBTIQ organisations, such as Seta in Finland and Samtökin 78 in Iceland. Their educational outreach work continues as the main window of opportunity to include queer themes in teaching. The responsibility still lies with educational institutions, teacher training institutes and schools, and their teachers, nonetheless, to change school culture and schools regarding inclusivity of queer students and teachers.

7. Concluding remarks and implications

The main objective of this article is to investigate and justify the discrepancy in education policy between a rather liberal society and more conservative schools. Our detailed discussion concerned the existing types of educational policies on gender and sexualities in the Finnish and Icelandic context, and their deficiencies in both content and scope in creating anti-oppressive schools or an anti-homophobic context. Education policies have arguably positively changed regarding diversity, antihomophobic education, and sexual minorities people in the last decade. Our research raises important questions about the need to continue examining the role of education policies and curricula, and how they feed into and influence pedagogical decisionmaking. How policies address queer-themed topics, and their effect on teaching sexual diversity in the school classroom is particularly important. This will affect how teachers read and interpret these policy documents or curricula, and how they draw on them when including sexual diversity and minorities in education. An

interesting issue for the future is whether tensions will raise in policy enactments of queer themed teaching and anti-homophobic education. These topics require further investigation. Additionally, how individual teachers negotiate different contexts of policy needs more focus, along with the silencing and marginalisation of sexual identity issues. This is necessary to bridge the gap between a "utopic" society and conservative schools regarding queer realties and issues.

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