Envisioning Queer and Trans Educational Futures in Contentious Times: Editors’ Introduction

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Abstract: The field of queer and trans studies has significantly grown, becoming interdisciplinary and intersectional, yet facing existential threats. A range of anti-queer and trans legislation, particularly targeting trans youth, and polarized political rhetoric have increased risks and eroded public support. This special issue of the Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education explores queer and trans futures amidst these challenges. Highlighting various scholarly perspectives, it addresses educational disparities, decolonial queer epistemologies, and intersectional frameworks. Growing out of interdisciplinary collaborations and years of conversations, the journal aims to provide a rigorous, open-access platform for innovative, anti-oppressive scholarship, fostering activism, practice, and policy in education and beyond.

Keywords: Queer Futurity, Queer Studies, Trans Studies, Educational Research

Envisioning Queer and Trans Educational Futures in Contentious Times

The field of queer and trans studies has rapidly grown, evolved, and expanded to encompass various disciplines in education. As the field has expanded, it has become increasingly interdisciplinary, taken up more intersectional perspectives, and proliferated theoretical and empirical approaches and possibilities. These generative shifts have been concurrent with concerning ones, as the field, and indeed queer and trans people broadly, face growing and existential threats. Across the globe, legislation targeting trans youth, in particular, has rapidly been enacted over the past several years, placing trans youth at risk in new and troubling ways. Public support for queer and trans people and policies that affirm them has eroded due in large part to increasingly polarized and extreme political rhetoric. Reactionary politicians and policymakers increasingly position queer and trans people, as well as researchers who take up queer and trans positions or frameworks, as problems to be solved in increasingly draconian and violent ways. These are, as the title of this special issue invokes, contentious times.

Queer and trans scholarship has always, arguably, been contentious. It intentionally seeks to disrupt the status quo, to question what has been, and to imagine what could be. Queer theorists, for example, question the very nature of reality. Researchers studying LGBTQ+ issues in schools have always faced headwinds that make their work at least as challenging as it is urgent. Yet, the current sociopolitical context presents new and formidable obstacles to queer and trans futures. In this special issue, we invited authors from across disciplines, frameworks, and career stages to write about queer and trans futures in contentious times, and they have provided a range of analytics, frameworks, and evidence on which to imagine those possibilities.

As the first issue in this new Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education, we hope that readers will find this inaugural issue to be forward-looking, provocative, and generative. While the issue focuses on futures, we want to document the history of how this journal came to be so that what it is and will become is grounded within where it began. In 2019, partially by happenstance and partially the result of activism, Auburn University in Auburn, AL found itself with three queer and trans studies scholars across three different disciplines (all of whom have since moved to new institutions). Kamden Strunk had been there for several years in quantitative methodologies, while Antonio Duran joined the higher education faculty, and Ryan Schey joined the English language arts faculty. As they learned more about each other’s work, they noticed some potential disconnects between higher education and K-12 scholarship. In attempting to bridge those particular gaps, they applied for and received an AERA conference grant titled “Bridging the Rainbow Gap,” which brought together about 35 queer and trans studies scholars from across North America to discuss the gaps that existed in the field and to chart paths forward together. Out of that series of meetings, which included two virtual convenings and two in-person convenings over the course of two years, a number of new initiatives, collaborations, and publications emerged. One was a book that shared the conference's title, which brought together authors from disciplines who did not normally collaborate to write about various gaps in education and how to bridge them (Duran et al., 2023). Among the others is this journal.

The idea for a new journal first emerged at an in-person convening in April of 2022, when attendees noted that there are not always good homes for cutting-edge queer and trans educational scholarship in existing journals. The journals that did exist for LGBTQ+ work were often specific to a single discipline, a single methodology, or were restricted in what
they could accept in other ways. We began to devise a plan for a new journal. Over the next 18 months, a group of scholars, including Antonio Duran, Jay Garvey, Kaity Prieto, Q Hutchings, Kris Renn, Stephanie Anne Shelton, Roland Sintos Coloma, Kamden Strunk, and Mario Suárez met regularly to discuss, plan, and implement the new journal, which eventually became the *Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education*. In forming a new journal, we sought to queer what a journal could be and how it could operate while also ensuring that the journal would meet typical standards of legitimacy and rigor. A number of commitments emerged from those conversations:

- We committed to an open-access model that is free for readers and authors.
- We committed to rigorous peer review while also committing to humanizing and generative reviews. Part of that commitment resulted in our Developmental Review process, which allows authors to work one-on-one with a more established scholar to improve their writing before submission for anonymous peer review.
- We also committed to methodological diversity and to encouraging creative and non- or anti-normative approaches. This commitment is evident in the first issue.
- We also committed to bringing in scholars from various education sub-disciplines, geographic contexts, theoretical backgrounds, and research foci in authorship and editorial board composition.

And, perhaps most importantly, we committed to creating a place where queer and trans scholarship could exist, live, and grow—and strive to be as anti-oppressive as possible. Where asset-based perspectives and an intersectional lens would be foregrounded and the standard, as opposed to furthering problematic narratives about queer and trans individuals, theorizing, and worldbuilding in education. Where we could use said approaches to push activism, practice, pedagogy, and policy in and beyond education.

This inaugural issue thus presents a view into what we hope the journal will continue to become while also forwarding rich manuscripts that all revolve around the topic of futures and futurities in the face of sociopolitically contentious times. For instance, the team of Aguilar et al. (2024) challenge readers to consider how the intersections of racism, sexism, and heterosexism affect the educational trajectories of students, and particularly, QT BIPOC individuals—advancing an agenda to complicate further the stories of who is affected by our educational settings and the policies within them. Coming from a lens of decolonization and cultural studies, Coloma’s (2024) article centers queer joy through an analysis of the coming-of-age boys love (BL) genre from Asia and, in particular, three BL series from the Philippines in order to challenge queer epistemologies rooted in whiteness/eurocentrism. In doing so, he pushes educational scholars and practitioners to embrace alternatives that attend to affect and that center the global majority.

Gutzwa and Gonzalez (2024) then provide an offering that exists in the liminal space between empirical and conceptual by using divination dialogues to showcase how academics can disrupt the academy and insert queer practices/politics into their roles. martin’s (2024) exploration of K-12 trans pedagogical scholarship brings to light the current limitations of said approaches to address the lives of Black trans youth and then generates possibilities for future pedagogues. Lastly, Salas-SantaCruz’s (2024) work introduces decolonial trans* feminism, a framework merging decolonial theory with trans* of color feminism to challenge colonial gender oppression. Through this framework, the author advocates for including decolonial and marginalized epistemologies to transform educational structures.

The inaugural issue is indeed just that—a start to what can be within and beyond the confines of this journal, the field of education, and sociopolitical milieus. We are humbled to feature these articles and cannot wait to see what is to come as we continuously build futures that revolve around queer and trans liberation.

**References**


