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Living in Anti-Intellectual Times: Addressing Transgender Inclusion in Second Language Teaching and Teacher Education

JOHN GRAY
IOE, UCL Faculty of Education and Society, University College London
London, UK

Abstract

At a time of acrimonious debates globally about gender identity and expression, students who identify as transgender (including those who are nonbinary, genderqueer, and gender fluid) are particularly affected. Although erased from the curriculum, they (and the ontological challenge trans people pose to the cisheteropatriarchal gender order in general) are omnipresent in political and media discourse. This can be particularly challenging for teachers who are often unclear about the issues involved and unsure how to support these students to whom they have a duty of care. Despite decades of legislative reform across much of the world with regard to transgender rights, education sectors globally have been hesitant to include gender (and sexual) diversity in the curriculum. This article explores the complex set of reasons as to why this erasure persists in English Language Teaching. In doing so, it addresses the concepts of "reproductive futurism," "hyper-reactionary neoliberalism," "postfascism," "biological essentialism," and the commercial logic of global edubusiness as key factors. The article concludes by considering some of the options for teaching and teacher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The second language classroom has long been recognized as a privileged site for relativizing the learner's worldview (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993) and developing curiosity about, and empathy for, those who are perceived as Other, usually in terms of language and culture (Houghton, 2014; Mercer, 2016). More recently, this has also been discussed in terms of sexual orientation and gender identification (Gray, 2021). But like all classrooms, the site of second language teaching is also a space characterized by taboos (Ludwig & Summer, 2023) and erasures which, as Irvine and Gal (2000, p. 38) describe, "renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible" for ideological reasons. Exclusion from the curriculum can serve to make certain topics literally unspeakable in the classroom. But erasure is not simply a matter of editing out what is considered ideologically unmentionable, it is also a denial of recognition, which can be understood as a form of symbolic violence directed against those considered unworthy of inclusion. At a time of acrimonious debates globally about gender identity and expression, those students who identify as transgender (including those who are nonbinary, genderqueer, and gender fluid) are particularly affected. Although erased from the curriculum, they (and the ontological challenge trans people pose to the cisheteropatriarchal gender order in general) are omnipresent in political and media discourse. This can be particularly challenging for teachers who are often unclear about the issues involved and unsure how to support these students to whom they have a duty of care. Part of the reason for this state of affairs can be traced to the waves of neoliberal reform impacting much of the world since the late 1970s in which the knowledge base of teachers has been significantly curtailed. It is the premise of this article that current debates about gender and the importance of inclusivity regarding the recognition and safeguarding of those students identifying as transgender presuppose a teacher who is informed, reflective and able to deal supportively with the complexities such identifications presuppose. The philosopher Butler (2021) argues that despite the difficulties involved in addressing how gender is theorized, "we have to do better in reaching a broader public"—one that necessarily includes teachers, parents, and students. The urgency of this is underlined by the fact that we are living in what they describe as "anti-intellectual times" characterized by the normalization of neo-fascism across much of the world, the misrepresentation of contemporary feminist/queer/trans scholarship and a shutting down of intellectual inquiry as an aspect of public life. In terms of my own position, I also wish to state at the

outset that I write as a privileged, queer, white cis man in a spirit of solidary with women and trans people in their ongoing struggles for bodily autonomy and an end to misogynistic, racist and classist violence. Such solidarity, as the feminist scholar Ahmed (2004, p. 189) puts it, "does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles," but the recognition that we "live on common ground."

I begin by referring to two UNESCO publications (a policy paper and a global report) which provide the immediate impetus for the article, before moving on to look at different conceptualizations of gender with particular reference to feminist scholarship and queer and transgender theory, as these underpin many of the debates being had today. I then consider the impact of second-wave feminism (1960s–1970s) on second language teaching, particularly with regard to feminist language reform and the development of pedagogical materials. Turning then to the current backlash against so-called gender ideology (Borba, 2022), I explore the main reasons for this under five inter-related headings: reproductive futurism (Edelman, 2004); hyper-reactionary neoliberalism (Fraser, 2017); postfascism (Traverso, 2019); biological essentialism (Hines, 2019); and the commercial logic of Anglo-American English language teaching (ELT) (Gray, 2013). Clearly, there are other relevant factors, such as the current crisis of cisheteropatriarchy (Ward, 2020) and the legacy of a homonormative politics indifferent to, or antagonistic toward, transgender concerns (Stryker, 2008)—however, space does not permit including them here. Cognizant of the political difficulties the redress of transgender erasure presupposes, I conclude by suggesting some possible ways forward for our field if we are to challenge the anti-intellectualism of the current conjuncture in an informed way.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION: THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Don't look away: No place for exclusion of LGBTI[1] *students* (UNESCO, 2021) is a policy paper aimed at the education sector globally. It argues that many countries nominally committed to inclusive education remain highly selective in their approach. Drawing on data from a range of studies, the policy paper concludes:

> Countries around the world struggle to address sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and variations of sex characteristics in curricula. They tend to omit affirmative inclusion of such identities

[1] Depending on the text being quoted acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, etc., people vary.

and realities. Many curricula either ignore LGBTI identities or treat them as deviant or abnormal. Understanding of gender identities, gender expressions and variations of sex characteristics in particular is very low: trans, non-binary and intersex people, with their specific needs and concerns, remain pathologized or invisible. Coupled with stereotypes and discrimination in everyday school life, this pathologization or lack of attention can have negative effects on the well-being of LGBTI students. It also deprives teachers of opportunities to discuss diversity and help create a positive school climate.

(UNESCO, 2021, p. 9)

This assessment echoes the findings of an earlier report which addressed the issue of violence against students in educational settings on the basis of their perceived sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. *Out in the open: Education sector responses to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression* (UNESCO, 2016), the first global report of its kind, drew on data from 94 countries in both the Global North and the Global South. It concluded that "the education sector [globally] appears hesitant to include representations of diverse sexual orientations or gender identities/expressions in the curriculum" and that "[t]he overwhelming majority of existing materials still consist of heteronormative representations, and representations of traditional masculine and feminine gender roles" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 87). Similarly, when it comes to teacher education, the report noted that "[i]n most countries, educational staff lack adequate training and resources to help them understand and address sexual orientation and gender identity and expression and, more specifically, homophobic and transphobic violence" (p. 93). The report made a number of recommendations, three of which are directly relevant to teachers and teacher educators: (1) the need for inclusive curricula and pedagogical materials; (2) specific training and support for teachers; and (3) the need for teachers to be given "access to non-judgemental and accurate information on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression" (p. 127). I will refer to all of these in the pages that follow, but my primary aim is to address the third point with specific reference to gender identity and expression. That said, as will become apparent, it is not possible to completely disambiguate discussions of gender from issues relating to sex and sexual orientation.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF GENDER

It is important to clarify at the outset that the word *gender* means different things to different people and part (but only part) of the

difficulty is that it is not always evident how it is being deployed. Cameron (2016) provides an excellent overview of the word's history and, drawing on corpus data, shows that its plural meanings (in English) have been in circulation for decades and in some cases centuries. As anyone who has completed a form requesting personal information will know, in general parlance gender often functions as a euphemism for what is understood as biological sex. However, in theoretical understandings of the term, gender is construed as something to be distinguished from sex. In this, the enormous body of work carried out by second-wave feminist scholars is foundational. Although this wave of feminist thinking is characterized by a heterogeneous range of array of concerns (e.g., women's health care, reproductive rights, working conditions, discrimination, misogyny, gender-based violence, sexuality, and pleasure and desire), as well as a variety of theoretical perspectives and strategies for social change (Preciado, 2015), second-wave feminists took the view that gender was a *social* phenomenon and one that was integral to understanding women's social subordination. As Rubin (1975, p. 165) explained in an agenda-setting canonical text, "[e]very society also has a sex/gender system - a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention"; adding that, "the social organization of sex rests upon gender, obligatory heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality" (p. 179). From Rubin's perspective, gender is understood as the social shaping of sex—an imposition based on an excessively rigid understanding of the biological differences between women and men. She argues that while women are clearly oppressed and exploited within the capitalist mode of production, their oppression predates capitalism and cannot be accounted for solely with recourse to Marx and Engels (important though she considered them to be). By way of elaborating a more holistic understanding of the sex/gender system, she turns to Lévi-Strauss' work on kinship and his concept of marriage as based on the exchange of women between men in premodern societies. This is complemented by a reading of Freud's theorization of the ways in which children are "engraved with the conventions of sex and gender" (p. 183) and the mechanisms whereby (in her own formulation) "bisexual, androgynous infants are transformed into boys and girls" (p. 185). Rubin concludes by arguing for a new feminist "political economy of sex" in which anthropological and psychoanalytical perspectives—and the residually enduring sexism they reveal—are integrated with the analysis of the role of women in the reproduction of capitalism. Paradoxically, in Rubin's view, despite the way in which the sex/gender system works to the disadvantage of women, its imposition also works against men in certain ways and (as it might be put today) the kind of identities they can claim:

> Far from being an expression of natural difference, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of "feminine" traits; in women, of the local definition of "masculine" traits. The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women. The same social system which oppresses women in its relations of exchange, oppresses everyone in its insistence upon a rigid division of personality.
>
> (Rubin, 1975, p. 180)

Interestingly, Rubin here uses the term *gender identity* (commonly associated with contemporary theoretical perspectives) to describe the way in which "the personality" (itself a gendered social product) is both constrained and produced by the rigid binary of the sex/gender system. It could be argued that Rubin here implies (in passing) the possibility of a less exclusive, more diverse set of gender identities, but this is a line that would not be pursued until a subsequent wave of scholarship in the 1990s. Ultimately, she takes the view that the aim of the feminist project is the abolition of the repressive apparatus of gender, thereby freeing human beings, the possessors of the raw material of sex to express themselves and relate to one another in whatever ways come naturally to them. For Rubin, such a project was about rethinking what it meant to be a human being and a deconstruction of conventional understandings of the categories of woman and man. Not surprisingly, her work is also seen as also foundational in transgender studies (Stryker, 2011).

In fact, radical thinking about the raw material of sex was at the heart of much second-wave feminist scholars' work. For Dworkin (1974, p. 175), who like Rubin shared the view that women and men were more alike than they were different, the aim was "to discern another ontology, one which discards the fiction that there are two polar distinct sexes." In a prefiguration of later work by feminist scientists that challenges the notion of sex as a rigid binary (e.g., Faustino-Sterling, 2016), and in light of emerging studies of intersex people and those identifying as transgender, Dworkin (1974, p. 174) argued that the categories woman and man were "reductive, totalitarian, inappropriate to human becoming." "We are" she stated, "clearly, a multisexed species which has its sexuality spread along a vast fluid continuum where the elements called male and female are not discrete" (p. 193).

However, as Cameron (2016) shows, in subsequent (mostly queer and transgender) theorizing beginning in the 1990s, gender came to be understood less as something to be abolished, but rather as

something that could be pluralized and claimed. In many ways, this is not entirely surprising—as gender, even if understood in entirely negative terms, was always something that had to be lived and within which human beings had to try and find some kind of accommodation. Butler (2021) argues that gender is never simply imposed, it can also be negotiated. That negotiation has become easier in recent years for more and more people, facilitated by a range of factors that include the rise of social media and the development of online gender nonconforming communities, the affordances of so-called progressive neoliberalism (Fraser, 2017; discussed below) in which sexual and gender diversity was endorsed and protected by legislative reform, the advances in medicine whereby "anatomy stops being destiny" (Giddens, 1991, p. 199), as well as the work of activists and scholars in destabilizing the rigid binary of the sex/gender system described by Rubin. In this new context, Butler (2021) suggests:

> Perhaps we should think of gender as something that is imposed at birth, through sex assignment and all the cultural assumptions that usually go along with that. Yet gender is also what is made along the way – we can take over the power of assignment, make it into self-assignment, which can include sex reassignment at a legal and medical level.

From this perspective, transgender identification can be seen as a very particular kind of agentive (re)making of gender and of the self. The proliferation of trans narratives in recent years (e.g., Alabanza, 2022; Jacques, 2015) underlines the fact that being trans is also about the body and embodiment, but moreover that subjective understandings of this are very varied. For some, it may entail the feeling of having been "born in the wrong body," while for others it may be experienced as something altogether more emergent (Hines, 2007). Some may feel the need for body modification, while others may not, opting to style their body differently and change their name and pronouns. Drawing on his own experience, Halberstam (2018) writes of the body as a home in which the trans dweller may not feel entirely comfortable. He describes his chest surgery as offering him "a different bodily abode" (p. 24), and he suggests that embodiment can in fact be seen as a "fluid architectural project" or as "a series of 'stopovers' in the body which is lived as an archive rather than a dwelling" (p. 24). From this perspective, the trans person who embarks on such modification, whether as architect or as archivist is laying claim to the body in ways that were previously impossible. Clearly, the struggle for bodily autonomy is easier for some than for others—issues of class, race, age, the legal landscape, as well as geography and a host of other

elements may impact a trans person's options (e.g., de Vries, 2012; Galarte, 2021). From the perspective of caregivers and educators who do not always know how best to provide support particularly to young people who are dealing with such issues, published trans narratives (as opposed to those told to doctors with the power to prescribe hormones and refer patients for treatment) are an important source of information, given that trans speakers are uniquely placed to articulate the subjective experience of being transgender in all its complexity.

By way of conclusion to this section, we can say that although the conceptualization of gender has evolved, with the pluralized identity view currently in the ascendant in feminist, queer and transgender theorization (e.g., Ahmed, 2016; Butler, 2021; Halberstam, 2018; McKay, 2021), not everyone agrees with this development. For some, gender remains a patriarchal instrument for the oppression of women and sex a biologically determined binary that cannot be altered. Before addressing the complex nature of the backlash against current understandings of gender, I turn briefly to a consideration of the impact of second-wave feminist thinking about gender on second language teaching materials.

LANGUAGE AND TEACHING MATERIALS

Central to the concerns of second-wave feminism was discrimination against women and the role of language and representation in reproducing this. Within the field of ELT, studies from the 1980s and early 1990s revealed the extent of sexism in textbooks (e.g., Porreca, 1984), detailing the myriad ways in which women were systemically underrepresented, trivialized, and stereotyped. Under the aegis of feminist language reform (Pauwels, 1998), women in the industry successfully lobbied publishers to effect change, arguing that such representations had negative consequences for students, and for female language learners in particular. This lobbying led to the production of publishers' guidelines for the regulation of linguistic content and accompanying artwork. These were designed to be used by writers and editors in producing nonsexist materials and tended to include *inter alia* lists of false generic uses of "man" (e.g., fireman) and preferred alternatives (e.g., firefighter), advice on avoiding the overuse of masculine pronouns, the use of feminine diminutives in job titles, and items to avoid (e.g., the implication that women were overly emotional and unsuitable for certain jobs) and items to include (e.g., the representation of women as capable, strong, and in positions of power; Sunderland, 1994).

By the late 1990s, Anglo-American textbooks designed for global consumption revealed the impact of these guidelines. The sexist representations of earlier generations of textbooks had disappeared. Women were more visible and overwhelmingly represented as agentive, entrepreneurial and occupying positions of power, particularly in the workplace—although lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women continued to be erased. Where their status as mothers was indexed, this was generally shown not to compromise their status as professionals or impact negatively on their success. However, this new representational regime was not linked explicitly to women's struggles for equality in the labor market. In keeping with the prevailing neoliberal figuration of work, the workplace tended to feature as a privileged site for the fulfillment of the self and women's participation in it as the result of personal choice (Gray, 2010). Thus, a feminist intervention designed to ensure fairer representation of women in commercially produced pedagogical materials resulted in an equally problematic representational regime in which exclusively heterosexual women were shown to succeed on the basis of their ability to embody the ideals of an idealized neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2018). Such unforeseen consequences will need to be borne in mind as we consider the case for transgender inclusion in the curriculum and the production of materials for use in the second language classroom.

THE BACKLASH

Bearing in mind, the criticisms outlined in the UNESCO reports referred to earlier, I now explore what I consider to be the main reasons for the ongoing erasure of gender and sexual minorities from the curriculum.

Reproductive Futurism

This concept originates in queer theory but, as Halberstam (2018) shows, it is equally relevant to contemporary debates about transgender issues as they relate to children and young people. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Edelman (2004) argues that the figure of the child is repeatedly mobilized by those on the political right in their stigmatization of the queer as someone who has no investment in the future and whose very existence is an affront to reproductive heterosexual family life. Halberstam concurs (2018, p. 55), arguing that in anti-trans discourse the child also functions as "a vehicle for both the most normative of social fantasies and the most flamboyant

of social fears." Thus, reproductive futurism may be said to refer to the way in which a cisheteropatriarchal regime construes the child as the embodiment of all that is potentially good and worth preserving for the future, while simultaneously underlining its own repressive structures as the necessary guarantors of this. For Edelman (2004, p. 3), the child "remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention," always in need of protection and always available for political mobilization. Although it could be argued that there are problems with some aspects of Edelman's political outlook, such as his insistence that "the future is mere repetition and just as lethal as the past" (p. 31), his understanding of the ways in which the figure of the child is mobilized and made to function politically by the right is astute.

Indeed, as Brock (2019) shows, the collection of transphobic and homophobic lobbies found across the world who oppose what they refer to as "gender ideology" all focus on the nuclear heterosexual family as the last bastion of protection for the innocence of the child. As Borba (2022, p. 59) explains, "gender ideology" is a catch-all term deployed by those on the right to "anathematize feminist and LGBTQIA+ agendas and to uphold an essentialist (rather than social and political) view of sexual orders, [. . .] while simultaneously shielding its users from being accused of bigotry." In one notable European polemic which holds that gender ideology is "the delusion of a decadent society" (Kuby, 2015, p. 280), the child is held to be at risk from a range of forces that includes feminists (and Butler in particular), the United Nations, LGBTQ+ activists, the European Union, and those in favor of sex education in schools who, it is suggested, contribute to the inappropriate sexualization of children. Paradoxically, the writer hopes that the supposedly uncontrolled migration of Muslims to Europe—and the dangers this is said to presage—will help bring people to their senses and enable them to reject gender ideology, returning them to "the solid ground of human reality – man and woman, father, mother and children" (p. 280). From this perspective, only the heterosexual family can oppose the threat posed by these migrants to so-called Western civilization. It is precisely this kind of hotchpotch of ideas that Butler characterizes as typical of the anti-intellectual times in which we live. As will become apparent, there are clear links between such views and hyper-reactionary neoliberalism to which I now turn.

Hyper-Reactionary Neoliberalism

This is the term used by Fraser (2017) to refer to the recalibration of neoliberalism that came to fruition during the Trump presidency.

Other scholars have discussed the same phenomenon as neoliberalism's "Frankensteinian creation" (Brown, 2019, p. 10) and as "neostatism" (Gerbaudo, 2021), an increasingly nationalistic form of authoritarian socially conservative capitalism. For Fraser, neoliberalism is understood as having entailed an alliance between libertarian and reactionary elements, both of which were equally signed up to the same economic agenda. However, the libertarian element and the cultural change to which it was committed initially held sway. Indeed, from the late twentieth century onward, some of the most progressive pieces of legislation with regard to LGBTQ+ rights across the Global North were introduced by governments fully committed to economic neoliberalism. Fraser (2017) comments on neoliberalism's progressivism as follows:

> Prior to Trump, the hegemonic bloc that dominated American politics was *progressive neoliberalism*. That may sound like an oxymoron, but it was a real and powerful alliance of two unlikely bedfellows: on the one hand, mainstream liberal currents of the new social movements (feminism, antiracism, multiculturalism, environmentalism, and LGBTQ rights); on the other hand, the most dynamic, high-end "symbolic" and financial sectors of the U.S. economy (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood). [...] The progressive-neoliberal program for a just status order did not aim to abolish social hierarchy but to "diversify" it, "empowering" "talented" women, people of color, and sexual minorities to rise to the top.

With regard to gender and sexuality, progressive neoliberalism proceeded initially on the basis of a politics of recognition of minorities but with no concomitant politics of redistribution. However, in the period following the economic crisis of 2008 a recalibration of neoliberalism began, in which its progressive aspects came increasingly under attack in what would become known as the culture wars. Shorn of its libertarian veneer, the forces of reaction may now be said to be in the ascendant and increasingly vocal in their condemnation of their project's erstwhile progressivism. Hence, the Trump administration's sustained attacks on trans people throughout his presidency (Williams, 2019). The US National Centre for Transgender Equality listed over 70 actions against trans people from January 2017 to December 2020. These included the widely publicized ban on membership of the military to less well-publicized actions such as the attempt to remove specific references to trans people from UN human rights documents to the nomination of openly transphobic individuals to the judiciary and other public offices. Similarly, in the UK plans to allow trans people to self-identify as their chosen gender without a medical diagnosis were halted by the Conservative government in 2020

in what was widely seen as capitulation to conservative lobbying and a largely hostile media. More recently, the Scottish parliament's Gender Recognition Reform Bill, which allowed trans people to self-identify without the need for medical authorization, passed by a majority of politicians from a range of political parties, was blocked by the UK government at Westminster in 2023.

In Brown's (2019, p. 2) analysis, the current political-economic conjuncture is characterized by a new distrust of democracy and a "curious combination of libertarianism, moralism, authoritarianism, nationalism, hatred of the state, Christian conservatism, and racism." The idea that democracy might be the problem and in need of some kind of authoritarian reset raises the specter of fascism, which as Traverso (2019) points out, was in its early to mid-twentieth-century European guise, born as a reaction against democracy and it is to his thesis that I now turn.

Postfascism

In *The New Faces of Fascism: populism and the far right* Traverso (2019, p. 4) states that the rise of extreme right-wing, xenophobic, nationalist parties characterized also by their homophobia and transphobia across much of the world means that "the concept of fascism seems both inappropriate and indispensable for grasping this new reality." And he adds that "[i]n the twenty-first century, fascism will not take the face of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco" (p. 5). Traverso names this trend as *postfascism* in an attempt to capture the present moment's chronological distinctiveness, while at the same time signaling its historical lineage. With specific regard to gender and sexuality, the points of continuity are particularly salient. Although the constitutive elements of classical fascism are disparate, there is an emphasis on the traditional gender roles associated with the heterosexual nuclear family, in which women occupy a subservient position to men who are expected to be active and virile. At the same time, those who are gender and sexuality nonconforming are seen as a threat to the strength and vitality of the race or the stock. In the early 20th century, fascist Italy, for example, gay men were rounded up and imprisoned on a penal colony in the Adriatic in 1939 and unmarried men were subject to a bachelor tax from 1927 onward with a view to increasing the number of married couples (Ebner, 2004).

A cursory look at some of the authoritarian right-wing regimes and their leaders around the world today shows that there are very clear differences between them and those of the early to mid-twentieth century. As Traverso explains "[c]lassical fascism was not neoliberal; it was statist

and imperialist, promoting policies of military expansion" (p. 22)—although, as suggested above, a return to nationalism and statism is increasingly evident. However, there are significant similarities with classical fascism in the way in which many of these regimes are openly hostile to those who are gender and sexuality nonconforming. In his account of the rise of Jair Bolsonaro (notorious for his sexist, homophobic and transphobic comments), Borba (2021, p. 678) states that it was "no surprise that in his 2019 inauguration speech the far-right politician ignored the material problems Brazil faces and, instead, picked the fight against "gender ideology" as his main government platform." This was part of a strategy designed to ignite moral panic about the threat to the nation, the traditional nuclear family and the supposed naturalness of the cisheteropatriarchal sex/gender system. In similar vein, right-wing governments in countries such as Hungary and Turkey today repeatedly deploy an anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-gender rhetoric as part of their claims to be defending women's rights and those of the traditional family; while at the same time, local authorities in around a hundred towns and regions across Poland have passed resolutions declaring themselves free of "LGBT ideology." These regimes might not be fascist in the classical sense, but there are clear indications of their fascistic lineage and the anti-intellectualism of their political discourse.

Biological Essentialism

One unfortunate element in the current backlash against transgender inclusivity is the role played by a section of feminism, referred to variously as trans-exclusionary radical feminism, gender-critical feminism or essentialist feminism. Within the plurality of feminisms, this particular strand has been present since the 1970s, but until recently was something of a minority voice. It still is in terms of most contemporary feminist theorizing; however, it has been amplified considerably in recent years (for reasons discussed below). One of the foundational texts is Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* which was published in 1979. In that book, Raymond argues that trans men are not male and trans women are not female:

> Maleness and femaleness are governed by certain chromosomes, and the subsequent history of being a chromosomal male or female. Masculinity and femininity are social and surgical constructs.
>
> (1979, p. 4)

From this perspective, male and female authenticity is biologically determined and cannot be undone—nature is what counts. This

rigidly binary and essentialist view of sex is disputed by some contemporary feminist biologists (e.g., Brusman, 2019; Faustino-Sterling, 1985, 2000, 2012, 2016) who argue that the notion of a chromosomal-only view of sex differences fails to take into consideration the variation of secondary sexual characteristics across humans. However, Raymond's argument is not simply that sex is a rigid biological binary, but that trans women, and in particular those who self-identify as lesbians, are dangerous frauds. All transsexuals' she asserts, "rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves," adding that, "the transsexually-constructed lesbian feminist violates women's sexuality and spirit, as well" (1979, p. 104). The rape charge has been repeated by Greer (1994, p. 102), who argues that the trans woman who seeks to enter women's spaces "does as rapists have always done." But as the sociologist McKay, who identifies as a butch lesbian *and* a radical feminist, points out, not all radical feminists are trans-exclusionary—neither today nor historically. That said, in the UK some feminists (but by no means all) took a strong stance against proposed legislation (now withdrawn) allowing trans people to self-identify as women without first being medically approved. They made the case for non-trans women-only spaces as necessary in a world still characterized by misogynistic violence, arguing that while trans women may need protection by the law, their inclusion as women puts other women at risk in some settings—such as in women's refuges, rape crisis centers or women's prisons. But as McKay (2021, p. 215) points out, "[t]he sexist status quo that gives rise to the necessity of such provisions in the first place is not the fault of trans people [. . .], who make up a marginalized minority in our society"—it is rather a consequence of cisheteropatriarchal misogyny, which remains the main source of violence against women.

The reasons for the amplification of these views are largely a reaction against the way in which trans people have "erupted into discourse" (Stryker, 2006, p. 11) and the factors listed in the previous sections. In addition, there is the rise of social media and the fact that many proponents of the gender-critical perspective have "a high level of social, cultural and economic capital" (Hines, 2019, p. 154) with easy access to traditional media outlets, ever on the lookout for a controversial story and audience numbers. In her exploration of the tensions between trans-affirmative feminism and gender-critical feminism, the feminist sociologist Hines (2019) shows how social media play a key role. Thus celebrities, such as J. K. Rowling, with large numbers of followers on social media and whose views on gender resonate with gender-critical feminism, are able to reach a wide audience—an audience which, as Borba (2022) puts it, is also in receipt of the scientific denialism, anti-intellectualism and disinformation promulgated by the

far right. As the anti-gender movement makes its voice increasingly heard, gender-critical feminism's staunch anti-trans stance and subscription to biological essentialism is also cynically co-opted by anti-feminist organizations. Thus, the North American Family Policy Alliance which advertises itself as supporting "God's definition of marriage" and the anti-trans right-wing Heritage Foundation, which denies the reality of man-made climate change and is opposed to critical race theory, are happy to welcome gender-critical feminists to speak at their events and campaign jointly with them. In such a scenario, Butler's concerns about anti-intellectualism and the drift toward neo-fascism seem justified.

I now turn briefly to the final inter-related factor for the ongoing erasure of gender and sexual minorities from pedagogical materials—the ELT publishing industry.

The Commercial Logic of Anglo-American ELT

The enduring silence regarding sexual orientation in ELT and in pedagogical materials was first identified by Nelson (1993) toward the end of the last century. This erasure extends equally to gender identification and continues in particular to typify Anglo-American textbooks aimed at the global market today. Transgender themes and characters remain ruthlessly erased from textbooks, as are all references to non-normative sexualities and alternative families. The reasons are entirely commercial, the issue being that such materials are sold (occasionally with minor modifications) as "one-size-fits-all" products suitable for all markets, including those in which state-sponsored homophobia and transphobia may be actively promoted. The costs of producing inclusive materials for markets in those countries offering legal protection to gender and sexual minorities are held to be excessively expensive, as well as running the risk of a decrease in sales (Gray, 2010, 2013). Apart from selling educational services and textbooks, the English language industry, as a major global edu-business (Ball, 2012), provides English language proficiency tests such as IELTS and TOEFL to millions of people annually. Marketed as passports for international travel, these tests are used by universities, employers, and governments of Anglophone countries in their regulation of migration. As with textbooks, these instruments are equally sanitized, not only in terms of their erasure of all references to non-normative gender and sexuality but also in their insistence on strict heteronorms. In one telling example, a test writer for a major UK global provider described how the company insisted on editing a reading test that featured an unmarried mother. Although the woman had a boyfriend, the company required

an edit so that the couple were represented as married (Gray & Morton, 2018). The reason given for the required change was that the text might "offend people" (p. 134) and impact negatively on test takers. Despite diversity and inclusion statements and highly visible celebrations of Pride on the web pages of major ELT publishers, the values such businesses claim to hold do not translate into the production of materials for use in the classroom or the tests that they provide. Calls for change in this regard, I would suggest, are likely to be ignored given the current extent of transphobia and the commercial imperatives of the publishing industry.

Collectively then, I am suggesting these are examples of the forces with which we must contend if transgender (and by extension queer) exclusion from the curriculum is to be addressed. Contending with these forces is far from straightforward in a climate as difficult as the one I have outlined; however, taking my cue from Butler (2021), I believe we must try to do better, despite the very real constraints within which teachers work. In the following section, I speculate about some of the possible ways forward.

CONCLUSION

As I suggested at the beginning, the neoliberal recalibration of the knowledge base of teachers has meant that subject knowledge has tended to predominate on teacher education courses at the expense of knowledge of the evolving social fabric within which teaching takes place. Paradoxically, this narrowing of the knowledge base was concomitant with the "neoliberal mechanics of inclusion" (Halberstam, 2018, p. 128) characterizing the economy in neoliberalism's aforementioned progressive phase—thus highlighting one of the many contradictions at the heart of the neoliberal project. In the absence of any significant overhaul of teacher preparation in countries with evolving and crisis-ridden neoliberal economies, it is unlikely that teacher education courses will be able to address the issues at the heart of this article in the short term. However, there may be potential for institution-based continuing professional development (CPD), particularly in terms of broadening teachers' knowledge about gender and sexual minorities generally, and also with regard to the creation of materials for use in classrooms. That said, it is important to learn from experience and actual attempts that have already been made to address these issues. Before concluding, I want to give a brief account of an anti-"gender ideology" protest that took place at a school in Birmingham, UK, in 2019. In many ways, the protest provides a useful case study of how attempts at inclusivity can go wrong.

The background is the British government's 2010 Equality Act, a comprehensive piece of antidiscrimination legislation applicable to the workplace and educational settings. The Act identifies nine protected characteristics of people to be considered if they are to be treated equally and with due respect: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. As a way of creating awareness of equalities legislation, schools in England are required as of 2020 to teach children about the protected characteristics. This is part of relationships and sex education which schools are free to address in locally determined, age-appropriate ways. Faith schools also have the freedom to do so in accordance with the tenets of their religion.

In 2019, Anderton Park primary school began early to prepare for the new requirement using a published set of age-appropriate materials designed by a local teacher. Almost immediately a protest began outside the school, which is located in a poor area with a large Muslim population. The protesters were concerned that the children were being indoctrinated with "gender ideology." But as has been pointed out (Khan, 2021), the context in which the protest took place is key to understanding its origins. In 2014, in what came to be known in the media as the Trojan Horse scandal, it was falsely alleged that schools in the Birmingham area were being infiltrated by so-called Islamist extremists. The charge was revealed to be a malicious hoax but, coupled with the rollout of the government's Prevent anti-terrorist strategy for schools that targeted Muslim students exclusively, many parents and residents in the area became distrustful of what was happening in schools. My point in raising this here is that having legislation on our side is not always enough—there is also a need for intersectional and local sensitivity in embarking on work of this kind. The Anderton Park protest proved to be the exception in terms of policy rollout, but with greater collaboration with the community and the specific involvement of parents, it could most likely have been avoided.

How then to proceed *within* schools and other educational settings? Knisley and Paiz (2021) provide important advice to teachers seeking to enhance teachers' understandings of transgender issues and create a more inclusive curriculum. They urge teachers to seek out allies and —crucially—to predict and plan for resistance by, for example, familiarizing themselves with institutional mission statements on inclusivity that can be used to help justify proposals for change in the curriculum.

One particularly useful suggestion by Knisley and Paiz (2021) is the creation of a toolkit that could be used in a CPD context as a means of broadening teachers' knowledge base about gender-related issues

and enabling them to create materials. The toolkit consists of a set of questions that educators might explore as they seek to engage with the topic and the ways in which transgender inclusivity might be incorporated into their teaching. Thus, teachers are asked to reflect on their knowledge base and their approach to teaching:

> What do you know about TGNC (trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming) lives and concerns in your home context(s)?
>
> How can you work to make your approach one that addresses queer and trans issues through the curriculum? (p. 32)

In fact, a number of institutions and universities have produced similar toolkits, some of which give detailed advice for promoting trans inclusivity. Under the heading of "Check the pronouns," one university toolkit suggests:

> When students have an account in the university database, they sometimes have an option to indicate their title and pronouns. However, sometimes this field is overlooked.
>
> - Invite—but do not require—your students to fill it in before the first lesson.
> - Or prepare a basic form including optional fields to indicate a name and pronouns and distribute it in class during your first teaching session. Some students might leave it blank because they are undecided or do not want to disclose it, but it demonstrates to students that there is space in your classroom for recognizing gender fluidity. (University College London, 2021)

Other approaches could include the use of trans narratives as a means of raising awareness among teachers of issues of concern to trans people. However, the most significant practical advice for teachers is to be found on Knisley's *Gender-Just Language Education Project* website (www.krisknisely.com). This resource aims to help "language educators in teaching gender-inclusive and non-binary language in ways that engage with trans knowledges and are increasingly affirming to trans, nonbinary, and other non-cis people". The many ideas contained there could easily be incorporated into CPD provision. In the classroom itself, teachers could include the pronouns favored by trans people as part of their teaching, as well as including honorifics such as Mx. They could also begin to incorporate published age-appropriate stories about trans issues as a way of creating an inclusive environment for trans students and at the same time educating all students about trans issues. Films too can be useful in this respect. The

British Board of Film Classification website (www.bbfc.co.uk) has produced a set of recommended films about trans issues that parents and children can watch together. Also useful in this respect is the internationally successful television series *Heartstopper*, based on the Oseman graphic novels (2019) and featuring a sympathetic trans teenager as a central character. Such materials are suitable for use in the second language classroom or as part of teachers' CPD. Such interventions may be small, but they send out a clear signal that diversity is not being erased.

To return to the title of this article as I conclude, these are indeed anti-intellectual times as Butler suggests. They are also perforce dangerous times, particularly so for gender and sexual minorities who, as the depredations of economic neoliberalism deepen, are increasingly scapegoated by way of distraction from the failure of this late capitalist project. Given the degradation of teaching that has been a constant of the neoliberal era, we have to work to educate ourselves and go beyond the constraints of our initial preparation and those of our working conditions where possible. It is only in this way that we can approximate the ideal of the teacher as a "socially necessary kind of thinker" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9), and our students be afforded the recognition they deserve as they attempt to make livable lives for themselves.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

THE AUTHOR

John Gray is a professor of applied linguistics and education at IOE, UCL Faculty of Education and Society, University College London. His research focuses on neoliberal ideology in language teaching and language teacher education, language teacher identity, and issues of gender and sexuality in language teaching and beyond.

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