

*Tuesday, 11th May 2021, 7 pm
via Zoom*

Language, Sexuality and Discrimination

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Abstract

This talk explores and exemplifies language, discrimination and privilege in relation to sexual diversity and educational settings. The talk focuses on an analysis of language in the new statutory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) guidance for schools in England, and some reactions from particular groups to the guidance's inclusion of positive teaching of LGBTQ+ identities and relationships. Scrutiny of the guidance reveals that, despite the inclusion of diverse sexual relationships and LGBTQ+ identities, this only occurs in a small section (two paragraphs) and the language used in these paragraphs is vague. Whilst the reforms are welcome and undoubtedly a positive step forwards, there is arguably still work to be done in terms of making LGBTQ+ identities and relationships even more visible in the guidance, and finding a way of ensuring that this aspect of the guidance is consistently being delivered in a positive and inclusive way by teachers. Moreover, the vague language of the new RSE guidance means that the implementation of the guidance by teachers is likely to be highly variable, a key issue that is currently being debated in various fora by academics, teachers and other practitioners.

Some groups have also recently mobilised against this inclusion of positive teaching about LGBTQ+ identities and relationships in the new RSE guidance. Groups have, for example, held public protests outside schools in Birmingham. The protests suggest that although there is overwhelming support for the new guidance, including its section on LGBTQ+ identities, there are still groups in society who are opposed to teaching about this dimension of equality.

This talk analyses some of the key linguistic strategies deployed by the anti-LGBTQ+ protest groups to distort progressive views of gender and sexuality within the UK school context. I conduct a critical discourse analysis of talk in some of the publicly-available video recordings of the protests in order to examine how the groups use language to produce discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (and sometimes also gender identity). In the final part of the talk, I consider some of the implications of the analysis for ELT.

Helen Sauntson is Professor of English Language and Linguistics and Director of the Centre for Language and Social Justice Research at York St John University in the UK. She specialises in teaching and researching sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. She has a special interest in language, gender and sexuality, particularly in relation to education contexts, and has published numerous books, chapters and journal articles in this area. She is co-editor of *The Palgrave Studies in Language, Gender and Sexuality* book series and co-editor of the *Cambridge Elements in Language, Gender and Sexuality* book series.

