



A literary analysis of queer texts: guidelines for senior and further education and training English language teachers

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DECLARATION

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From the depths of my heart, Matthys Johannes Uys

ABSTRACT

Research shows that South Africans are in general a queer-phobic nation. This study's hope is that positive exposure to queer individuals could be instrumental in changing these prejudices. This study starts by exploring and critically analysing different themes from selected queer texts (the search for identity; prejudice and abuse; and religious zealotry), critically analysing the portrayal of queer characters in the selected texts; and determining what social messaging is prevalent in the queer texts. The aim is to find ways to introduce learners to the positive and negative realities of the queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society. This first endeavour is followed by an analysis of what is stated in the South African Department of Education's Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for English Home Language (EHL) and English as First Additional Language (EFAL) (Senior and further education and training [FET] phases) in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus to determine to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works. I conclude the study by providing guidelines that may be used by Senior phase and FET English language teachers as criteria for selecting queer texts, together with strategies to use when teaching these texts. The study followed a qualitative approach with the use of critical hermeneutics as strategy of inquiry. The novels selected for this study are *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg (2013), *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (2004), and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (1985).

Databases consulted: EBSCOhost, JSTOR, African Journals (previously SAePublications), A–Z Publication Finder, Google Scholar, and Google.

Key Terms: queer texts, queer literary elements, queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity, English education and classroom.

OPSOMMING

Navorsing toon dat Suid-Afrika oor die algemeen 'n queer-fobiese land is. Alhoewel die Grondwet van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika (1996) gelykheid en inklusiwiteit as fundamentele regte stel, word persone met queer seksuele identiteite dikwels gemarginaliseer. Een manier waarop die queer fobie van die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing aangespreek kan word is om queer tekste in te sluit in die Engels Huistaal (EHT) en Engels Eerste Addisionele Taal (EEAT) klaskamers. Blootstelling aan queer tekste kan help om vooroordele te verander en dit kan queer leerders minder geïsoleer laat voel. Die doel van die studie is om riglyne voor te stel wat die Departement van Basiese Onderwys en onderwysers kan gebruik om leerders bekend te stel aan die positiewe en negatiewe realiteite van die queer karakters se ervarings in 'n heteronormatiewe samelewing, en om te illustreer hoe sodanige tekste ontleed kan word.

Die studie begin met 'n kritiese ontleding van drie geselekteerde queer tekste, *Openly Straight* deur Bill Konigsberg (2013), *Geography Club* deur Brent Hartinger (2004), en *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* deur Jeanette Winterson (1985). Die analise fokus ten eerste op die temas wat uit hierdie tekste blyk, byvoorbeeld die soeke na identiteit, vooroordeel en mishandeling, en godsdienstige dweepsug. Daarna word die uitbeelding van queer karakters in die geselekteerde tekste krities ontleed, en laastens word vasgestel watter sosiale boodskappe die queer tekste aan lesers oodra.

Die teksontleding word gevolg deur 'n ontleding van die Suid-Afrikaanse Departement van Onderwys se Kurrikulumassesseringsbeleidsverklarings (KABV) vir EHT en EEAT (Senior en Verdere-Onderwys-en-Opleiding [VOO] fases) met betrekking tot die insluiting van queer literatuur in die leerplan. Dit dui aan tot welke mate queer literatuur reeds opgeneem is as voorgestelde en verpligte vasgestelde werke, of tot watter mate daar ruimte is daarvoor.

Ek sluit die studie af met riglyne wat taalonderwysers in die Senior- en VOO-fase kan gebruik as kriteria vir die keuse van queer tekste, tesame met strategieë wat gebruik kan word om hierdie tekste aan te bied. Die studie het 'n kwalitatiewe benadering gevolg met die gebruik van kritiese hermeneutiek as ondersoekstrategie.

Databasisse geraadpleeg: EBSCOhost, JSTOR, African Journals (voorheen SAePublications), A–Z Publication Finder, Google Scholar, and Google.

Sleuteltermes: queer tekste, queer literêre elemente, queer-fobia en hegemoniese heteronormatieweit, Engelse onderwys en klaskamer.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BEdHons	Bachelor of Education Honours
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CAPS:	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CNN:	Cable News Network
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
EduRec	Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education
EFAL:	English First Additional Language
EHL:	English Home Language
FET:	Further Education and Training
GSA	Gay-Straight Alliance
GSBA:	Gay-Straight-Bisexual Alliance
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IHE	Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise
LGBT:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

LGBTQ:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
MEd	Master of Education
NCS:	National Curriculum Statement
NSC:	National Senior Certificate
PFLAG:	Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
PHCCWC:	Patrick Henry Community College Writing Center
ROE	Research Outside Entities
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SAPS:	South African Police Department
SASAS:	South African Social Attitudes Survey
SMART:	Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Traceable
SOTA:	School of the Arts
SWRL:	Speaking Writing Reading Listening
UCT:	University of Cape Town
UIC:	University of Illinois at Chicago
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces this study by delineating the problem under consideration. Accordingly, this chapter commences with a clarification of relevant concepts, a contextualisation and problem statement, and a discussion of two bodies of scholarship. This is followed by the research questions and aims, the research design and methodology, a section where I position myself, the motivation for the study, and an outline of the chapters.

1.2 Positioning myself

I graduated from *Academic Central*¹ in 2013, obtained my BEd degree (Senior and FET phases) in 2017, and my BEdHons (English for Education – Senior and FET phases) in 2018. I have two years of tertiary English teaching experience as an assistant junior lecturer (Foundation phase, Intermediate phase, and Senior and FET phases) as I was an assistant for two lecturers at the School for Language Education in the subject group English for Education at the NWU. I also have two years of tertiary English teaching experience (Intermediate phase, and Senior and FET phases) as I am a temporary junior lecturer for the NWU. Furthermore, I have a few months of secondary English teaching experience that I obtained during my BEd practicals – Work Integrated Learning (WIL) – at *Academic Central*. While I was at *Academic Central*, both as a learner and a student teacher, I became aware of learners (including myself) who struggled to find their place in society. As a high school learner, I was exposed to a heteronormative school environment where queer sexuality was tolerated and accepted by teachers, but mostly rejected by learners. It was not until I went to university that I became aware of a more open and celebratory environment that has more possibilities and freedom.

I enjoyed reading from a very young age. I started out with J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in Afrikaans (my home language), but soon converted to the English language. I dove into Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, as I was more interested in my first additional language (English). My passion for English grew each day and I started purchasing and reading more English fictional texts. It was not until my second year at university that I read my first queer-themed novel – *Something like Summer* by Jay Bell. I was moved by the novel as it deals

¹ The pseudonym, *Academic Central*, has been created in order for my school's identity, due to ethical considerations, to remain unknown.

with two homosexual characters who struggle to find their place in their heteronormative school environment and society and the consequences their decisions may have on each other. Thereafter, I started reading a variety of queer literature: *Openly Straight* and *Honestly Ben* by Bill Konigsberg, *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger, *Two Boys Kissing*, *Boy Meets Boy*, and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* by David Levithan, *Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli, *More Than This* by Patrick Ness, *Something like Autumn* and *Something like Winter* by Jay Bell, *A Boy's Own Story* by Edmund White, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst, *Bullied Boy* by Daring Diane, and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson. As a result, I became more interested in queer literature.

During my BEdHons degree, I had to complete a research project. At first, I wanted to analyse *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in terms of improving learners' creative writing skills. However, once my fellow peers became aware that I wanted to analyse some novels of the *Harry Potter* series, they wanted to do the same. I then decided to choose a different genre that they most probably would not be interested in: queer-themed literature. Afterwards, due to a positive snowballing effect, my BEdHons project progressed to become my MEd's topic.

My position in my study is to analyse queer literature to provide guidelines for Senior and FET English language teachers should they be granted the opportunity to teach queer literature in their academic careers. For the time being, queer literature has not been included in the South African curriculum yet. The guidelines I provide may make the Department of Basic Education aware of including queer texts in the English curriculum and support educators where necessary.

1.3 Motivation for the study

I considered several texts for analysis in this study to reach the objectives described above. They were *A Boy's Own Story* by Edmund White, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson, and *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst. However, due to inappropriate content or themes that did not correspond with The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate's (2016) studies, or writers (such as White and Hollinghurst who are too advanced for school children), three of the four original texts were removed and replaced with two others: *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg and *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger.

An analysis of *Openly Straight*, *Geography Club*, and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* revealed appropriate and applicable experiences of fictional queer characters in terms of the themes, other queer characters, and the social messaging to be used as examples. This meant that appropriate queer-themed literature teaching guidelines could be formulated.

1.4 Conceptual clarification

The following concepts are clarified to ease understanding: literary analysis, queer texts, English language teacher in the English language classroom, and heteronormativity.

1.4.1 Literary analysis

The Cambridge English Dictionary (2019) defines “literary analysis” as “the study of a work of literature by a critic, teacher, or student”. The Patrick Henry Community College Writing Center (PHCCWC, 2016:1) gives a more in-depth explanation by saying that literary analysis is “an opinion-based type of [writing] that makes a point about a work of literature”. Therefore, literary analysis firstly makes (a) point(s) about the literary work in question; secondly, supports the stated point(s) by “discussing the work’s literature elements” (PHCCWC, 2016:1) (e.g. main themes and/or characterisation); and thirdly, implies ideas that are “not necessarily apparent within the literature itself” (PHCCWC, 2016:1). For this study, I will analyse literary texts (in terms of literary themes and elements) that make and support points.

1.4.2 Queer texts

The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020g) defines “queer” as “not fitting traditional ideas about gender or sexuality, especially the idea that everyone is either male or female or that people should only have sexual relationships with the opposite sex”. Accordingly, queer sexuality challenges the heteronormative norm that all individuals are heterosexual. Furthermore, queer sexuality may be used as an umbrella term to include all the various sexual identities that differ from being “straight”. For the purpose of this study, the queer umbrella includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTQ)².

² Throughout this text, I do not use the personal pronouns *he* and *she* when referring to queer individuals in this study, but rather *they* in order to accommodate queer individuals that do not identify as males or females (gender-neutral). Accordingly, the possessive pronoun, *their*, and the reflexive pronoun, *themselves*, are also used throughout this study, unless I am referring to a specific character in one of the selected texts.

Secondly, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019a) defines “literature” – or texts – as “the body of written works produced in a particular language, country, or age”. Therefore, queer texts refer to written works that are queer-themed. Consequently, these written works are about characters who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or who fall into other groups that fall under the queer umbrella. Kander (2011:7) agrees that “queer texts” are “readings ... where queerness is visible beneath the surface ... wherein readers can explore LGBTQ+ themes and issues”.

As a result, queer texts generally focus on queer characters and their experiences in heteronormative environments, whereas non-queer texts can include queer characters, but the focus is not on these characters or on their experiences.

1.4.3 English language teacher in the English language classroom

Since South Africa follows an additive approach to languages, the English language classroom in South Africa may offer English as Home Language (EHL) or English as First Additional Language (EFAL). Nine of the eleven official languages are offered as either first, second or third additional languages (DBE, 2011a:8–9; DBE, 2011b:8–9; DBE, 2011c:8–9; DBE, 2011d:8–9). The English language teacher is the individual who teaches English (the individual who provides information about and in English) as a first, second and/or third additional language.

In general, EHL would refer to the first language an individual acquires. FAL would then refer to a language an individual acquires in addition to the individual’s home language. However, the difference between EHL and EFAL in the South African context is more nuanced. Many learners with other home languages take English as their home language in the school setting as it serves as a *lingua franca* in the country. The difference between EHL and EFAL is therefore rather the academic and proficiency level expected from the learner. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for EHL (DBE, 2011a:8; DBE, 2011b:8) and EFAL (DBE, 2011c:8; DBE, 2011d:8) therefore allows for EHL and EFAL to refer to the level at which English is offered as either a home language or an additional language in South Africa, and not to the manner in which the language itself is acquired.

1.4.4 Heteronormativity

The Oxford Living Dictionary (2019) defines heteronormativity as “denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation”.

Nelson (2009) states that heteronormativity refers to the normalisation of one sexual identity – heterosexuality – by portraying the world as heterosexual only. Watney (1991:384) maintains that heteronormativity is a process of avoiding “any representation that might reveal the actual diversity and complexity of sexual choice”, in effect normalising heterosexuality. As a result, heteronormativity refers to the assumption individuals and societies make about other individuals and societies: each and every individual is heterosexual – normal – and being different from heterosexuality – such as homosexual, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and additional – is abnormal.

1.5 Contextualisation and problem statement

A problem statement can be referred to as a problem that a researcher aims to address because the researcher has identified something unsatisfactory and/or unsettling that needs change (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008).

1.5.1 The significance of queer individuals in a heteronormative South Africa: area of research

The Other Foundation (2016:3), Love Not Hate (2016:1), and Nduna, Mthombeni, Mavhandu-Mudzusi, and Mogotsi (2017) mention that there are limited data concerning the significance of queer South Africans in a heteronormative society. There are several international studies on sexual orientation diversity and gender, but these types of studies are limited in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Nevertheless, there have been a few queer studies that provide statistics. These are discussed below.

Progressive Prudes, conducted by The Other Foundation (2016), highlights and brings forward the following factors that have a positive or negative influence on queer South Africans in a heteronormative society: morality, self-identity, prejudice, abuse and violence, attitudes, the role of contact, constitutional protections, and the role of education. The key factor though, is education, because it can create an awareness and an understanding of morality, self-identity, prejudice, abuse, violence, and constitutional protections as well as offer contact with individuals who (openly) identify as queer South Africans.

Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today, conducted by Nell and Shapiro (2011), highlights the following factors: sexual orientations; coming out; love, marriage, and children; parents at home; the education system; the school environment; and the role of religion.

Similar to *Progressive Prudes*, the study states that the education system can be used to create awareness and understanding of the relevance of queer individuals in South Africa.

Hate Crimes against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People in South Africa, 2016, a study conducted by Love Not Hate (2016), provides statistics on queer South Africans' experiences in a predominantly heteronormative society. These experiences include the fear of coming out, of discrimination and abuse, and the knowledge of murdered queer victims. The statistics provided and those presented in *Progressive Prudes* and *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today* highlight the experiences of queer South Africans in a predominantly heteronormative society.

Based on the above-mentioned three studies, it is apparent that queer individuals are significant in the South African context. Even though there is limited research concerning queer individuals, they remain an area of research.

1.5.2 Research on queer literary elements: themes, queer characters, and social messaging

Many liberal democracies such as South Africa have an accepting view of diversity of gender, race, intelligence, ethnicity, place of origin, age, sexual orientation, class, etc. On the face of it such countries appear to adapt to this taxonomy, but young queer individuals are still born into a new age where diversity is not celebrated. In reality, both young queer and non-queer individuals are exposed to an overly conservative and traditional society. Queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity contribute to the rejection, tolerance and exclusion of queer individuals that form part of the broader landscape (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:12). The use of queer literature in the language classroom can help to address queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity in the heteronormative South African context.

The themes that are reflected in literary texts can inspire learners to think critically and independently of the authors' reasons for sharing a queer story, especially if the young adult can identify with these themes. Literature containing such themes can also serve as a reflective mirror or provide a different point of view for young adult learners, assisting them with identity formation and confirmation. As such, theme awareness can empower readers to challenge controversial issues. Accordingly, the themes that are present in queer literature may be used to expose heterosexual and queer readers to the experiences of fictional queer characters in heteronormative societies (Lord, 2014:181, 184; Bacon, 2016:30; Batchelor, Ramos, Neiswander, 2018:29).

The fictional queer characters that are present in queer literature can also be used to address social issues. The point of view of fictional queer characters with their unique values and beliefs, can interpret, describe, and represent a scene, event, or character. Thus, readers can become more aware and their awareness can become heightened by means of queer literature and experiences of fictional queer characters. Queer literature for young adults reveals the importance of fictional queer characters (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:xx, 17, 134; McCallum, 1999, cited by Blackburn, Clark & Nemeth, 2015; Blackburn *et al.*, 2015).

Another queer literary element that may be used to combat queer-phobia and hegemonic heterosexism³ is social messaging. Individuals are exposed to positive and negative messages through sources such as their homes, parents, televisions, schools, educators, literature, etc. These sources, especially literature, provide an opportunity for these individuals to construct cultural and societal messages. Literature and the messages contained in it can challenge discrimination and inequities. Therefore, opportunities should be created for learners to participate in the classroom (i.e. to discuss the messages discuss – with teachers and/or amongst their peers – in literature that are deemed suitable) (Rosenblatt, 1978; Zitlow, 2000; Eisner, 1998:149; Jackson & Boutte, 2009:108, 112).

1.5.3 Research on education and critical literacy

It is not surprising that many young queer individuals experience abuse at school when there is no support in the classroom environment concerning various sexual orientations. School policies should therefore consider including queer topics that address queer phobia and hegemonic heterosexism (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:20). This would allow queer learners themselves to inhabit a safe environment. It can even lead to unique stories where their lives are shared within school curricula and policies. Just as the authors of queer novels share fictional experiences of queer characters in a heteronormative society, critical thinking and reading, literature, and creative writing can provide the same opportunity for learners in the language classroom (Berry, 2018:510).

The education system (whether it is primary, secondary, or tertiary) can offer a space to include young queer individuals' experiences. Education policy and practice are sensitive to the possible reinforcement of various gender ideologies. Educators should therefore broaden

³The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020g) defines "heterosexism" as "discrimination or prejudice against non-heterosexual people based on the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality". Queer individuals are therefor considered to be abnormal and unnatural with regard to sexual identity and expression.

their own and learners' understanding of South Africa as a society that is enriched by its sexual diversity. A policy framework may be formalised by schools, educators and learners, parents and the community that normalises and mainstreams different sexual orientations and the sexual diversity relevant in South Africa. This can be achieved through critical literacy (Neill & Shapiro, 2011:15).

Critical literacy focuses on the researcher's ability to collect information from various formats, to reflect on the materials, and to interpret them (Freire, 1970). Therefore, critical literacy entails a researcher using a critical lens and additional multiple viewpoints when viewing information (Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002:385, 387). In other words, critically literate individuals are more socially attentive when the analysis of materials and criticism of injustices occur. So, should learners read queer literature critically in the language classroom, they can reflect and question the heteronormative position queer individuals find themselves in (McMillan & O'Neil, 2012:33–34).

Even though queer texts are available to be read in the language classroom, a critical literacy curriculum is overshadowed by the uncertainties and qualms of critical literacy and what it represents. Many educators and learners do not have the necessary knowledge to implement and read literature critically (Lewison *et al*, 2002:390). Consequently, educators and learners need guidelines for implementing critical literacy in the language classroom. Understanding how texts work, anticipating the texts' intentions, and evaluating and recreating social relations may inspire a critical literacy agenda for teachers and learners (Behrman, 2006:491–492).

1.6 Research questions and aims

1.6.1 Research questions

The research questions formulated for this study are as follows:

- How do the identified themes manifest in the chosen literary texts?
- How are queer characters portrayed in the selected texts?
- What social messaging is prevalent in queer texts that introduce learners to the positive and negative realities of fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society?

- What do the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent is queer literature included in suggested and compulsory set works?

1.6.2 Research aims

The research aims formulated for this study were to:

- critically analyse the identified themes in the selected literary texts;
- critically analyse the portrayal of queer characters in the chosen texts;
- determine what social messaging is prevalent in the queer texts that introduce learners to the positive and negative realities of fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society;
- determine what the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works; and
- provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers as criteria for selecting queer texts and for strategies to use when teaching these texts.

1.7 Research design

Grosser, Oosthuizen, Simmonds, and Van der Vyver (2018:101) state that a research design refers to the approach, strategy of inquiry, and philosophical worldview of a study. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, with critical hermeneutics as the method of inquiry.

1.7.1 The qualitative approach

Qualitative research involves non-empirical or theoretical research to do an extensive investigation into complexities and processes. The research for instance probes variables that have not been identified yet; the unsuccessful application of policy; the exploration of folk

wisdom and practices; and unknown societies or systems that are innovative (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:46).

Other characteristics of the qualitative approach include attempts to understand a phenomenon of interest using a flexible strategy shaped as the investigation proceeds. For example, a method such as observation can be used to obtain in-depth knowledge of either individuals and/or their social worlds. Qualitative methodology assumes that a single researcher can gain a valid understanding of the data gathered through accumulated knowledge (Fortune & Reid, 1999:94).

In the case of this study, non-empirical research was conducted to identify themes, explore the depiction of queer characters, and to uncover social messaging. This research is presented in Chapters 4–6. Finally, in Chapter 8, I endeavour to provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers should queer literature be prescribed for South African learners.

1.7.2 Strategy of inquiry – critical hermeneutics

A critical hermeneutic approach refers to a hermeneutic approach combined with a metaxological approach (Kinsella, 2006). Literary hermeneutics is the interpretation theory used to study literary works. It shapes the nature of philosophy and self-reflection. Furthermore, hermeneutics is regarded as an approach to meaning, a way of investigating the significance, and the significance of significance (Szondi, 1978:17; Malbon, 1983:207). A metaxological approach – which is included as a critical dimension – offers a way to apply critical hermeneutics to qualitative inquiry as it acknowledges dualities and resistance to opposed positions. The metaxological approach emphasises the interplay between sameness and difference. Accordingly, critical hermeneutics emphasises the interpretive act of understanding (Kinsella, 2006).

Taking the above-mentioned information into consideration, this study aims to analyse queer literature to gain knowledge and understanding – through interpretation – of the themes, the queer characters, and the social messaging that forms part of the text. Contrasting ideas and opinions are also taken into consideration when analysing and interpreting the queer texts in order to formulate a critical understanding.

1.7.3 Social constructivism⁴

Social constructivism is an uncertain, indefinite perspective: a researcher does not necessarily know what is universally good or bad, true or false, and right or wrong. This perspective therefore concentrates on relations and maintains the individual's role in the social construction of realities (Galbin, 2014:82). Furthermore, this perspective specifically suggests that there are multiple realities and truths throughout the entire research process (Given, 2008:228). This philosophical worldview does not aim to create something, but it has an influence on the processes that form something (Galbin, 2014:82). It supposes that everything people know has been determined or influenced by the relationships they have with values, politics, religious beliefs, ideologies, language, etc. (Given, 2008:118). As a result, all formations differ in the same world, because individuals create their own world using perceptions of the actual world. Communication, language and speech are therefore fundamental to the interactive process through which people understand the world and themselves (Galbin, 2014:82).

Accordingly, I analysed queer characters and their perspectives of their worlds in a heteronormative society. I also analysed themes and the positive and negative realities of the fictional queer characters' experiences as expressed in social messaging.

1.8 Methodology

Using a qualitative approach, I employed text analysis of policy documents and an in-depth analysis of selected literary texts as the research method. Given this methodology, the ethics implications had to be included as part of the researcher's considerations to ensure the quality of the research.

1.8.1 The selection of texts

A qualitative approach entails that a researcher selects intentional settings, individuals, and/or occurrences to provide information with which to answer a study's research questions and aims (Palys, 2008, cited by Maxwell, 2013:97). The criteria for the selection of documents and texts for analysis therefore depend on the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). The research aims of this study necessitated the use of both literary and non-literary texts.

⁴ A more detailed explanation of "social constructivism" follows in section 3.4.3.

I purposefully selected literary texts from the category of queer literature that reflect the themes that manifested from the studies by The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate (2016). The selected texts are aimed at young adults specifically. The search for identity is paramount in Bill Konigsberg's 2014 queer text, *Openly Straight*, prejudice and abuse manifest in Brent Hartinger's 2004 queer text, *Geography Club*, and religious zealotry is addressed in Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. These texts were selected through the following criteria: firstly, is the text queer-themed? Secondly, if the text is queer-themed, what is the queer point-of-view? Thirdly, is the queer character a young adult? Fourthly, does the text seem age appropriate for young adults? Lastly, does the text address or explore prominent issues that are relevant to queer individuals' perspectives in a heteronormative society (e.g. coming of age, psychology – risk decisions; fanaticism, socio-economic issues, etc.)?

In an effort to provide guidelines for South African English classroom teachers, I selected the South African Department of Basic Education's 2011 CAPS for EHL Senior phase (Grades 7–9) (2011), and FET phase (Grades 10–12) and the CAPS for EFAL Senior phase (Grades 7–9) (2011), and FET phase (Grades 10–12) to examine what these non-fictional documents state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works. Mathematics and English were my two major subjects when I completed my Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree. English, afterwards, became my subject of specialisation when I completed my Bachelor of Education Honours (BEdHons – English for Education) degree. As a result, I chose the CAPS for EHL and EFAL as English remained my subject of specialisation for the Master of Education (MEd – Curriculum Studies) degree.

1.8.2 Textual analysis

Text analysis focuses on written texts and their contribution to the phenomenon a researcher is investigating. Documents enter as the research process agents that have effects that are everlasting as they can always be open to manipulate allies, further action resources, and/or opponents to be demolished or silenced. In other words, a text (printed or electronic) exist continually and may be used for research purposes to address possible problems and phenomena (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:88; Given, 2008:230). Furthermore, documents can be used to develop interpretations that are positive and/or negative on a particular subject. Therefore, I attempted to place the documents in a social context and considered the authors' motivations for their creation and to determine the target audience (Given, 2008:403).

1.8.3 Ethical considerations

The following ethical issues – as suggested by Gillion (1994:184) – were taken into consideration for this study: autonomy, beneficence and non-maleficence, and justice.

The purpose of autonomy is for an individual to make deliberated decisions (Gillion, 1994:184–185). Furthermore, this study has a moral obligation to respect all individuals' autonomy and to ensure that the rights of queer and heterosexual individuals are respected.

The purpose of beneficence and non-maleficence is to produce net benefit over harm. Even though people can help other people, they unavoidably risk harming them. Therefore, beneficence together with non-maleficence refers to a researcher not doing any harm and only bringing about benefit (Gillion, 1994:185). So, beneficence and non-maleficence are addressed in this study in that both queer and heterosexual individuals in a heteronormative society will benefit from queer-themed literature teaching guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers.

The purpose of justice is to justify fairness between moral obligations and competing claims. The rights of individuals and laws that are morally acceptable should be respected (Gillion, 1994:185). By promoting the inclusion of queer texts in the South African curriculum, this study embraces an ethics of justice.

1.9 Contribution of the study

The current list of prescribed texts for the Grade 12 English language classroom does not include queer texts⁵. This study aimed to analyse queer texts in order to set queer-themed literature teaching guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers. Teachers will require guidelines for selecting and teaching queer texts to their learners since the content is sensitive. This is currently leading to teachers avoiding or rejecting queer-themed literature in the language classroom. Possible appropriate and applicable queer texts in terms of the

⁵ Jacobs (2011:44) explains that the hidden curriculum, which is neither good nor bad, can indicate the planned or unplanned activities that learners and teachers complete at schools, but which are “not stipulated in departmental rules and regulations”. However, there is the possibility that English language teachers tend to avoid/reject queer texts in their classrooms, meaning queer texts can also be avoided/rejected in the hidden curriculum. Nonetheless, there is also the possibility that some teachers do implement queer literature/themes in the English language classroom. Queer literature should form part of the Department of Basic Education's stipulated rules and regulations to ensure that all Senior phase and FET learners are exposed to the experiences of queer characters in heteronormative environments.

themes, queer characters, and social messaging was identified to inform the DBE about the necessary exposure to queer individuals in heteronormative environments and the queer texts that can be implemented in the English language classroom (especially given South Africa's liberal democratic constitution and its values).

1.10 An outline of chapters

Chapter 1 commences the study with an introduction and the problem statement of my study. The introduction entails a conceptual clarification and the contextualisation of the problem statement. The problem statement is founded on three queer studies on queer individuals and their experiences in the South African context (The Other Foundation, 2016; Nell & Shapiro, 2011; Love Not Hate, 2016). The chapter continues with a concise overview of two bodies of scholarship, research on queer literary elements and research on queer education and critical literacy. This is followed by the research questions and aims, research design and methodology. Additionally, I explain the contribution the study may make to the research field of education and I provide a motivation for my study. Since no researcher can claim to be objective, I also declare my own position in relation to my study.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the literature review of relevant available research. Research in the field of queer studies, queer literature, queer literary elements (themes, queer characters, and social messaging) and social issues (the search for identity; prejudice and abuse; and religious zealotry), education and critical literacy are identified, analysed, explored, and discussed. The significance of queer individuals in South Africa and the implementation of queer literature in the English language classroom are linked and highlighted (Bacon, 2016; Banks, 2009; Batchelor *et al.*, 2018; Barton, 2010; Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Beck, 2005; Behrman, 2006; Berry, 2018; Bittner, 2018; Blackburn *et al.*, 2015; Cart & Jenkins, 2006; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Eisner, 1998; Freire, 1970; Glazier, 2007; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Leins, 2019; Lewison *et al.*, 2002; Lord, 2014; Love Not Hate, 2016; McMillan & O'Neil, 2012; Nell & Shapiro, 2011; Reygan, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1978; Samelius & Wågberg, 2015; South Africa, 1996; South Africa, 2019; The Other Foundation, 2016; Wilson & Cariola, 2019; Wright & Smith, 2013; Zitlow, 2000). This chapter concludes with a section on possible factors that could limit the assimilation of queer literature into the language classroom.

In Chapter 3, I outline the research design and methodology of this study. A timeline and a reminder of the research questions and aims are included, as well as a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology. The chapter explores the qualitative approach, the critical hermeneutic method of inquiry and the philosophical point of departure of social

constructivism (BibleHub; 2018; Code, Mullett & Overall, 1988; Creswell, 2009; Fortune & Reid, 1999; Fouché & Delport, 2005; Gadamer, 1976; Galbin, 2014; Given, 2008; Grosser *et al.*, 2018; Kearney, 2003; Kinsella, 2006; Malbon, 1983; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b; Strydom, 2005a; Szondi, 1978). The selection of texts, the method of analysis, and the primary texts (*Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg, *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson, and the CAPS for EHL Senior and FET phases [Grades 7–12] and the CAPS for EFAL Senior and FET phases [Grades 7–12] of South Africa's Department of Basic Education) are discussed shortly (Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Given, 2008; Grosser *et al.*, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Mora, Gelman, Paradice & Cervantes, 2008; Nieuwenhuis, 2016a; Strydom, 2005b). This chapter concludes with a section that considers the rigour of the study and ethical considerations (De Vos, 2005; Gillion, 1994; Maree, 2016; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b; Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

Chapter 4 scrutinises one of the themes – the search for identity – that manifested from The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate's (2016) studies in relation to Bill Konigsberg's 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight*. Firstly, I provide a synopsis of the text. Secondly, I focus on the main protagonist – Rafe – as he experiences each of the stages in the search for identity identified by Konigsberg: rejection, tolerance, acceptance, and celebration. Thirdly, I analyse the queer characters in the text and how they are portrayed by Konigsberg. Lastly, I explore the social messaging used in the text.

Chapter 5 explores the second of the three themes – prejudice and abuse – found in The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate's (2016) studies by considering Brent Hartinger's 2004 queer text, *Geography Club*. This discussion also starts with a synopsis of the text. Secondly, I focus on six queer individuals – Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, Ike, and Brian – and their experiences in a heteronormative school environment where there are three popularity levels: Land of the Popular, Borderlands of Respectability, and Outcast Island. Thirdly, I probe the queer characters of the text and how Hartinger portrays them. Lastly, I consider the social messaging that appear in the text.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the third theme – religious zealotry – mentioned in The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate's (2016) studies by looking at Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. After a synopsis of the text, I focus on the religious zealotry that is apparent in Jeanette's experiences. The queer character's experiences are linked to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, the first eight books of the Bible, as she undergoes four stages due to her mother's religious zealotry: obedience, discovery, critical defiance, and

spirituality. This is followed by an exploration of the queer characters of the text and how Winterson portrays them. Lastly, I explore social messaging that are provided in the text.

Chapter 7 turns to the CAPS documents for EHL and EFL (Senior and FET phases) of the South African Department of Basic Education. The first endeavour was to see how literature is portrayed in the documents. Secondly, I determined whether the documents include queer literature or not. Thirdly, I inspected the current prescribed literature for Grade 12 learners. Fourthly, I perused the previous prescribed literature for Grade 12 learners. Lastly, I recommend the inclusion and the implementation of queer texts in the English curriculum for Senior and FET phases.

Chapter 8 offers a conclusion to the study. The chapter commences with a reflection on the findings. Thereafter, the discussion turns to guidelines for Senior and FET English language teachers with respect to teaching queer literature in the language classroom. This is followed by weighing the limitations and the contribution of my study, after which I make recommendations for future research (based on the results and discussions of this study) as well as a final reflection.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter served as an introduction to this study. It clarified the relevant concepts, offered a contextualisation and problem statement, and touched on the significance of queer individuals in a heteronormative South Africa as an area of research. The chapter also includes a cursory consideration of the available research on queer literary elements and research on education and critical literacy. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the research questions and aims and presents a brief overview of this study's research design and methodology. I mention the contribution of this study to the research field of education, I position myself in the study, and I provide a motivation for this study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the eight chapters included in the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction and background

Chapter 1 offered an introduction to this study and expanded on the research problem. This chapter presents the theoretical framework that informs this study. In the literature review several key texts on studies that examined queerness in South Africa are consulted. These include The Other Foundation's 2016 *Progressive Prudes*, The Atlantic Philanthropies' 2011 *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, and Love Not Hate's 2016 *Hate Crimes against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in South Africa, 2016*. These reports are analysed for the statistics they provide on the significance⁶ of queer South Africans in a heteronormative society and for information on the factors that affect their lives. The literature review also includes a glimpse into the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) to gain an understanding of the legal framework that affects sexual orientation and education. In addition to this, queer literary elements, such as themes (the search for identity; prejudice and abuse; and religious zealotry⁷), the depiction of queer characters, and social messaging, are discussed. The literature review concludes with an explication of the concept of critical literacy and its implementation in education, especially in relation to queer literature.

2.2 The studies conducted by The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate (2016)

When I decided that I wanted to focus on queer literature, I asked myself the question, "How significant is queer literature within the South African context?". In other words, to what extent does queer literature appear in the language classrooms of South Africa? I want my literary analysis of queer literature to serve a purpose within the South African context by providing guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers should the possibility of implementing queer literature in the language classroom become a reality. The first question led me to ask a second question: "How significant are queer individuals in a heteronormative South Africa?" In order to answer my second question, I critically analysed three studies that

⁶ "Significance", for this study, refers to the reports that deal with what part of the population is queer (in terms of numbers) as well as the seriousness of the negative experiences they have in a heteronormative society. The reports are not on how significant queer individuals are.

⁷ These themes manifested from the three studies I analysed and are used as literary themes in this study's selected primary texts. Literary works (such as *Openly Straight*, *Geography Club*, and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*) pick up on these real-life problems so that they also appear as literary themes.

were conducted in South Africa (from 2011–2016) to determine the significance of queer South Africans in a heteronormative society. This can shed light on the relevance and applicability of the guidelines I would like to provide for Senior phase and FET English language teachers concerning queer literature.

The first study was conducted by The Other Foundation (2016:15) – “an African community trust that advances human rights and social inclusion in Southern Africa, with a particular focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) [individuals]”. The study consisted of a survey conducted in 2015 on South Africans’ attitudes towards various sexual orientations. The survey in question was called *Progressive Prudes*. If one looks at the title of the report, one detects an oxymoron. How can prudes be progressive? However, on closer inspection, the title makes perfect sense. The Other Foundation (2016) explains that the rationale for the survey was to highlight the fact that in reality many South Africans believe that queer individuals should have the same human rights as the heteronormative society and that queer individuals form part of South Africa’s cultures and decisions. This refers to the “progressive” part of the title, as it is an adjective meaning “a person favouring social reform”. However, The Other Foundation (2016) also states that many South Africans believe that sex between queer individuals is morally wrong. This phrase refers to the “prudes” part of the title as it is a noun meaning “people who are or claim to be easily shocked by matters relating to sex or nudity”. So, even though there are South Africans who are easily shocked by matters of sexual orientation, they still believe that queer South Africans should have the same or similar human rights as individuals who form part of the heteronormative society.

The second study was conducted by Nell and Shapiro, who form part of the Atlantic Philanthropies. They conducted the study, *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*. Nell and Shapiro (2011:5) introduce their case study by explaining that “young [queer individuals] are exposed to the same challenges as most South African youth – but these are made worse by continuing [queer]-phobia at home, at school, in churches and in society at large, despite the social changes of the recent past”. Young queer learners experience the same challenges, such as for instance a search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry that heterosexual learners experience. However, even though queer South Africans in a heteronormative society have grown intellectually, gaining awareness and understanding (the past vs the present), queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity are still present and still influence these individuals. Thus, even though there is more knowledge about queer individuals, South Africans tend to avoid the subject, which leads to queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity.

The third study was conducted by the *Love Not Hate* campaign (2016:1) – a nation-wide multi-partner initiative that addresses queer violence. They state that “there is limited data on the prevalence of [queer] discrimination and hate crimes in South Africa which can be used to inform services, interventions and advocacy”. There are not many studies that provide statistics of hate crimes against queer South Africans in a heteronormative society due to, for example, the lack of knowledge of queer individuals (Lewison *et al.*, 2002:390), the complexity and magnitude of various sexual orientations (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:64), the alertness of the heteronormative society (Clark & Blackburn, 2009:25–26), and Christian fundamentalists (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). As a result, *Love Not Hate*, with the assistance of *OUT* and *Nudge*, conducted the study, *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016*, to gain an insight into the level of discrimination against queer individuals in schools and in general. This research can inform practical solutions to the queer-phobia that is still prevalent in South Africa.

Both The Other Foundation (2016:3) and Love Not Hate (2016:1) mention that there are limited data concerning the significance of queer South Africans. Nduna *et al.* (2017) also state that there are several international studies on sexual orientation diversity and gender, but these types of studies are limited in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The three chosen studies – *Progressive Prudes*, *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, and *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016* – can subsequently be instrumental when determining the significance of queer individuals in a heteronormative South Africa.

2.3 The participants in the studies by The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate (2016)

A broad range of diverse South Africans – in terms of sexual orientation, age, location, and race – were interviewed in the three studies discussed here.

The Other Foundation (2016:7, 19) states that their participants were geographically representative. More than three thousand South Africans (16 years and older) were interviewed face-to-face between October and December 2015. They could choose any of South Africa’s eight most widely spoken languages for the interview. The interviews formed part of the overall South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) field round. It is important to note that various races (white, coloured, black, and Indian/Asian) were interviewed. The most widely spoken or official languages in South Africa, according to the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) in terms of Section 6(1), are: “Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana,

siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu”. [The current mid-year South African population estimates, 2019, is as follows: 4 652 006 white, 5 176 750 coloured (a term used in South Africa for persons of mixed-race ancestry), 47 443 259 black, and 1 503 007 Indian/Asian (StatsSA, 2019).] Thus, the South African population consists of a complex mix of different races. As can be seen in Figure 2-1 (The Other Foundation, 2016:19), this survey report includes the views of a diverse section of the population with regard to the queer South Africans in a heteronormative society:

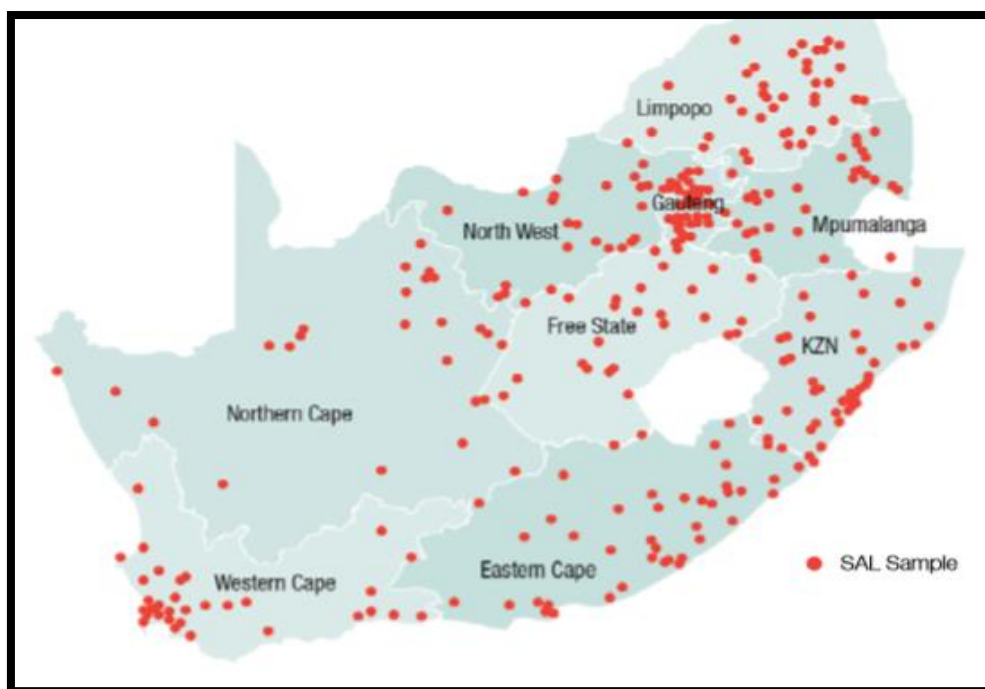


Figure 2-1: Map of the SASAS sample for the interviews conducted in 2015 (The Other Foundation, 2016:19)

The red dots in Figure 2-1 indicate that a cross-section of people from all South Africa’s provinces contributed to The Other Foundation’s findings.

Nell and Shapiro (2011:5, 7) state that they conducted interviews with young queer South Africans across race, class, and gender, in order to get a snapshot of the queer individuals’ experiences in a heteronormative society today. The researchers used focus groups of lesbian groups, at schools and universities, churches, queer organisations, and political parties. Some of the members of these groups were also individually interviewed. The researchers also spoke to educators, church group leaders, university student affairs officers, working class queer individuals and researchers, and people in government who work with youth. For the sake of balance, the researchers also spoke to young straight individuals to test if the

aspirations of young queer individuals differ significantly from those of young heterosexual individuals. Thus, a broad range groups and individuals in South Africa were interviewed.

Love Not Hate (2016:1) states that they had a total of 2 130 South Africans who participated in the *Hate Crimes against LGBT people in SA, 2016* study. Six hundred and eighty-seven (687) individuals identified as lesbian, 1 165 as gay, 216 as bisexual, and 285 as transgender. The participants were aged 16 years or older, with 63% of them being between the ages of 16 and 29. The participants were also from all over South Africa, and included black (817), coloured (193), Indian (52), and white (1068) respondents. The sampling of this study also selected diverse participants in terms of sexual orientation, age, location, and race.

The descriptions of the participants in the conducted studies indicate that the studies offer trustworthy data to determine the significance of queer individuals in a heteronormative South Africa. The findings of these studies are discussed in section 2.6.2.

2.4 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)

It is a fundamental right that all South Africans may choose their sexual orientation. Section 9(3) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996), states the following:

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

Sections 29 (1a) and 29 (1b) state the following:

Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

As a result, with relevance to “sexual orientation” and “education”, individuals should have equal rights and the freedom to choose their own “sexual orientation” without discrimination from the state. This discrimination can be explicit or more hidden, for example, there is an absence of stories dealing with the lives of all groups, regardless of sexual orientation, in the school syllabus. The hidden curriculum refers to the lessons learners learn unintentionally, including the norms, values, and beliefs of dominant groups in society. Learners should have

access to available queer sources and resources so that they are exposed to various viewpoints on queer topics that are relevant to the hidden curriculum.

With the above in mind, The Other Foundation (2016:3) conducted their study in order to determine what the South African public really think of queer individuals, since there is a general belief that South Africans are deeply queer-phobic. They make clear that South Africa is a heteronormative society when they state that the majority of South Africans are heterosexual (The Other Foundation, 2016). Consequently, discrimination, violence and abuse, and discouragement occur – even though it is against the law – because queer individuals are regarded as “abnormal” and something that a heteronormative society needs protection from. On the positive side, South Africa was the first country in the world to provide its citizens protection on the basis of sexual orientation and also the only country in Africa, but the fifth in the world, to have legalised same-sex marriage (The Other Foundation, 2016:9; Nell & Shapiro, 2011:12). The South African government has embraced the fact that there are various sexual orientations in the country, but it is clear that queer-phobia is still present. One of the reasons for this may be the limited comprehensibility of Section 9(3) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996). Many South Africans do not understand what this clause entails. In fact, four out of five citizens have reported that they do not understand Section 9(3) of the Constitution (The Other Foundation, 2016:45). There is a definite 20% of South Africans that feel queer South Africans should have no constitutional protections and another possible 20 to 30% that possibly agree, but every four in five individuals do not even understand why queer individuals have or should have rights as well. Secondly, individuals that do not understand and/or are unaware of queer individuals in South Africa, should be informed about the Constitution and sexual orientation, gender identity, and education. This can be done by means of education. Conversely, once the clause was explained to those participants that did not understand it, some of these individuals’ perceptions changed (The Other Foundation, 2016:45).

Queer South Africans in a heteronormative society should have constitutional protections. Such protection will allow queer South Africans to choose and express their sexual orientation as discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity are now illegal (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:5). It is therefore key to create awareness and to improve understanding of queer individuals in a heteronormative society to inform or change negative perceptions, and to counteract discrimination and the violation of sexual orientation and gender identity human rights (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:10). A starting point can be those individuals who do not understand the clause and individuals are neutral on the subject, because these groups might be persuaded to agree that queer South

Africans in a heteronormative society need constitutional protection. Jones (2018:469–470) explains that there are South Africans who support the country's politically progressive policy concerning queer rights. However, South Africa does have an inconsistent approach to queer education where regional opposition, lack of funding and lack of resources are of concern. South African politicians, diplomats, etc., may promote the education rights of queer South Africans more "so as to preserve South Africa's reputation as an African state advancing its own position on African sexual and gender diversity as part of a transnational act of decolonisation".

2.5 Sexual orientations in a heteronormative South Africa

This section provides some of the statistics obtained from *Progressive Prudes*, *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, and *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016*, in order to state the significance of various sexual orientations in South Africa.

The Other Foundation (2016:3) provides the following information about the distribution of queerness in South Africa:

In South Africa, over half a million adult women and men, across all population groups, living in both rural and urban areas, and across all age groups identified themselves as [queer] – consistent with similar population ratios in many different parts of the world. Almost six times that number of South Africans (three million) present themselves in public ('dress and act') in a gender non-conforming way: about 430 000 men and nearly 2.8 million women.

Similarly, Nell and Shapiro (2011:10) found in their study, which was conducted approximately five years earlier, that around 900 000 individuals in South Africa under the age of twenty, identify as gay or lesbian. It is unknown whether these individuals are open about their sexuality. This statistic does not even include bisexual, transgender, intersex, or other queer individuals, or South Africans who are twenty years or older. When one compares the study of The Other Foundation with the study of the Atlantic Philanthropies, it is clear that the number of queer individuals has increased from 2011 to 2016. The increasing number can be the result of more queer individuals being open about their sexual orientations now compared to the past. Love Not Hate (2016:4) determined that of their 2 130 participants, 3% (64 individuals) have indicated that they had been hiding their status from everyone around them. Similarly, 40% (852 individuals) have indicated that they have shared their sexual orientation only with individuals with whom they feel comfortable. Furthermore, 74% of the white participants (790

individuals) indicated that they are open about their sexual orientation, while only 66% of coloured participants (127 individuals), 52% of Indian participants (72 individuals), and 51% of black participants (417 individuals) were open to sharing their sexual orientation. Thus, there are still many individuals who have not “come out” yet due to factors such as relationships and religion.

Nell and Shapiro (2011:33) define “coming out” as “the process by which [a queer individual] accepts that his or her sexual orientation or gender identity does not conform to the norm, but that it is part of his or her overall identity and a ‘fit’ for him or her”. This includes that such queer individuals are open about their sexual orientation and accepts and celebrates it with those around them. Nell and Shapiro (2011:33) explain that coming out usually involves opposing heteronormativity – the general acceptance that all individuals are heterosexual. However, coming out can lead to rejection by parents, guardians, family, friends, and other possible relationships the queer individual may have. Nonetheless, the researchers have found that most queer individuals interviewed felt that their “coming out” experience was positive. The positive reaction refers to self-acceptance and celebration, which is powerful and liberating. Similarly, there can be negative reactions as well (such as rejection and tolerance, queer-phobia, and hegemonic heteronormativity). By the same token, Nell and Shapiro (2011:33–34) explain that “closeted individuals” talk about the closet as “a shadowy place where things remain hidden in danger of discovery”. “Coming out” does not take away that fear, but it does lead “to a feeling of pride, because one is part of creating a new norm – one which includes, and is comfortable with, diversity”. Accordingly, when people react negatively to queer individuals who are open about their sexual orientation, they are probably making a statement about themselves in that they deny diversity. Worldwide, statistics have suggested that most young queer individuals realise their sexual orientation at about the age of twelve, but that it can take many years before they come out, accept and celebrate their sexuality to anyone else. All queer individuals do not follow the same process of coming out, just as every queer individual’s process of getting comfortable with their sexuality is different. In South Africa, factors such as race, class, and gender play into when a queer individual can come out, because some races, classes, and genders may not be as accepting of queer individuals as others – males between the ages of 22–25, for example, may be more accepting compared to males 50 and older. There are networks that have slowly emerged to support young queer individuals in South Africa, allowing many to feel more comfortable in the world they live. Thus, there is support for young queer individuals in a heteronormative South Africa.

The information related above makes it clear that queer individuals form a large enough group to be relevant in the South African context, and that human sexuality naturally includes various

sexual orientations (straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and additional). Furthermore, individuals' attitudes towards these various sexual orientations can be the basis for their actions towards queer individuals in a heteronormative society. A positive attitude can result in positive actions (such as an acceptance or celebration of queer individuals, and/or support) whereas a negative attitude can result in negative actions (such as prejudice, abuse and violence). The Other Foundation (2016:37–38) explains that about seven out of ten South Africans (a large majority) feel that [queer] sex and the breaking of gender dressing norms are “wrong” and “disgusting”. Men aged 45 to 54 years old, specifically, disapprove of queer South Africans the most. Young adults aged 16 to 19 years old are also more likely to report that queer South Africans are wrong or disgusting. However, adults aged 20 to 24 years old tolerate queer individuals in a heteronormative society best. On the more positive side, there has been a change in attitude, not only of the way queer South Africans view themselves, but also of the heteronormative society towards queer individuals. Nell and Shapiro (2011:5–7) explain that the number of openly queer South Africans have grown since 1995 due to safe spaces, support, and services that are provided by organisations. A new landscape has emerged in which the post-apartheid queer generation has the possibility to live more fulfilled lives – to live and love, to marry, and to have families of their own. Many young queer individuals, with the support of different organisations, are able to accept and celebrate their sexuality at an earlier stage compared to the generations before them. Queer activism as part of the broader human rights discourse has become part of South Africa, meaning that queer individuals can more frequently overcome the adversity of being queer in an environment that is overwhelmingly heterosexual. Queer sportspeople, musicians, etc., can also be role models to other individuals.

In order to come to a point where queer individuals are excepted completely, they first of all need to have a voice that is heard by the non-queer individuals in a heteronormative society. Secondly, queer individuals need support in terms of the possible challenges they face. They can receive support from organisations, the community, educators, and any other support system where there is an awareness and an understanding of their lives and challenges. Thirdly, education can offer queer individuals support or the skills necessary for searching for support themselves; they can also become more aware of other queer individuals' experiences as a whole. Lastly, queer individuals can contribute to a more tolerant South Africa as far as diversity and human rights goes, especially within the context of education. “Rejection” is not South Africans' only attitude towards queer individuals, but “tolerance”, “acceptance” and even “celebration” should be developed. This can be achieved by creating opportunities for contact between non-queer individuals and queer individuals.

Contact between non-queer and queer South Africans can have a positive influence since individuals' attitudes and viewpoints can be positively influenced. The Other Foundation (2016:41) states the following:

One of the most compelling explanations for differing views on [queer individuals] is that one of the best predictors of a person's attitude towards [queer individuals] is the amount of direct contact they have with [queer individuals]. In numerous studies it has been shown that what most effectively shifts people's negative perceptions of [queer individuals] is increased contact, especially with family members and friends.

It is important to realise that there are or there can be positive perceptions (such as "acceptance" and "celebration") towards queer individuals in a heteronormative South Africa. It also became clear in the study of The Other Foundation that there are many South Africans that do not have or barely have contact with queer individuals. This, in effect, can have a negative influence on individuals' perceptions of queer South Africans. The Other Foundation (2016:43) also lists the following factors that influence an individual's attitude towards sexual orientations in a heteronormative society: sex, race, religion, age, and education. However, the two factors that particularly affect contact with [queer individuals] are "age" and "education". The Other Foundation (2016:43) provides the following information in this regard:

People under the age of 24 are more than twice as likely to know [queer] friends and family members than people over 65 years old. While two out of every three people who have no formal education report having no close contact with [queer individuals], only one in every three people who have graduated from college or university report the same.

Education can thus play a pivotal role in informing individuals of queer South Africans in a heteronormative society, and could possibly change or improve negative perceptions towards these queer individuals. Since young adults are more exposed to queer individuals, the inclusion of queer literature in their school curriculum can help combat queer-phobia and the hegemony of heteronormativity.

Parents and guardians at home also have an influence on queer South Africans. Nell and Shapiro (2011:13, 29, 46) explain that adolescence and early adulthood are notoriously fragile periods for young individuals, but especially queer individuals. Isolation, exclusion and rejection many young queer individuals mentioned in strong terms, and there is a high-risk of suicide in the aftermath of such experiences. Parents or guardians have either a positive or negative influence on their child's sexual orientation. Queer individuals are negatively affected when they are rejected and emotionally isolated from their parents or guardians, sometimes

as severe as an eviction from home. Negative experiences in the home can also lead to problems such as depression, self-harm, and alcohol and drug abuse. A possible reason why parents or guardians reject and isolate their queer children, is that they were exposed to a world where sexual orientations other than heterosexuality were considered both morally wrong and illegal. However, on the more positive side, there are many parents and guardians that have accepted and celebrated their queer children without any reservations.

It is clear that parents' or guardians' responses to young queer individuals are pivotal as they can be greatly affected for the rest of their lives. The aspirations of young queer individuals, just like young heterosexual individuals, is to have relationships, to marry, to have children, and to be part of society. On the whole, the aims are to bring individuals, families, and communities together, to foster mutual respect between South Africans, and to support one another emotionally and financially where possible.

2.6 Exploring social issues in literature

Addressing a social issue, in this case queerness, in a literary work makes for a number of literary challenges. However, many authors have done so successfully, and critics have paid attention to these efforts.

2.6.1 Queer literary elements

In liberal democracies such as South Africa, the generally accepted view among informed and thinking individuals is that of respect for diversity of gender, race, intelligence, ethnicity, place of origin, age, sexual orientation, class, etc. On the face of it, South Africa would appear to adapt to this taxonomy, but, in reality, young queer individuals have not been born into a new age of diversity celebration. There are young individuals – queer and non-queer – who are still exposed to a society that is overly conservative and traditional. In effect, this does not only affect young queer individuals, but also young heterosexual individuals. The process by which queer individuals have won full citizenship, at least at an official level, has also been strongly contested by religious fundamentalists⁸ and traditional leaders. Rejection, tolerance, and exclusion of queer individuals (by religious fundamentalists and traditional leaders) remain part of the broader landscape and contribute to queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:12). A possible method that can be used to address

⁸ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020c) defines “fundamentalism” as a strict and literal adherence movement or attitude to a basic set of principles.

queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity in the heteronormative South African context, is the inclusion of queer literature in language classrooms.

Gosher and Pannall (2014:204) define a “theme” as “the central idea, message or essence of a poem, play, novel, etc.”. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019c) defines a “theme” as “a subject or topic of discourse or of artistic representation” and “a specific and distinctive quality, characteristic, or concern”. Themes are therefore central to literature. Learners can learn and be exposed to life lessons by reading literature and connecting these lessons to their everyday lives. Important lessons can be learned vicariously through the lives of others or through fictional characters. Young adult literature generally has a protagonist that is a young adult who represents themes based on experiences. When learners attend to themes, they start to think – critically and independently – of the authors’ reasons for sharing these stories. Any author can experiment with young adult themes, specifically on the foundation that any young adult can identify with these themes. Themes in literature can become a mirror (for reflection) as well as a window (for a different point-of-view) for young adult learners to assist them in identity formation and confirmation. Learners’ comprehension skills can be practised by attending to literature details, and theme awareness follows, empowering readers to challenge controversial issues. The themes that are commonly present in queer literature can be used to expose heterosexual and queer readers to fictional queer characters’ lives in a heteronormative society. In effect, these themes can allow South African learners to link the texts to other texts, their own worlds, and the outside community, which can combat queer-phobia and hegemonic heterosexism, which would be relevant to a heteronormative South Africa (Lord, 2014:181, 184; Bacon, 2016:30; Batchelor *et al.*, 2018:29).

Just as themes as a literary element can be used to address queer social issues in a heteronormative society, the depiction of fictional queer characters can be used to address the same issues. Cart and Jenkins (2006:xx, 17, 134) state that there are four types of fictional queer characters: first, a character that comes out or is outed as queer – the character shares his/her sexual orientation with those around him/her, or another character makes people aware of the character’s sexual orientation without permission. The second type is a character that is born queer; this touches on the nature–nurture debate on whether a person is born queer or is influenced by the environment. The character may be queer since birth or factors (such as parents, guardians, friends, television, etc.) in the environment can lead the character towards queer sexuality⁹. The third type is a character that experiments in queer and non-

⁹ This refers to a character who has been aware of or has come to terms with their queerness at an early age (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:xx). Most people discover their sexualities during their preteen and teen years; even straight individuals may figure these things out at that time. First realising that one is

queer contexts to find their own sexual orientation; the character gets into various situations with various sexualities to determine his/her sexual orientation. The last type is queer characters that are found in non-queer texts' heteronormative worlds¹⁰. The first three types of characters generally occur in queer literature, whereas the fourth type occurs in non-queer literature.

The point-of-view of fictional queer characters can interpret, describe, and represent a scene, event, or character. Queer characters have unique values and beliefs. Conversely, the queer character can be interpreted, described and represented by another character's point-of-view. Readers can become more aware of social issues hardships as they share in queer characters' experiences of being or coming out as queer. "Fictional queer characters" is an important part of queer young adult literature. Early depictions included characters that were flawed and stereotypical and plots that were predictable and centred on queer individuals' miserable lives (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:17, 134). However, the evolution of queer literature has caused depictions to become more positive and inclusive. Queer literature generally now includes characters that can disrupt the norms for sexuality, same-sex desire, and behaviour of queer characters (i.e. lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals). More marginal characters can also disrupt the norms that are associated with gender, such as the rejection of traits and actions typically associated with the opposite gender to assert their gender (i.e. transgender and intersex individuals). Fictional characters can accomplish these identity disruptions in various ways, and this characteristic is generally what makes literature queer (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:xx, 17, 134; McCallum, 1999, cited by Blackburn *et al.*, 2015; Blackburn *et al.*, 2015). Other queer literary elements that can be used to combat queer-phobia and hegemonic heterosexism is social messaging that specifically addresses queerness.

Readers can construct cultural and societal messages sources such as literature to supplement or contradict the messages they receive from home. Literature and the messages it offers can be critical for the achievement of literacy, and beyond that, discrimination and inequities can be challenged by learners that engage in thoughtful, ongoing efforts in the

queer and finding a way to deal with it during the teenage years does not mean that one was not born that way; it just means that sexuality was not that prominent in the individual's mind at five or seven years of age. However, this may also suggest that queerness can be developed later in life. The assumption that it can be developed or learned later may be seen as something that can then be unlearned or "cured". Nonetheless, this dissertation is not the place to get into this debate as it was not the primary purpose of this study (i.e. the research questions). I do mention that these debates exist, but it is not the focus in the study.

¹⁰ The fourth type refers to one or two queer characters that are present in non-queer literature, but the focus is not on them or on queer social issues. For example, Professor Albus Dumbledore is a homosexual character in the *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* franchises, but the focus remains – respectively – on the main protagonists, Harry Potter and Newt Scamander.

classroom. Opportunities should be created for learners to participate and discuss messages in literature that is artistically created. Young adult literature can have a great impact as they include social messaging that allow individuals the opportunity of becoming more aware and knowledgeable (Rosenblatt, 1978; Zitlow, 2000; Eisner, 1998:149; Jackson & Boutte, 2009:108, 112).

2.6.2 Social issues

The social issues identified by *Progressive Prudes*, *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, and *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016*, are the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry. These social issues are the literary analysed in the fictional texts chosen for this study.

2.6.2.1 The search for identity

The first social issue, the search for identity, is crucially important for any individual, be it queer or non-queer. Self-identity can develop effortlessly, or with great effort and awareness of the process. Individuals can struggle so much to find their self-identity that they reject what they see completely, which can have dire consequences. Wilson and Cariola (2019) warn that young adults from sexual orientation and gender minorities face higher rates of violence and victimization, hopelessness, attempted suicide, substance use or abuse, risky sexual behaviours, eating disorders, and mood disorders.

Table 2-1 reflects the answers of participants in the *Progressive Prude* survey when asked the question, "Which of the following options best describes you?":

	Total Population	Male	Female
Heterosexual or Straight	97.10%	97%	97.10%
Gay or Lesbian	0.70%	0.70%	0.70%
Bisexual	0.50%	0.20%	0.70%
Other	0.20%	0.30%	0.20%
(Don't know)	0.20%	0.20%	0.30%
(Refused to answer)	0.20%	0.30%	0.10%
(No answer provided)	1.10%	1.30%	0.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%
% LGBT	1.40%	1.20%	1.60%

Table 2-1: *Progressive Prudes* Table 1: Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself? (The Other Foundation, 2016:29)

As can be seen from the above table, the majority of the population identifies as “heterosexual” or “straight” (97.10%). A small part of the population (1.40%) identifies as queer individuals. The concerning part is the participants who indicated that they do not know (0.20%), did not want to answer (0.20%), or those who did not provide an answer at all (1.10%). Participants that identified as heterosexual or straight, or did not know what their identity was, could possibly have been dishonest due to religion, inner conflict, rejection, violence, or any other factor that most probably has a negative influence on queer individuals. Participants who did not provide any answer can also possibly identify with other queer South Africans, but they do not want to mention this. The percentage (1.40%) of the South African population that identifies as queer South Africans can, in effect, be higher than what was found by The Other Foundation. These statistics also indicate that South African men (minority) and women (majority) who are “breaking gender norms” may secretly identify as queer South Africans. It does not necessarily mean that these men and women all form part of the group of queer South Africans, or for that matter the non-queer individuals in a heteronormative society, but due to the challenges of self-identity, or other factors such as religion, inner conflict, rejection, and violence, these South Africans are struggling to find their place in society.

Generally, an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity is based on the fixed assumption of the individual's sex and/or how the individual in question expresses sexuality. This assumption is also based on the fact that an individual must either be male or female, and that this individual becomes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI). However, adolescence is described by Harper, Brodsky, and Bruce (2012) and Difulvio (2011) (cited by Wilson & Cariola, 2019), as a unique period during which young adults develop their

identities. The well-being, mental health, and feelings of social connectedness of sexual orientation and gender minority young adults – LGBTI – are crucial, as they are vulnerable during this stage of development. It is therefore important that educated adults with whom queer individuals can connect, provide support (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:15; Harper *et al.*, 2012, cited by Wilson & Cariola, 2019; Difulvio, 2011, cited by Wilson & Cariola, 2019; Wilson & Cariola, 2019).

There are various sexual orientations that individuals identify with that fall under the queer umbrella¹¹. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:12) also mention that the following (concerning an individual's identity) should be taken into account: gender is not a synonym for men and/or women, because current research about gender focuses on women and men, as well as individuals that consist of femininities, masculinities, or both. The most known sexualities queer South Africans identify with, are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI). They (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:11) define homosexual women (also known as lesbians) and homosexual men (also known as gays) as having “a sexual orientation towards [individuals] of the same sex”. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:11) secondly define bisexual women and men as having “a sexual orientation towards [individuals] of the same as well as of the opposite sex”. They define transgender as male-to-female or female-to-male individuals whose “sexual and/or gender identity differs from the norm of the biological sex that was ascribed to them by birth”. These individuals feel that they are in the wrong body. Transgenders can also have a “homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual orientation when it comes to preference of sexual partners”. Thus, a transgender can be a man that identifies as a woman in a man's body or a woman that identifies as a man in a woman's body, and in both cases can be sexually attracted to a man, woman, or both. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:12) define intersex as “a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that [does not] fit the conventional definitions of being only male or only female”. They provide a number of possible intersex examples: one, “[an individual might be born appearing to be female on the outside, but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside” (or even on the outside). Two, “[an individual] may be born with mosaic genetics, so that some of the person's cells have XX chromosomes [apparent in females] and some of them have XY chromosomes [apparent in males]”. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether an intersex individual is mostly male or mostly female, since the individual in question

¹¹ The queer umbrella also consists of other categories, such as genderqueer, demisexuals, twospirited, questioning, asexuals, allies, pansexuals, polyamorous, etc. Thus, I am aware that there are other groups which are often included in these references, but I have chosen to limit my study to those groups mentioned – LGBTI – since the scope of my study does not allow to include all. The reason for focusing on the LGBTI categories is because these categories are more known in the heteronormative society and more general amongst queer individuals.

can have both characteristics that differentiate a man from a woman and those that differentiate a woman from a man. Yet, when one reads Judith Butler (2015), most of the statements here are dispelled. Gender performativity is at play and individuals emulate the gender roles prescribed for them by heteronormativity.

Samelius and Wågberg (2015:11–12) explain that “the identity creation process is an intricate and complex dynamic of the relationship between the ‘one’ who has power to name a category and determine its qualities and the ‘one’ who is placed in a category’s counteraction to renegotiate the qualities and nature that is ascribed to the category”. Gender identity should rather consist of the following two aspects where appropriate: the “self-defined gender identity” and the “ascribed or imposed gender identity” (that is generally based on reproductive tracts and organs – internal and/or external – and their appearance). Thus, individuals’ identities and the characteristics that go along with them should not be decided for those individuals; the individuals should do this on their own. Individuals should not feel uncomfortable about their identity. Blackburn *et al.* (2015) agree and explain that this identity development should hold true in queer literary characters. The researchers express that their idea is “we are who we are, even if we don’t know it yet”, thus calling sexual identification into question. Knowing about these various sexual orientations by means of queer literature in the language classroom can assist learners to find their own identity in a heteronormative society.

In an effort to offer guidelines to teachers on the theme of the search for identity, I analysed a 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg, which has fictional queer characters that are in search of their identities in a heteronormative school environment.

2.6.2.2 Prejudice and abuse

The second social issue, prejudice and abuse, can also – as with identity – have dire consequences for queer individuals if not addressed, including substance abuse, depression, and suicide. The Other Foundation (2016:33–34) found that 90% of South Africans stated that they would never hurt a queer individual. Contrastingly, many queer South Africans or South Africans that do not conform to gender norms have reported prejudice, abuse and violence. A deeper analysis of the data gathered from the survey of The Other Foundation shows that men (across all racial groups) are twice as likely as women to abuse or use violence against queer South Africans. Furthermore, young adults across all racial groups between the ages of 16 to 19 years old are three times as likely as age categories, to stereotype, abuse and use violence against queer South Africans. Verbal abuse and physical violence were reported across all age and racial groups (including individuals over 65 years old). Love Not Hate

(2016:5) asked their participants the question, “Are you afraid that you might experience discrimination due to being [queer]?” Over half of the 2 130 (55%) expressed fear that their sexual orientation might expose them to discrimination, while 149 participants (7%) were unsure. When considering race, 69% of Indian, 56% of black, 53% of white, and 48% of coloured individuals feared discrimination due to their sexual orientation. Thus, the Indian race is more likely to fear discrimination compared to coloured individuals, with black and white individuals being in between. Love Not Hate (2016:12) also asked the question, “Do you know of anyone who has been murdered due to being or suspected of being [queer]?” Of the participants, 852 participants (41%) knew of a queer individual who had been murdered as a result of their sexual orientation. The statistics also indicated that females (46%) were more likely to be aware of murders compared to males (36%). This is not surprising as violence against women in South Africa, whether queer or non-queer, has taken on alarming proportions (StatsSA, 2018).

There has been prejudice and abuse aimed at queer South Africans in the past, whether it be from non-queer or queer individuals. Bittner (2018:5) states that “the utilisation of violence against queer individuals is overwhelming”. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:5) agree that queer individuals may be subjected to discrimination, violence and marginalisation due to legal, medical, religious or cultural misconceptions. Consequently, violence and abuse against queer individuals such as verbal abuse, hate and honour crimes, neglect, forced marriages and forced medication, mutilation and rape, can occur in workplaces, local communities, healthcare settings, and family and/or friends.

Berry (2018:505) explains that bullying, for example, would not exist in the first place without the means of relating. The researcher explains that bullying (in a time where mindfulness benefits communicators and communication) is, in effect, mindless. Young adults who bully peers do so purposefully to cause harm, instead of conveying compassionate and non-judgmental messages. This aggression essentially takes advantage of individuals’ interconnectedness and exploits learners’ rationality, which is foundational to their lived experiences – this is done to instigate chaos instead of an effort to seek peace and love. Bullying is often the beginnings of prejudice, abuse and violence against queer learners.

The Other Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and Love Not Hate’s studies clearly reveal that prejudice and abuse against queer individuals are relevant to South Africa, and is it pivotal to address these issues. In the case of my study, I analyse a 2004 queer text, *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger, as it focuses on the experiences of fictional queer characters with regard to prejudice and abuse in a heteronormative school environment.

2.6.2.3 Religious zealotry

The third social issue that manifested from the surveys studied, is religious zealotry. Morality, in terms of religion, has a definite influence on queer South Africans. Researchers from The Other Foundation (2016:23) state that, according to their survey, “South Africa is considered a religious society”, and the report provides the following information:

Eighty-four percent of adults [reported] that they belong to a religion and 45 percent [considered] themselves to be ‘highly religious’ (values of between 8 and 10 on a 0–10 scale, with a national mean of 6.92). It is only a small minority (about 1 person in 10) who are not ‘very religious’ and who never attend a regular religious institution.

These statistics show that religion plays a role in the views and beliefs of the majority of South Africans, especially when it comes to abortion, pornography and marriage. Many religious South Africans have strong opinions about gender roles and individual sexual activity as part of their conservative moral beliefs. As a result, it becomes a challenge for non-queer individuals to adhere to the South African law of equality and freedom concerning an individual’s sexual orientation. However, more than half of South Africa’s population believes that queer individuals should form part of the cultures and traditions of the country, and 55% of respondents state that they would accept a family member who is queer.

Many young individuals (whether queer or heterosexual) form part of a religion due to a sense of belonging and to derive comfort. The South African Government (2019) clarifies that according to the Community Survey (undertaken by StatsSA in 2016), the distribution of the top five religious beliefs in South Africa is as follows:

Religion	Total Individuals
Christianity	43 423 717
Traditional African Religion	2 454 887
Islam	892 685
Hinduism	561 268
Judaism	49 417

Table 2-2: Community Survey undertaken by StatsSA (South African Government, 2019)

The vast majority of South Africans are Christians, but South Africa, according to its Constitution, is not a Christian country. Nell and Shapiro (2011:20) agree that for many young

queer individuals, religion is a major challenge as the views on queer sexuality differ tremendously among religions, traditions within religions, and among religious leaders as individuals. There might be religious individuals that accept a queer sexual lifestyle. However, for some young queer individuals religion can be devastating, because in general, religious communities hate the sin, but love the sinner (one of many views). For example, some individuals may simply hate queer-sexuality and queer individuals and act without any grace, while other churches fully accept queer-sexuality and may have queer church leaders among them – there has been much discourse on this matter among religious groups, and there are quite a few groups who have gone completely to a contemporary view. There is also the view that an individual who has queer desires is not sinful as long as the individual does not act on it. Nell and Shapiro (2011:20–21) further state that the South African Roman Catholic Church has about 3.3 million individuals. Consequently, this church and its teachings can influence many (queer) individuals. The researchers explain that queer sexuality is generally seen by the Roman Catholics as a movement against morality, because a less moral society has resulted as individuals accepting abortion, prostitution, contraception and same-sex marriage. It is the fundamentalist views that do a lot of damage as they are judgemental, aggressive and often the loudest. Be that as it may, many South Africans have children who are queer, and besides the children, more young adults and elders are “coming out”. Interestingly enough, a representative of the Roman Catholics, when interviewed by Nell and Shapiro (2011:21), mentioned that Biblical texts are often seen to be against queer-sexuality, but these texts can also be interpreted in other ways. Thus, not all interpretations are negative. The Roman Catholic Church may interpret queer sexuality as a sin, but they also mention that this sin cannot remove you from God’s love (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:21).

The Christian African Independent churches have many followers (around a third of the South African population – particularly black individuals), and these churches also view queer sexuality from a fundamentalist point-of-view. Since there are various groups, there is always the possibility that there are pastors who believe that queer individuals, too, are seen as equal to heterosexual individuals in God’s eyes. Despite this, the majority of these groups generally treats queer-sexuality as a sickness that needs to be cured (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:21). As a result, many devoted Christians who identify as queer feel alienated from these churches.

Although the above-mentioned may be true, queer individuals, parents, friends, families, societies, religious organisations, teachers, learners, etc., should receive education about queer individuals so that more individuals would be prepared to support queer South Africans. As Blackburn and Schey (2017: 54) observe, “curricular representations of LGBTIAQQ people” must include “dimensions of difference, such as [...] religion”. Wilson and Cariola

(2019) explain that research about the relationship between culture, ethnicity, and religion should be explored in order to gain a better understanding of the levels of acceptance and rejection of the wider socio-cultural society. Beagan and Hattie (2015:92, 94) state that a queer individual almost unavoidably has a conflicted relationship with religion and spirituality. The researchers justify this by explaining that “the condemnation by mainstream faith traditions has inflicted considerable harm on sexual and gender minorities” and that “there is compelling evidence” that expresses the significant damage the conflict between religious teachings and sexual or gender identity can do to a queer individual’s psychological and emotional well-being. Barton (2010:471) agrees and states that when an individual’s eternal soul is threatened, the stakes are high. The fear of hell is a powerful motivator that terrifies young queer individuals who cannot control their sexual attractions. Ream and Savin-Williams (2005), cited by Beagan and Hattie (2015:94), explain that the degree of rejection and intolerance from a religious community can harm queer individuals emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, which can lead to queer individuals choosing to leave or being forced to leave a religion. Beagan and Hattie (2015:95, 98, 111) mention that several studies have found patterns in queer responses to conflicts with religious identities: “rejecting the [queer] identity”, “rejecting the religious identity”, “compartmentalising the [queer] self and religious self”, or “identity integration”. Thus, faith traditions negatively affect queer individuals through guilt, shame, disconnection from body, sex negativity, and the undoing of relationships to self and others, all of which causes conflict between queer individuals’ identities and their religious or spiritual beliefs. The researchers emphasise the pain queer individuals experience in connection with organised religions. Queer individuals experience messages that are queer-negative and sex-negative, and messages that elicit guilt, shame, and anxiety about spending eternity in hell. As a result, young adult queer Christians can suffer from depression, low self-esteem, and self-loathing, which can lead to self-harm, addictions, and suicide (Beagan & Hattie, 2015:111).

Despite the pain and suffering described above, many queer individuals continue to long for religion or spirituality, as they experience an emptiness, a void, or a search for greater meaning. Conversely, even queer individuals that have found spiritual solace (by practising individualised spiritual beliefs and practices), often feel the need to hide it in queer circles. Just as queer individuals can be rejected repeatedly in religious communities, so spiritually inclined individuals can repeatedly be rejected in queer circles (Beagan & Hattie, 2015:114). However, it may be helpful to queer individuals to know that relationships that have suffered due to religious views can heal. Furthermore, the researchers explain that spiritual engagement counselling to learn to distinguish “religion”, “church”, and “spirituality”, and focusing on values instead of beliefs can assist, support and be beneficial to queer individuals to address spiritual

and religious pain, as well as the collective pain of oppression, losses, violence, and death. Young adult queer literature can act as a mirror that reflects various sexualities and religious upbringings, as well as various outcomes or solutions to the problem of spirituality.

It is possible for a queer individual to form a personal spirituality where theology is converted into a belief system that is workable and allows for acceptance and a more liberal understanding of queer-sexuality. This will not mean that they no longer struggle with their sexual identity or the pain of coming out though. Queer young adults should be encouraged to resolve their religious dilemmas and their sexual identity, because elements such as political oppression, school bullying, and religious condemnation all form part of a queer individual's life (Beagan & Hattie, 2015:111, 113–114; Bittner, 2018:3, 5, 15–16).

It is pivotal to take religious aspects into consideration when studying queer individuals in a heteronormative society. In the case of my study, I analysed a 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeannette Winterson, which focuses on religious aspects from a Christian perspective, namely religion, spirituality, religious zealotry, and sin.

2.7 Education and the implementation of critical literacy in the language classroom

If there is no support in the classroom environment concerning various sexual orientations, it is not surprising that many young queer individuals experience abuse on the school ground (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:19). Queer phobic bullying seems to be regarded only as a mild offense by some educators, learners, schools, and the community. Nell and Shapiro (2011:19) recount an occurrence where heterosexual learners came across young queer individuals being subjected to (verbal) abuse and did not consider it as bullying at all. Consequently, these heterosexual learners did not feel that it was their business to intervene in any way and to come to the rescue of the queer individuals in question, as they saw it as “inevitable” that these individuals would be bullied. The researchers (2011:20) continue to explain that school policies that include queer topics and address queer phobia improve this situation.

Recently, Illinois, USA, became the fourth state to enlarge its American history definition by requiring public schools to teach queer history (Leins, 2019). Heather Steans, as cited by Leins (2019), stated that, “One of the best ways to overcome intolerance is through education and exposure to different people and viewpoints”. Accordingly, texts that include queer individuals – who are also protected by the Illinois Human Rights Act – will be purchased with state grant funds and be included from July 2020. Thus, Illinois learners will be exposed to the history of queer individuals that contributed to the history of the USA. Leins (2019) further

explains that California in 2011, followed by Colorado and New Jersey in 2019, became the first states to legalise the teaching of queer history in schools. Christian Fuscarino, executive director of Garden State Equality, an advocacy group, stated, “Our youth deserve to see how diverse American history truly is – and how they can be a part of it one day, too” (Leins, 2019). However, a former New Jersey assistant principal, Mayor Alfonso Cirulli, explained that a government does not have the right to teach learners morality. Other limitary groups include state officials, parents, and conservative groups. Nonetheless, the first queer-inclusive textbook was approved in 2017.

South African schools are largely heteronormative environments where the needs of young queer individuals are not fully met. A possible reason for the creation of environments that includes no exposure to queer individuals can be ignorance on the part of education authorities and individual educators, as well as education policy in its current form. The Other Foundation (2016:49–50) also mentions that there is not enough support for school learners and community-based education to receive more education about the human rights and social inclusion of queer South Africans. Love Not Hate (2016:6) asked their participants the question, “Did you ever experience any discrimination when you were at school due to being [queer]?” The participants (24 years or younger) responded that in schools, victimisation on the grounds of sexual orientation is very high. With this in mind, 56% of 638 participants indicated that they experienced discrimination in schools due to their sexual orientation. Based on the statistics, white schools (82%) were more inclined to discriminate against queer individuals compared to coloured (59%), black (53%), and Indian (below 50%) schools. Love Not Hate (2016:6) also asked the question, “Which of the following abuse – verbal abuse, threats of violence, physical abuse, and sexual abuse – did you experience when you were at school?” The statistics indicated that verbal abuse (55%) was the most common form of discrimination at schools. The second most common form was threats of violence (35%). However, roughly a third of the verbal threats (12%) resulted in actual abuse and/or property damage, while one in ten of the participants experienced sexual abuse in the form of rape. Wright and Smith (2013:1, 9) mention that queer learners, compared to heterosexual learners, continue to report a much higher incidence of harassment, bullying and isolation in schools. Thus, queer learners can frequently and consistently be exposed to prejudice, abuse and violence as their queer-phobic peers in a queer-phobic heteronormative school climate bully them. Consequently, attending a school with such a negative climate contributes to the high suicide rate among queer learners. Berry (2018:502) agrees that some populations tend to be at greater risk as they are more vulnerable compared to others when bullied, such as the non-queer individuals in a heteronormative society. Thus, Wright and Smith (2013:9) propose that schools appoint leaders who can create a safe workplace and environment for queer

educators and learners in order to decrease bullying as a result, especially of queer learners. Berry (2018:510) adds that schools, educators, administrators, board members, etc. should continue their efforts to create warm, enriching and inclusive environments for queer learners by facing queer-phobic school climates and the impact of queer bullying. As a result, queer learners will be able to identify and be themselves in a safe environment, which can lead them to share unique stories of their lives within school curricula and policies. Just as the authors of the three novels selected for analysis share fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society, South African learners can share language classroom by means of critical thinking and reading, literature and creative writing.

The Other Foundation (2016:51) gives an overview of the viewpoints South Africans have concerning queer individuals: it is a "lifestyle choice" (34%), an "illness" (12%), a "sin" (5.10%), a "result of a person's upbringing" (3.80%), and/or is influenced by "ancestral spirits" (3.70%). The other 41.40% of individuals did not provide a viewpoint. The Other Foundation (2016:53) points out that these opinions can change, and that information and advocacy about sexual orientations are very important. Nell and Shapiro (2011:15) clarify that the education system (whether it is primary, secondary, or tertiary) can be either an opportunity or an obstacle for young queer individuals in South Africa. When heteronormative gender ideologies are reinforced in schools, young queer individuals can be attributed characteristics they do not have, such as living in sin, being immoral, and having a negative influence on others, and they become likely to develop "citizenship deficit" (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:15). Citizen deficit refers to queer individuals never feeling part of society. It is crucial for educators in the classroom environment to be aware of this, because young queer individuals are fully qualified to be South African citizens, and they have to be equipped with deeper knowledge and experiences in order to engage positively in and with society. Forthwith, educators play a pivotal role in helping young queer individuals to realise that they are living in a sexually diverse South Africa legally. As a result, educators should broaden the understanding of South Africa as a society enriched by its sexual diversity. Schools, educators and learners, parents and the community can work together to formalise a policy framework that normalises and mainstreams sexual orientation and the sexual diversity that is relevant in South Africa (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:15). This can be done by implementing critical literacy in the language classroom.

In the next section, three questions about critical literacy and its relationship with education are discussed: What is critical literacy and why is it important in education? How can queer literature be looked at through a critical literacy lens? What are the factors that can limit the possible assimilation of queer literature in the English Language classroom?

2.7.1 What is critical literacy and why is it important in education?

Paulo Freire (1970) contributed to the development of “critical literacy” as a concept. It focuses on the reader’s ability to collect information from various formats, reflect on the materials, and to interpret them. Accordingly, one can retrieve knowledge from different formats (such as poems, novels, plays, and short stories) through the reading and viewing skills. Afterwards, one critically reflects on the information obtained, asking questions (such as who?, why?, when?, where?, etc.). Lastly, through critical thinking, one interprets the information collected and questions asked. Lewison *et al.* (2002:385, 387) maintain that critical literacy entails a researcher using a critical lens and additional multiple viewpoints when viewing information. According to McMillan and O’Neil (2012:33–34), authoritative individuals are those who represent and account for what is accepted as truth. Consequently, these individuals will probably benefit at the expense of others who believe these “truthful facts”. Basically, the “authority” decides whether “something” is right or wrong, and ignorant or gullible individuals will believe this to be true without reflecting or questioning it. However, critically literate individuals are more socially attentive when the analysis of materials and criticism of injustices occur. Thus, should learners read queer literature critically in the language classroom, they can reflect and question the truthful facts presented by those who are in authority. McMillan and O’Neil (2012:34) explain that people can become critically literate when they are given the opportunity to construct their own knowledge. Lewison *et al.* (2002:382) categorise critical literacy into interrelated dimensions: “disrupting the commonplace”, “interrogating multiple viewpoints”, “focusing on socio-political issues”, and “taking action and promoting social justice”. In relation to this study, I am disrupting the commonplace (heteronormativity) when I reflect, question and critically engage with the chosen queer texts. The queer texts also allow me to view fictional queer and non-queer characters using multiple viewpoints – heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. I also focus on socio-political issues, taking action and promoting social justice when I address issues such as the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry through analysing queer literature.

Even though there are queer texts that can be read in the language classroom, Lewison *et al.* (2002:390) explain that a critical literacy curriculum for the classroom environment is overshadowed by the uncertainties and hesitations related to critical literacy and what it represents. Thus, not many educators and learners have the necessary knowledge to implement and read literature critically, and because it is something that is unknown to them, they avoid it. However, Beck (2005:392, 397–398) states that critical literacy instruction can play a role in the classroom environment by shifting the focus of the class from the text to modern-day concerns. In other words, allowing learners to make real-life connections.

Furthermore, the classroom environment can inspire learner awareness and empowerment. Employing critical literacy in the language classroom may result in learners becoming more aware of fictional queer and non-queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society and of modern-day concerns and challenges (the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry).

Consequently, educators and learners need training (guidelines) with respect to implementing critical literacy in the language classroom in order for a critical literacy curriculum to be included. Lewison *et al.* (2002:387) mention that the practice of critical literacy in the language classroom can occur by making connections between learners' personal and real lives with the social issues addressed in texts. Moreover, Glazier (2007:141) describes her critical literacy approach as "anti-oppressive" and she calls it "socially just teaching". Thus, she deconstructs her learners' general prior knowledge about literature and text, and allows them to question what has been said, learned, and known in literature and text. For example, learners can question the fictional queer and non-queer characters and their experiences in a heteronormative society and the division, similarities and differences between the two characters. Behrman (2006:491–492) states that educators and learners should be inspired by a critical literacy agenda as they work together to understand how texts work, to anticipate what the texts' intentions are with the world, and how they can evaluate and recreate social relations.

Consequently, critical literacy classroom practices can contain the following three approaches: "supplementary text reading", "multiple text reading", and "resistant perspective reading". Firstly, Behrman (2006:492) explains that in order to develop a critical perspective, supplementary text reading would entail that educators supplement the traditionally chosen texts with "other fiction", "non-fiction", "film", and/or "popular culture works"¹². In effect, supplementary texts may permit learners to confront social issues which traditional or canonical texts skim over and avoid. For example, queer literature can supplement non-queer literature, allowing social issues – such as the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry – to be confronted and discussed.

Secondly, Behrman (2006:493) explains that multiple text reading on the same topic can develop a critical perspective. Learners can understand authorship as a situated activity by being encouraged to read multiple texts. They can contemplate the who, when, where, why,

¹² The DBE (2011a:35; 2011b:28; 2011c:35; 2011d:33) does make provision for enrichment opportunities in the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases).

and how of the multiple texts. Learners will thus begin to recognise that the multiple texts are not true in any definite sense, as they are author-portrayed interpretations of diverse experiences equivalent to a topic or event. For example, Bill Konigsberg's *Openly Straight* addresses the social issue of the search for identity from a homosexual (gay) perspective. Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club* addresses the social issue of prejudice and abuse, mainly from a homosexual (gay) perspective, but the perceptions of lesbian and bisexual characters are also included. Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* addresses the social issue of religious zealotry from a homosexual (lesbian) perspective. These same issues could be addressed from the point-of-view of race or class for example.

Thirdly, Behrman (2006:493–494) explains that reader-resistant reading entails that the values of the reader and the stance of the author are emphasised in the classroom environment, and that the reader can form a conscious awareness of text interpretation and its effect. So, learners are asked to undertake new or unfamiliar identities, are invited to read from a frame of reference that is different from that normally used, and will have the opportunity to accept and evaluate an argument or statement from the author's point-of-view. For example, a heterosexual learner can be asked to read a queer-themed text that is told from a fictional queer character's point-of-view. Behrman (2006:497) concludes that the above-mentioned categories can develop an understanding that text "is given meaning" instead of "containing meaning". Thus, texts do not entail only fictional stories, but they can provide meaning for the greater good.

2.7.2 How can queer literature be looked at through a critical literacy lens?

The previous section explained critical literacy and why it is important in an educational environment. This section focuses on queer literature and how it can be analysed through a critical literacy lens. Griffin and Ouellett (2003:106) explain that schools are important socialising institutions for young adults, and that the education (explicit and hidden curriculum) that learners receive in schools has a vital impact on expectations, norms, and values of the larger society. With the given information in mind, school administrators have started realising the importance of queer learners' safety. They realise that understanding sexual diversity in a heteronormative society can inform gender and sexuality issues in schools by means of educational policies and inquiry advancement.

Griffin and Ouellett (2003:107) state that in 1973, researchers began to view lesbian and gay individuals as normal, and during the 1990s this started to extend to bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals. Instead of carrying a deviancy assumption, they fixated on the

assimilation of queer individuals into society. However, Griffin and Ouellett (2003:108) explain that Rofes (1984), in an early call for schools to address the needs of queer learners, describes in *The Advocate*, a queer magazine, the isolation queer youth faced in schools:

[Queer] teenagers still feel secluded in their homes, neighbourhoods, and schools. It is a rare [queer] teenager who discovers support in [his/her] high school – either from another [queer] learner or an openly [queer] teacher. The options for the typical [queer] teenager in high school have not expanded much after fifteen years of the modern-day [queer] movement.

The above-mentioned quotation indicates that queer individuals can feel isolated in their heteronormative environment due to a lack of support. Griffin and Ouellett (2003:109) further maintain that the 1984 *Harvey Milk School* and 1985 *Project 10* projects were the first to address queer youths' school needs, but they did not attempt to modify schools or address larger social justice issues (such as heterosexism and gender oppression). Positively, Banks (2009:33) mentions that novels, stories, poems, non-fiction texts, etc., can be valuable for teachers in their teaching, because spaces for learner-readers are bestowed by powerful arguments in texts and opportunities for discovery, reflection and substitute possibilities are created for learners to result in richer, happier, fuller lives. Banks (2009:34) expresses that individuals should be rescued – not only queer learners, but non-queer learners as well – from queer-phobia and intolerance, and their damaging or deadly effects. With this in mind, one way to approach this kind of work is employing critical literacy, because learners can recognise their lives in the texts that they read.

A critical literacy approach requires that one should address social issues as the reading of texts consists of “word calling”, “how one learns the language for describing oneself”, “for narrating oneself into existence”, “for articulating one’s needs and values”, and “value in the spaces that one needs to survive in” (Banks, 2009:34). Accordingly, various kinds of lives are made possible by the texts one reads, because literary elements – myths, values, messages, images, characters, themes, etc. – can remind one of or expose one to possible options. Reading about fictional queer characters coming out to parents, friends, and educators that are resistant or accepting in a heteronormative society, provide young adult learners with other possibilities available to them. Additionally, Banks (2009:35) mentions that fictional queer characters, in more recent literature compared to past narratives, do not die, but get to live. In other words, the protagonists of past narratives usually died (whether it be of AIDS, suicide, violence, etc.), but in more recent literature, the protagonists do not necessarily die, but can, for example, overcome challenges, find love and live full lives. Since they are the stories’

protagonists, the readers are challenged to understand these protagonists as human beings that also have desires, thoughts, and interests that can mirror their own. Banks (2009:35) furthermore explains that adolescent fictional queer characters are presented in these queer-themed texts as individuals that are interesting, smart, complex, and people who are in search of their identity in the world that will allow them to advance as full human beings. Additionally, queer-themed texts can also address “gay shame” – an individual feeling ashamed of being queer. As a result, young adult learners will be able to relate, resonate and connect to these fictional queer characters who are searching for true love within a heteronormative society. Contrastingly, in these queer themed texts generally is also an exploration of characters who either struggle to exist or individuals who attempt to manage their sexualities and the possible conflicts that go along with it and their fears of parents’ and/or friends’ reactions – this can be achieved through education.

Through education, learners can relate to fictional queer characters. Education, in relation to the lives of sexual and gender minorities, holds particular relevance when it is conceptualised and challenged as the “practice of freedom” – being allowed to live one’s life as set out in the law – and the “cultures of silence” – minority groups’ voices that are not heard or are expected not to be heard (Reygan, 2013:229). However, Batchelor *et al.* (2018:29) and Wright and Smith (2013:9) mention that queer literature is often avoided in school curriculums and that queer learners in schools where queer literature is excluded do not obtain critical knowledge about themselves and queer topics. Reygan (2013:229) and Francis and Reygan (2016:191–193) agree and clarifies that schools in South Africa are unprepared for queer-themed education (queer texts, queer characters in a heteronormative society, and queer social messaging), as well as queer-phobia and hegemonic heterosexism. Teachers seem to experience deep suspicion, disapproval, and discomfort about queer identities.

Butler (2003), cited by Reygan (2013:231), explains that the minority of young South African people, overall, in view of sexuality and gender, are “exposed to a lack of support systems”, “lack of affirming materials in schools”, “teachers who express derogatory and hostile sentiments in class”, and “experiences of peer harassment”. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:24) agree and state that this can make young queer individuals vulnerable to identity problems, health hazards, and discrimination, suicide, HIV/AIDS, abuse, etc. As a result, they attend unsafe schools, little or no support is received from the school management, and school counsellors are inexperienced and not knowledgeable in the area of queer literature.

Queer phobia and hegemonic heterosexism in South African schools can be challenged through increased awareness (Reygan, 2013:234). Teachers can, for example, as Behrman

(2006:492) suggests, implement supplementary text reading, multiple text reading, and resistant perspective reading. Teachers can also adopt a queer-inclusive curriculum and create a classroom that supports various cultures by including queer literature (Batchelor *et al.*, 2018:29), because tolerance and acceptance can be constructed through queer-themed literature presentations and lessons. In effect, this can help to reduce bullying and abuse in heteronormative school environments (Flores, 2012:190). Banks (2009:36) urges schools in South Africa to utilise spaces where many queer texts are available for learners so that they can be exposed to queer youth experiences that can support and encourage them. Therefore, queer texts should form part of the language curriculum and the language classroom. Learners will be encouraged to read queer texts emphatically and critically using the critical literacy lens, and they will become aware of the contexts of these texts and the more positive and complex experiences of the fictional queer characters. The incorporation of queer-themed texts in a school curriculum is a sensitive issue and such an endeavour will garner resistance. The following section addresses possible factors that may hinder the reading of queer-themed texts in classrooms.

2.7.3 What are the factors that can limit the possible inclusion of queer literature for discussion in the English Language classroom?

I am not unaware of the challenges that arise when advocating the inclusion of queer-themed literature in the language classroom. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:64) explain that it can be difficult to find the correct approach(es) to consider the various expressions and different conceptualisations of queer individuals and their identities. The researchers explain that there is no simple or straightforward answer for a question of this complexity and magnitude. The reason for this is that sexual orientation has different meanings for different individuals. Some individuals consider it as “a basis for identity” while others consider it as “a practice”. Some individuals also consider it as a way to express and shape one’s intimate and innermost emotional life. Individuals’ gender dichotomy – male, female, gender-neutral, intersex, etc. – is too narrow to describe the various expressions and experiences of gender identity in the real world. So, the researchers suggest that the mere complexity of experiences may curb the initiative to expose learners to differing sexual orientations. I agree that sexual orientation as a concept can become difficult to explain, but it should not be avoided on the basis of its complexity. If there is no simple or straight forward definition, explanation, or answer, one can find a way – such as including queer literature in the language classroom – to explain the various sexual orientations there are.

Clark and Blackburn (2009:25) continue by saying that discussing queer-themed texts, from a teacher's point-of-view, may seem impossible. Thus, due to limited or no training on queer literature, tackling social issues can become too much of a challenge for teachers. Wright and Smith (2013:9) agree learners have teachers who are less prepared to successfully meet queer learners' learning needs due to insufficient professional development concerning the teaching of queer literature. Without the necessary knowledge and expertise to teach queer literature in the language classroom, teachers may feel it is an impossible task to complete. Consequently, pre-service teachers should be exposed to such texts during their tertiary education and they should be taught the pedagogical strategies that accompany the teaching of such texts at school level.

Thirdly, Clark and Blackburn (2009:25–26) mention that a school's context can contribute to the limitation of the assimilation of queer-themed texts. The power of the non-queer individuals in a heteronormative society (the majority group) surpasses the power of non-queer individuals in a heteronormative society (minority group). Ignorant people's viewpoint that queer literature is "unimaginable" or "inappropriate" in the school's context results in queer literature not being read in schools. Wright and Smith (2013:9) also clarify that there are queer teachers who believe their occupations are at risk if they are out and open to learners about their sexuality. Not only do these learners lack queer role models in the school environment, but queer literature as well. Since South Africa is a heteronormative society, the minority who identify as queer, struggle to surpass the power of those who are ignorant and in authority.

Fourthly, Griffin and Ouellett (2003) add that Christian fundamentalists – such as the clergy, parents, other family members, guardians, friends, schools, etc. – believe that conversing about queer individuals or characters in anything but contemporary terms puts innocent youth at risk of immorality and that deviant sexual behaviour is promoted. Thus, exposing young adult learners to queer literature is "wrong", because this can lead vulnerable and ignorant learners to believe that the queer individuals are justified in leading the lives they do and that any sexual orientation that deviates from a heteronormative is not a sin. For the same token, Christian fundamentalists believe that should these learners partake in this sexual behaviour that is deviant and immoral, learners would lose their souls and, instead of going to heaven, would end up in hell.

2.8 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of relevant literature focussing on issues of queer individuals and their experiences in a heteronormative society. I also discussed the theoretical

framework that informs this study. The discussion analysed The Other Foundation's quantitative study, *Progressive Prudes*, the Atlantic Philanthropies' case study, *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, and Love Not Hate's study, *Hate Crimes against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in South Africa, 2016*, to gain an understanding of queer South Africans' experiences in a heteronormative society. Thereafter the role of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) with regard to sexual orientation and education was highlighted, and queer literary elements – themes (the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry), queer characters, and social messaging – were explored. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implementation of critical literacy and examples of studies by other researchers who analysed literature from a critical literacy point-of-view.

The Other Foundation's 2016 survey of attitudes towards queer individuals, *Progressive Prudes*, highlights and brings forward many factors that have a positive or negative influence on queer South Africans in a heteronormative society. These factors include morality, self-identity, prejudice, abuse and violence, attitudes, the role of contact, constitutional protection, and the role of education. The key factor for this study is that of education, because it can create an awareness and an understanding of morality, self-identity, prejudice, abuse, violence, and constitutional protection concerning queer South Africans in a heteronormative society, as well as create contact with individuals that (openly) identify as queer.

The Atlantic Philanthropies' 2011 case study, *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, also highlights and brings forward many positive and negative factors that have an influence on queer South Africans in a heteronormative society. These factors include sexual orientations, coming out; love, marriage, and children; parents at home, the education system, the school environment, and the role of religion. The education system and environment can be used to create awareness and understanding of the relevance of queer individuals in South Africa with regard to their experiences of coming out, loving, marrying, having children, and the influence parents and religion can have in a heteronormative society.

The 2016 study by Love Not Hate, entitled *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016*, provides statistics of queer South Africans' experiences in a heteronormative society. These experiences include the fear of coming out, the fear of discrimination, abuse, and the knowledge of queer murder victims. The provided statistics can be linked to The Other Foundation's *Progressive Prudes* and the Atlantic Philanthropies' *Out of the Box: Queer Youth*

in South Africa Today to emphasise the experiences of queer South Africans in a heteronormative society.

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) makes it clear that queer individuals may not be discriminated against based on their sexual orientations, as they should have equal rights and the freedom to choose their own sexual orientation. South Africans should also have access to available queer sources and resources in education in order to be informed about alternative viewpoints of queer individuals and topics in a heteronormative society.

The chapter also focused on the following queer literary elements: themes (the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry), queer characters, and social messaging. By addressing these queer literary elements and by connecting them to the primary fictional queer texts in Chapters 4–6, I aim to provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers about the factors addressed by *Progressive Prudes*, *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today*, and *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa*, 2016.

The purpose of this study is to determine and critically analyse the themes that manifest in Konigsberg's 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight*, Hartinger's 2004 queer text, *Geography Club*, and Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, the portrayal of fictional queer characters, and the exploration of social messaging that could expose learners to the realities (positive and negative) of fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society. Other aims of this study were to determine what the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus and to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works. This will be followed by guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers with respect to the criteria for selecting queer texts and strategies to use when teaching these texts.

Lastly, I asked three questions about critical literacy and its relationship with education: What is critical literacy and its importance in education? How can queer literature be looked at through a critical literacy lens? And, What are the factors that can limit the possible assimilation of queer literature in the English Language classroom? These questions were asked in order to show that critical literacy can be used and can be functional in the language classroom to create awareness and understanding of various sexual orientations that are relevant in a heteronormative South Africa, and to change ingrained perceptions and stereotyping of queer individuals. Accordingly, queer texts can be looked at through a critical

literacy lens. However, even though the assimilation of queer literature in the English curriculum is possible, I also addressed possible factors that could limit it as well.

The next chapter elaborates on this study's research design and methodology. It provides a timeline, the key research questions and aims, the research design together with text analysis and interpretation, the selection of the primary texts, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 reviewed the available body of literature applicable to this study. This chapter focuses on the research design and methodology followed for this study. The chapter provides a timeline, formulates the key research questions and aims, discusses the research design and the method of text analysis and interpretation. This is followed by an introduction to the primary texts and a consideration of possible ethical concerns.

3.2 Timeline of the study

The timeline of this study offered below shows the process I followed to complete this study. As can be seen in Table 3-1, the timeline for this study divides into three stages. Stage one (orange) entailed the writing, rewriting, submission and approval of my proposal. Stage two (blue) involved the reading of the fictional and official texts. Stage three (green) comprised the writing, improving, editing and submission of the eight chapters. The following table visually displays the timeline that I followed to successfully complete this study:

Table 3-1: Timeline of study

Year	Month	Activity
2019	March	• Work on and submit problem statement and rationale to supervisors. • Work on and submit conceptual clarification to supervisors.
2019	April	• Work on and submit theoretical framework to supervisors. • Work on and submit design, methodology, and methods to supervisors.
2019	May	• Submit proposal (Draft 1) to supervisors.
2019	June	• Improve proposal (Draft 1) and submit to supervisors. • Submit proposal (Draft 2) to supervisors. • Improve proposal (Draft 2) and submit to supervisors.
2019	July	• Submit proposal (Draft 3) to <i>Research Outside Entities</i> (ROE).
2019	August	• Improve proposal (Draft 3) and submit to supervisors.

		• Submit proposal (Final Draft) to ROE. • Purchase primary texts (queer texts) from <i>TakeALot</i>, <i>Loot</i> and/or <i>Reader's Warehouse</i>.
2019	September	• Apply for relevant ethics clearance concerning this study.
2019	October	• Read <i>Openly Straight</i> (Bill Konigsberg, 2013). • Read academic articles available on <i>Openly Straight</i>.
2019	November	• Read <i>Geography Club</i> (Brent Hartinger, 2004). • Read academic articles available on <i>Geography Club</i>.
2019	December	• Read <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i> (Jeanette Winterson, 1985). • Read academic articles available on <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i>. • Read <i>CAPS for EHL Senior and FET phases (Grades 7–12) (2011)</i> and <i>CAPS for EFAL Senior and FET phases (Grades 7–12) (2011)</i>. (The CAPS documents are available on www.education.gov.za.)
2020	January	• Write Chapter 1 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 1 and submit to supervisors. • Write Chapter 2 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 2 and submit to supervisors.
2020	February	• Write Chapter 3 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 3 and submit to supervisors. • Write Chapter 4 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 4 and submit to supervisors.
2020	March	• Write Chapter 5 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 5 and submit to supervisors. • Write Chapter 6 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 6 and submit to supervisors.
2020	April	• Write Chapter 7 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 7 and submit to supervisors. • Write Chapter 8 and submit to supervisors. • Improve Chapter 8 and submit to supervisors.
2020	May	• Submit completed dissertation for editing. • Edit dissertation as indicated by editor(s). • Submit completed dissertation for examination purposes.

3.3 The key research questions and aims

A study's research questions and aims are pivotal since they guide the research of a study. The research questions and aims should be original, clear, centred and mentioned at the beginning of the introductory and the research design and methodology chapters (Jansen, 2016:2). The following section expounds the research questions that guided this study, and the subsequent section discusses the aims of this study.

3.3.1 Research questions

The research questions formulated to address the problem identified for this study are:

- How do the identified themes manifest in the chosen literary texts?
- How are queer characters portrayed in the selected texts?
- What social messaging is prevalent in queer themed texts that introduce learners to the positive and negative realities of fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society?
- What do the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent is queer literature included in suggested and compulsory set works?

The research aims formulated in pursuit of answers to the research questions follow below.

3.3.2 Research aims

The following research aims were set in an effort to answer the research questions:

- To critically analyse the identified themes in the selected literary texts;
- To critically analyse the portrayal of queer characters in the chosen texts;
- To determine what social messaging is prevalent in the queer texts that introduce learners to the positive and negative realities of fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society;

- To determine what the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works; and
- To provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers as criteria for selecting queer texts and for strategies to use when teaching these texts.

The next section discusses the research design, which includes the type of approach, strategy of inquiry, and relevant philosophical worldview.

3.4 Research design

A research design generally consists of approach to the study, the strategy of inquiry, and philosophical worldview (Grosser *et al.*, 2018:101). I followed a qualitative approach, the strategy of inquiry is critical hermeneutics, and the philosophical worldview is social constructivism. Each of these aspects and its relevance to my study, is discussed below.

3.4.1 Qualitative approach

The “quantitative” and the “qualitative”¹³ paradigms, which differ greatly, are presently the “two well-known and recognised approaches to research” (Fouché & Delport, 2005:73). Grosser *et al.* (2018:15) agree, but the researchers add the “mixed methods approach” to the list, in effect explaining that there are three major approaches a researcher can follow to conduct research. Marshall and Rossman (1999:46) list a few characteristics that briefly explain a qualitative approach: non-empirical/theoretical research is conducted for practical and/or ethical reasons – thus, no experimental research occurs; qualitative research investigates complexities and processes extensively; qualitative research consist of relevant variables that have not been identified yet or explores the unsuccessful application of policy, folk wisdom and practice; qualitative research focuses on societies (that are unknown) or systems that are innovative and can be on informal and unstructured connections and processes in organisations; it involves research on organisational goals that are real instead of “stated”. In the case of this study, non-empirical research was conducted since I did a literary analysis of queer texts. There are certain complex issues (themes, queer characters, and social messaging) that were identified, explored and explained in Chapters 4–6. Furthermore, I identified relevant queer

¹³ Since my study follows a qualitative approach, I will not focus on the characteristics of a quantitative or a mixed methods approach.

literature that could be incorporated into the Senior phase and FET English language classrooms to promote an understanding of the experiences of fictional queer characters in a heteronormative society.

Additionally, other characteristics of the qualitative approach, as mentioned by Fortune and Reid (1999:94), are as follows: Firstly, the researcher attempts to understand a phenomenon of interest using a flexible strategy that is shaped as the investigation proceeds. Given (2008:xxix) agrees that new phenomena are usually explored by using the qualitative approach in order for an individual's feelings, thoughts, and/or interpretations of process and meaning to be captured. Secondly, a method such as (non-human participant¹⁴) observation is used to gain in-depth knowledge of either individuals and/or their social worlds. Strydom (2005a:275) agrees that (non-human participant) observation involves data gathered from using a qualitative approach that generally cannot be reduced to figures. Thirdly, qualitative methodology assumes that a single researcher can gain a valid understanding of the data gathered through accumulated knowledge. However, Given (2008:555) explains that a social science inquiry researcher using a qualitative approach recognises that the study and its objects cannot be understood fully in an unbiased or objective way, since both can change and be complex. For this reason, a researcher is no longer separated from their research, because the observed and the observer's relationship (what is being observed, how it is being interpreted, and how it will be reported) forms a pivotal part of the research.

In terms of my study, the phenomenon I explored was the themes that manifest from the chosen queer literature, the portrayal and experiences of queer characters, the social messaging that can be explored from the queer literature, and the extent to which such texts are promoted in the EHL and EFAL CAPS documents. I also endeavoured to provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers should queer literature be prescribed for South African learners. I aimed to achieve this by gaining a valid understanding of the experiences of queer characters in a heteronormative society by observing the chosen queer texts and official documents (non-human participants).

The relevance of a qualitative approach to this study is clear. I now focus on the strategy of inquiry used, namely critical hermeneutics.

¹⁴ The non-human participants in this context refer to documents (fictional and official texts).

3.4.2 Strategy of inquiry

There are several strategies of inquiry a researcher can follow to analyse documents. Since there is no single correct strategy of inquiry, the type of documents to be examined will determine the strategy or strategies to be used. Possible strategies of inquiry are: “content analysis”, “discourse analysis”, “document analysis”, “historical analysis”, “narrative analysis”, “semiotics”, “conversation analysis”, and (critical) “hermeneutics” (Given, 2008:24; Grosser *et al.*, 2018:53). Any one or a combination of these that are relevant to the documents to be analysed in a study can be used. Since my study does not specifically or entirely focus on content, discourse, history, narratives, semiotics, and/or conversations, the strategy of inquiry is critical hermeneutics¹⁵. Since document analysis can also be a strategy of inquiry, I rather used it as my method of data collection as I analysed fictional and official documents (primary texts). I collected data from documents (primary texts) and interpreted these using a critical hermeneutic approach.

3.4.2.1 Critical hermeneutics

An interpretative philosophy generally contributes to qualitative data analysis that aims to examine qualitative data for meaningful and symbolic content – content, discourse, history, narratives, semiotics, and/or conversations generally contribute to making data or content meaningful and symbolic. Therefore, researchers try to interpret and make meaning of a phenomenon in which they are interested by analysing attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, understanding, feelings, values, and experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:109). In the case of this study, I tried to interpret and construct meaning by analysing queer texts using a critical hermeneutic approach. However, for critical hermeneutics to be understood, I briefly explain hermeneutics first in order for its relation to critical hermeneutics to be comprehended.

Literary hermeneutics, as explained by Szondi (1978:17), is the interpretation theory (*interpretatio*) of literary works. Hermeneutics shapes the character of philosophy and self-reflection. Szondi (1978:17) further explains that Dilthey’s essay, *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, that was published in the year 1900, is devoted to “a theory of understanding”, which came to serve the human sciences as a foundation. Hermeneutics is subsequently regarded as an

¹⁵ In order to apply critical hermeneutics to texts, the analysis of content, discourse, history, narratives, semiotics, and/or conversations cannot be excluded as these elements contribute to my interpretations when I read the chosen queer texts. The strategy of inquiry for this study is critical hermeneutics, as my focus is on interpreting the chosen queer texts. However, the analysis of content, discourse, history, narratives, semiotics, and/or conversations are included, but the focus is not specifically or entirely on one of these elements.

approach to meaning, a way of investigating the significance, and the significance of significance (Malbon, 1983:207). Malbon (1983:212) continues to explain that hermeneuticists view hermeneutics as including a variety of meanings of *hermeneuein*, the Greek verb, and *hermeneia*, its noun form. Moreover, the BibleHub (2018) mentions that the Greek word *herméneuó*, original word being, *ἐρμηνεύω*, means “to interpret”. There is also a linguistic root linking the two words and *Hermes*, the Greek god, who is the discoverer or inventor of language and writing, as well as the messenger of the gods. The linguistic root can refer to the language(s) Hermes invented or discovered and the interpretation thereof in order to determine Hermes’ purpose with language. Hence, *hermeneuein* consists of three meanings: to speak, express, or say; to explain, interpret, or comment on, and to translate. Palmer, as is cited by Malbon (1983:212), notes that “all three meanings may be expressed by the English verb ‘to interpret’, yet each constitutes an independent and significant meaning of interpretation”. Palmer includes modern definitions of hermeneutics: “the methodological foundation of human studies” and “the system of interpretation” (Malbon, 1983:212). Gadamer (1976:117) observes that, as a result, hermeneutics can be used to analyse textual data through the use of a “hermeneutic circle” (the interaction between the understanding of the entire text and its interpretations, in which anticipated explanations guide descriptions).

Kinsella (2006) elaborates that qualitative inquiry is perfectly underpinned by hermeneutics and critical hermeneutics, because both emphasise the interpretive act of understanding. Therefore, critical hermeneutics is an appropriate data analysis method for this qualitative study, because this study aimed to analyse queer literature to gain knowledge and understanding – through interpretation – of the themes, the queer characters, and the social messaging that were explored and addressed.

As explained further by Kinsella (2006), a hermeneutic approach pursues “understanding rather than explanation, acknowledges the situated location of interpretation, recognises the role of language and historicity in interpretation, views inquiry as conversation, and is comfortable with ambiguity”.

In addition to interpretative characteristics of the hermeneutic approach, an added metaxological approach offers a way to further tailor hermeneutics to qualitative inquiry by adding a critical stance; a move from hermeneutics to critical hermeneutics. The root of metaxological is the Greek transliteration, *metaxu*. *Metaxu* means “between” (BibleHub, 2020). For a hermeneutic approach to become critical, a metaxological approach should be followed. Kearney (2003:187) agrees that a critical hermeneutic approach can inquire by informing a metaxological approach, and explains that it seeks for a connection between

dualities or dichotomies. Code *et al.* (1988:7) point out that dichotomies (e.g. “abstract and concrete”, “reason and emotion”, “universal and particular”, “subjective and objective”, “knowledge and experience”, “theory and practice”, and “mind and body”) enhance dualistic thinking due to the way of thinking that underpins them. A critical hermeneutic approach to inquiry is informed by an acknowledgement of dualities and resistance to opposed positions by considering that which lies between the opposite ends of a dichotomy. In other words, *metaxu* emphasises the mediation between dualisms (such as heterosexual and homosexual) and it leaves the between open (as opposed to dualisms and binaries). The metaxological approach emphasises the interplay between sameness and difference. Thus, for this study, contrasting ideas and opinions (such as queer texts and non-queer texts, heterosexual and queer, and positive and negative) were taken into consideration when analysing and interpreting the queer texts in order to formulate a critical understanding, but not forgetting the space between them. The metaxological approach was applied when accounting for the protagonist’s initial state of “being between”, as it were, a state which is described by William Desmond (2008), as the “metaxological”.

The outcome is that I interpreted the fictional texts and official documents by trying to understand how the fictional queer characters’ experiences are mirrored in a heteronormative society from the various queer perspectives in the chosen texts by identifying and critically analysing themes (the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry), queer characters, and the social messaging that manifests from the texts and that may be indicative of aspects of queer experiences. As a result, I am able to provide queer-themed literature teaching guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers with respect to the appropriate knowledge and various viewpoints unearthed by interpreting the queer texts using a critical hermeneutic approach. I also determined what the CAPS states in terms of including queer texts in the Senior phase and FET English language classroom, and to what extent (if at all) such texts are promoted in suggested and compulsory set work lists. This informed recommendations to the DBE regarding the possible inclusion of such texts in suggested and compulsory set work lists.

Consequently, I read the chosen queer literature and official documents closely in order to interpret and to reflect on possible multiple meanings related to the experiences of fictional queer characters in a heteronormative society. The reading of relevant research in my field of inquiry was mediated by my own research. As the interpretations and meanings were constructed from similarities and differences, they were divided into categories (such as heterosexual or queer, positive or negative) in order to identify recurrent instances. This coding

system, as a result, helped me to answer my research questions and to reach my research aims.

The next section focuses on social constructivism as the philosophical worldview underlying this study.

3.4.3 Social constructivism

A typical philosophical underpinning for qualitative research, is social constructivism. Social constructivism is usually adopted as a worldview by researchers who follow a qualitative approach in their studies – studies that research and represent gender, race, sexual orientation, class and/or other issues (Creswell, 2009:8; Given, 2008:228). In the case of this study, sexual orientation is a key issue that is considered to address other social issues (the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry) that are experiences of fictional queer characters in their heteronormative societies.

Galbin (2014:82) introduces social constructivism as an uncertain, indefinite perspective: a researcher does not necessarily know what is universally “good or bad”, “true or false”, and “right or wrong”; the researcher only knows stories that are good, bad, true, false, right or wrong. Social constructivism therefore concentrates on relationships and maintains the individual’s role in the social construction of realities. Given (2008:228) also mentions that social constructivism places emphasis on the nature of reality being socially constructed. This perspective specifically also suggests that instead of a single reality and truth being constructed by researchers, there are rather multiple realities and truths throughout the entire research process. Galbin (2014:82) further explains that social constructivism does not aim to create something, but it has an influence on the processes that form something. The processes that form something are based on individuals’ experiences and how they perceive them. Given (2008:118) agrees by defining social constructivism as the perspective that addresses the “ontological-epistemological questions of constructivism in describing the bodies of knowledge developed over human history as social constructs that do not reflect an objective external world”. Hence, everything people know is determined or influenced by the relationships they have with values, politics, religious beliefs, ideologies, language, etc. Galbin (2014:82) concludes that all formations differ in the same world, because individuals, using perceptions of the actual world, creates their own world. Social constructivism sees communication, language and speech as fundamental to the interactive process through which individuals understand the world and themselves. Accordingly, I analysed the characters of the chosen texts and their perspectives of their worlds in a heteronormative

society, as well as the themes and the positive and negative realities of the fictional queer characters' experiences that are expressed through social messaging that is socially constructed from these perspectives. These themes and social messaging already exist in the characters' worlds; something entirely new is not created, but existing realities are explored.

Creswell (2009:8) agrees that a social constructivist holds the assumption that individuals want to understand "the world in which they live". Individuals develop varied and multiple meanings with regard to objects and/or things involved in their experiences that are subjective. These meanings, as a result, lead the researcher to rather look for various views and complexities instead of the "narrow meanings" of a few ideas. The researcher should therefore rely heavily on the views of the participants – whether the participants are human beings or, in the case of this study, characters in fictional texts – and the contexts being studied. Creswell (2009:8) comments in this regard and maintains that constructivist researchers should not only address interaction processes among individuals, but also focus on the contexts and perceptions of the individuals' world to understand settings that represent history and culture. Researchers also recognise their own backgrounds and the roles they play as they outline their interpretation and position themselves; they acknowledge how their interpretation influences their perspectives concerning cultural, personal and historical experiences. I aimed to interpret themes, messages and/or meanings other individuals (the queer characters that were created by the authors of the chosen queer texts) construct in relation to the world and to make sense of these.

The research design of this study – the qualitative approach, strategy of inquiry (i.e., critical hermeneutics) and philosophical worldview (i.e., social constructivism) – has been discussed and linked to my own study. The following section of this study focuses on participant sampling.

3.5 Text selection

In qualitative research using hermeneutics as a method of inquiry, the text selection must be considered in the design stage of a study as it is an important aspect. Purposive sampling means that the sample is purposefully chosen to represent a group, phenomena, location, incident, or type, and it therefore suits qualitative research (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:83, 85). This can also apply to the purposive selection of texts. The next section discusses the purposive selection of texts in this study.

I purposively selected queer-themed literature works that address themes, present queer characters, and use social messaging that expresses the realities of the experiences of fictional queer characters in a heteronormative society.

Firstly, Singleton, Straits, Straits & McAllister (1988), cited by Strydom (2005b:202), explain that purposive sampling comprises solely of the judgement of the researcher in that the sample consists of characteristics, representatives, and comprised elements that are typically attributes of the population, in this case texts. Palys (2008), cited by Maxwell (2013:97), agrees that intentional settings, individuals, or occurrences are selected to provide information that are specific and relevant to a study's research questions and aims. Consequently, Maxwell (2013) states that the researcher's criteria for the selection of respondents (or in the case of this study, documents) are important, and that these should consist of clear identification and formulation to justify their decisions.

Nieuwenhuis (2016a:89) proposes that the researcher should ponder the following characteristics when selecting texts or other document types: type of document, publication date, purpose, main points and/or arguments, and relation to study. For this study, the sources of data are as follows: firstly, two types of documents were consulted (three fictional texts and four policy documents). Secondly, the publication dates of the fictional texts vary between 1985 and 2013, while the publication dates of the official texts are 2011. Thirdly, the purpose of the fictional queer texts is, as Clark and Blackburn (2009:27) explain, to serve as "windows" through which heterosexual or queer learners can see into the worlds of homosexual, bisexual, transgender, and/or intersex learners. The purpose of the official documents is to identify what the South African curriculum states about the inclusion of queer texts and their implementation in the classroom environment. Fourthly, the main points or arguments (which also form part of the selection criteria of the queer texts) put forward are: themes, queer characters, and social messaging. The themes, characters, and social messaging were not only identified, but also interrogated in order to facilitate a critical interpretation and subsequent understanding. Even though the queer texts and some of the queer literary elements at first sight might also seem negative (sensitive topics or themes e.g. bullying, abuse, religion), they were specifically chosen due to their themes, characters, and social messaging. Lastly, the main points or arguments relate to this study, because queer-themed literature teaching guidelines are provided for Senior phase and FET English language teachers to address and in the process expose their learners to the experiences of queer characters in a heteronormative society.

I elaborate on my method of data generation in the next section.

3.6 Method of data generation

Data generation methods are tools researchers use to generate data. These tools enable researchers to generate data from artefacts, groups, and/or texts that reflect a social reality. It is also important for a researcher to know that the method chosen to generate data will be influenced by the research questions, ontological position and/or the conceptual framework (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:74). In the case of this study, document analysis was my method of data generation as I analysed fictional and policy documents in order to provide teaching guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers on how to introduce and engage with queer literature in their classrooms. These guidelines are by no means presented as best practice as I am certain that in-service teachers have their own arsenal of very valid methods, approaches and strategies. The guidelines remain suggestions.

3.6.1 Document analysis

Given (2008:24) defines document analysis as “the study of the written text [documents]”. Nieuwenhuis (2016a:88) agrees by stating that document analysis (textual data) focuses on the light that is shed on the phenomenon a researcher is investigating through different types of written communications. Given (2008:230) further elaborates that the standard approach when analysing documents focuses primarily on the information and what it contains. For this reason, documents are viewed as channels between the reader or writer and the various forms of writing, architectural plans, maps, photographs, and films (that contain meaningful messages). Nieuwenhuis (2016a:88) mentions that sources of written data can include documents, memoranda, reports, articles, agendas, journals, letters, etc., both published and unpublished. Given (2008:230) continues to elaborate that although documents naturally contain information, it becomes clear that all documents enter human activity in a twofold relation. Firstly, documents enter as “sources into the social field”. Secondly, they enter as “agents in their own right”. These documents that enter as agents also have effects that are everlasting after their human creators – the authors – have passed away. Additionally, these documents will be open to manipulate allies, further action resources, or opponents to be demolished or silenced. Given (2008:403) furthermore explains that documents can be used to develop interpretations. The method of analysis will depend on the type of documents used and the study’s research questions. However, regardless of the method of analysis, the researcher will try to place the documents in a social context and consider the authors’ motivations for their creation and who they were intended for (the target audience). For this study, I analysed documents (fictional texts and official documents) to obtain information through interpretation to elucidate the phenomena of the previously identified social issues

(see Chapter 2) (the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry concerning fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative world) that I addressed.

Statistical documents and other reports on social issues (such as health, crime, the environment, and poverty) have also been studied as objects in various social science research studies (Given, 2008:231). These statistical documents and reports can be used as resources for further study as these documents can be intricately linked to a study's "topic". Social issues can be intertwined with the generation of documents. It is then important to study written documents that focus on these social issues. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Progressive Prudes* (The Other Foundation, 2016), *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today* (Nell & Shapiro, 2011), and *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016* (Love Not Hate, 2016), are documents that report the current social issues of crime and the environment concerning queer South Africans in a heteronormative society. The English class provides a perfect platform for larger social issues to be addressed and specifically through literary works. This makes the policy documents relevant to this study.

3.6.2 Primary texts

The qualitative method of data generation is the selection and analysis of fictional texts and policy documents. For this study, non-experimental research was conducted and it entailed non-empirical methods (Grosser *et al.*, 2018:19; Mora *et al.*, 2008:2).

"Primary" can be defined as "of first rank, importance, or value" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019b). Nieuwenhuis (2016a:88) also advises researchers that they should evaluate the accuracy and authenticity of the primary documents that will be used in their studies. The primary texts of this study were determined according to the following criteria: firstly, is the text queer-themed? Secondly, if the text is queer-themed, what is the queer point-of-view? Thirdly, is the queer character a young adult? Fourthly, does the text seem age appropriate for young adults? Lastly, does the text address or explore some of the prominent issues relevant to queer individuals' perspectives in a heteronormative society (e.g. coming of age, psychology – risk decisions; fanaticism, socio-economic issues, etc.)? (See Table 3-2.)

With the above-mentioned paragraph in mind, the primary texts for this study are three queer texts (*Openly Straight*, written by Bill Konigsberg in 2013, *Geography Club*, written by Brent Hartinger in 2004, and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, written by Jeanette Winterson in 1985) and four policy documents [*CAPS for EHL Senior phase, Grades 7–9* (2011), and *FET phase*,

Grades 10–12 (2011) and the CAPS for EFAL Senior phase, Grades 7–9 (2011), and FET phase, Grades 10–12 (2011)].

Openly Straight, written by Bill Konigsberg and published in 2013, was analysed for the Senior phase. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, written by Jeanette Winterson in 1985, was analysed for the FET phase. *Geography Club*, written by Brent Hartinger in 2004, was analysed for both the Senior and FET phases.

Table 3-2 provides the criteria for the selection of the primary texts:

Name of Queer Novel	Queer-Themed	Queer Point-of-View	Young Adult Characters	Young Adult Age Appropriate	Literature Review Prominent Issues
<i>Openly Straight</i>	Yes	Gay	Yes	Yes	The search for identity
<i>Geography Club</i>	Yes	Gay point-of-view, but lesbian and bisexual characters are present as well.	Yes	Yes	Prejudice and abuse
<i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i>	Yes	Lesbian	Yes	Yes	Religious zealotry

Table 3-2: Primary texts

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2018) explains that the CAPS for EHL Senior and FET phases (Grades 7–12) (2011) and the CAPS for EFAL Senior and FET phase (Grades 7–12) (2011) form part of South Africa's *National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement*. The DBE (2018) defines a *National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* as a “single, comprehensive, and concise policy document, which has replaced the Subject and Learning Area Statements, Learning Programme Guidelines, and Subject Assessment Guidelines for all the subjects listed in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12”. These texts were closely analysed in order to determine what they state in terms of

including queer literature in the syllabus, and to determine to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works.

3.7 Ethical considerations

It is pivotal for a researcher to consider the ethical considerations of the research (Maree, 2016:44). The following ethical issues, as suggested by Gillion (1994:184), have been taken into consideration: autonomy, beneficence and non-maleficence, and justice.

3.7.1 Autonomy

Autonomy is defined by Gillion (1994:184–185) as “deliberated self-rule – a special attribute of all moral agents”. If an individual has autonomy, that individual can make deliberated decisions. This study has a moral obligation to respect all individuals’ autonomy, including individuals that can potentially be affected (such as heterosexual or queer individuals). Autonomy ensures that the rights of queer and heterosexual individuals – in a heteronormative society – are respected. I ensured that no individual was insulted, downgraded, or seen as being right or wrong. I avoided painting any fictional or non-fictional individual in a bad light.

3.7.2 Beneficence and non-maleficence

Gillion (1994:185) explains that even though researchers can help other individuals, they unavoidably risk harming them. Therefore, in order to produce net benefit over harm, the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence should be considered simultaneously. Accordingly, beneficence with non-maleficence refers to an individual who wants to benefit others without harming them in any way. So, beneficence ensures that both queer and heterosexual individuals in a heteronormative society will benefit from this study (by setting queer-themed literature teaching guidelines for all Senior phase and FET English language teachers). Non-maleficence also ensures that no (emotional) harm – anxiety/stress, depression; anguish, humiliation, fury – befalls the researcher, the researcher’s supervisors, the language editors, or the examiners.

3.7.3 Justice

Gillion (1994:185) explains that justice can be synonymous with fairness and can be summarised as “the moral obligation to act on the basis of fair adjudication between competing claims”. The rights of people and the laws that are morally acceptable should be respected.

Subsequently, justice ensures equity for queer individuals by exposing heterosexual individuals, as well as queer individuals, to queer literature. By promoting the inclusion of queer texts in the South African curriculum, this study adheres to an ethics of justice.

3.7.4 Ethics approval

Ethics clearance was granted by the EduRec Ethics Committee of the North-West University. The number is as follows: NWU-01612-19-A2. Furthermore, Appendix A is a confirmation letter from the *Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education* (EduREC) that states that my study has been approved ethically.

3.8 Summary

This chapter focused on the research design and methodology of this study. A timeline, the key research questions and aims, the research design, the selection of texts, the method of data generation, and ethical considerations were discussed.

The research design and methodology were specifically selected to critically analyse the manifestation of identified themes in the chosen literary texts; to critically analyse the portrayal of queer characters in the chosen texts; to determine what social messaging is prevalent in the queer texts that introduce learners to the realities (positive and negative) of the experiences of fictional queer characters in a heteronormative society; to determine what the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works; and to provide guidelines for Senior and FET English language teachers in terms of the criteria for selecting queer texts and strategies to use when teaching these texts.

Furthermore, the discussion explains the choice of a qualitative approach, critical hermeneutics as the strategy of inquiry for text analysis and interpretation purposes, and social constructivism as the philosophical worldview. The text selection by way of purposive sampling, and my method of data generation, which was the analysis of primary texts (documents), were discussed in detail and shared. I also shared the ethical considerations that guided this study.

The following chapter includes the analyses of the queer text, *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg (2013). The chapter starts with a brief synopsis of the novel. Secondly, the text is

analysed and discussed in terms of its relevant theme. Thirdly, the queer characters and their experiences are analysed. Lastly, possible social messaging of the realities of the queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society is identified and explored.

CHAPTER 4: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Openly Straight – Bill Konigsberg

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 delineated the research design and methodology. Chapter 4 documents the analysis of Bill Konigsberg's 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight*. The chapter starts with a short synopsis of the text, followed by a discussion of the most prominent theme that manifests in *Openly Straight*, namely the search for identity¹⁶. The chapter also explores the experiences and the portrayal of the queer characters and the social messaging used in the text.

4.2 *Openly Straight* – Bill Konigsberg

4.2.1 Synopsis

Bill Konigsberg introduces *Openly Straight* by explaining that the main protagonist, Rafe Goldberg, wants a second chance at his open sexuality and decides to be openly straight instead of openly gay. To achieve this, he changes schools and moves across the country to attend Natick College. He is tired of being considered different and gay. Rafe mentions, however, that his life as an open gay teenager was not difficult and that his parents celebrate his sexual orientation, but he wants to experience a label-free life, because it always feels as if the spotlight is on him.

At Natick, Rafe meets his peers and spends some time with them. Since he is openly straight, he can socialise with the jocks and play football with them without any of them wondering if he is finding them attractive or not – he is accepted. After a football game, Rafe meets his roommate, Albie, and the only openly gay student at Natick, Toby. Rafe also gets to know Ben – a fellow jock – better.

As the story unfolds, Rafe attends classes, gets to know Albie and Toby better, and meets one of his educators, Mr Scarborough, who teaches English. The reader is also introduced to his best friend from home, Claire Olivia. It becomes clear that Rafe has no intention of sharing with anyone at Natick that he is actually gay, as he lies to Toby about his sexual orientation.

¹⁶ This theme is also evident in the studies conducted by The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate (2016) (as discussed in Chapter 2).

However, after writing his first English essay for Mr Scarborough, Rafe learns that his teacher has known all along that he is gay as his mother shared the information with him. Mr Scarborough then learns that Rafe wants to be openly straight for his time at Natick, but he still invites him to join Natick's Gay–Straight Alliance (GSA) club. Rafe also starts writing "The History of Rafe" in which he reflects, as instructed by Mr Scarborough, on his sexuality and the challenges that go along with it.

Rafe and Ben soon become more acquainted at a party. One night, after listening to a police scanner, Rafe, Albie, Toby, and Ben sneak out of Natick in search of Bryce (Ben's black roommate) who they believe ran away. Once Bryce is found and starts receiving treatment for depression, Ben invites Rafe over to his room. Rafe spends the night in Bryce's bed after he and Ben have in-depth conversations.

A few days pass at Natick – Rafe attends class, plays soccer games, becomes more acquainted with other students, becomes best friends with Albie, Toby, and Ben, and starts studying with Ben in his room. After a philosophical discussion about body vs brain, the two boys almost kiss. Their friendship grows as time passes and they talk about their situation – Rafe knows that he is gay and why he is attracted to Ben, but Ben is very confused about his sexuality, because he is straight, but he is also developing romantic feelings for another boy. Rafe invites Ben to his hometown for Thanksgiving. During this time, the two boys share their first kiss, spend the night together, and ski in the snowy mountains. Ben also opens up to Rafe about his family. Afterwards, as both boys are conflicted about their sexualities (Rafe out of guilt and Ben out of confusion), they start seeing less of each other at Natick and Rafe starts sleeping in his own bed again.

Rafe becomes more conflicted about his false persona and decides to share his secret with Toby. He soon confides in Ben as well, leaving Ben very upset because of his dishonesty. Losing and hurting Ben helps Rafe to reflect and find his true identity. As he comes out to the rest of his peers, Rafe tries to explain to Ben why he has not revealed his sexual orientation. However, Ben tells him that it would take time for him to forgive Rafe.

Even though Rafe and Ben are driven apart, Rafe finally knows what it means to celebrate his sexuality when he returns home for the school vacation.

4.2.2 The search for identity as a theme

When one looks at the title of the novel, some form of comical irony is noted. *Openly Straight* refers to individuals who identify with the heterosexual orientation and need to come out of the non-queer closet. However, in heteronormative societies where there is an assumption that all individuals are straight, it is unnecessary for straight individuals to be open about their sexuality. The situation is different for queer individuals. Since queer individuals have to challenge the heteronormative norm by not identifying as straight, they usually have to come out of the queer closet.

When one also looks at the front cover of the novel (see Appendix B), it becomes clear that there are various groups with which one may identify in this novel. The first image shows a boy with a crown on his head that may represent “queer” individuals – the crown, here, does not refer to kingship, but queenship. The second image is of a boy wearing dark shades and a Hasidic Jew’s hat that seems to represent a “religious” individual. The third image of a boy who has a clean-cut face may represent “straight” individuals, as there is a correction mark in the tick-box, linking it to the title, *Openly Straight*. The fourth image of a boy who has a daring smile while wearing a Robin Hood hat, may represent an “adventurous” individual. The fifth image may be representative of “goth” individuals as the boy has a piercing, wears lipstick, wears dark shades, with hair in a fashionable style. The last image is of a boy with a punk hairdo, a piercing, and a mean facial expression, which may be a representative of the “jock” category.

When linking the title and the front cover of the novel, it becomes clear to the reader that the front cover represents various identities. Since the reader would probably know that this is a queer text when they start reading the text, it seems probable that a queer character is going to take on a heterosexual identity and be open about it. Conversely, the reader can also wonder why this motley crew of characters are depicted as being straight. Littlefield (2016) agrees that *Openly Straight* explores how Rafe searches for his identity and the power that Rangeview and Natick, the settings, have on and contribute to the formulation of a homosexual identity. Yet, the reader does not know that unless they read the blurb first.

An English teacher at Natick, Mr Scarborough, decides one day that the topic for the day would be, “respecting and understanding differences” (Konigsberg, 2013:140; Littlefield, 2016:42). He wants to use the language classroom to talk about a serious issue and, in the process, create awareness and understanding. He is indicative of a teacher who is supportive and understanding of queer individuals:

"We're [Natick] a pretty tolerant place," Steve said. "Tolerant. What does tolerant mean?" [Mr Scarborough asked]. "It means we tolerate," Steve said, flat. "We accept people." "Actually, tolerance and acceptance are different. To tolerate seems to mean that there is something negative to tolerate, doesn't it? Acceptance, though, what's that?" I [Rafe] thought about that [...] I mean, if you accept something, you take it for what it is. Tolerance is different. Less. So is acceptance at the top of the pyramid? Is that what everyone wants in the best of all possible worlds? Acceptance? [...] It didn't feel right, somehow [...] "Acceptance also has a bit of negative to it, doesn't it?" I finally said [...] "Well, if you need to accept something, that means it's not like it should be, right? Like you accept something as it is" [...] "And yet, colleges accept students who are otherwise rejected. Acceptance is an affirmation that you're good enough" [...] "It's hard to be different," Scarborough said. "And perhaps the best answer is not to tolerate differences, not even to accept them. But to celebrate them. Maybe then those who are different would feel more loved, and less, well, tolerated [or rejected]" (Konigsberg, 2013:141–142).

The above quotation from *Openly Straight* reflects much of the core of the novel and the four stages Rafe goes through when he searches for his true identity when he starts questioning his homosexuality (Littlefield, 2016:8). The four stages in which Konigsberg has Rafe searching for his true identity are: rejection, tolerance, acceptance, and celebration. Figure 4-1 presents the stages graphically:

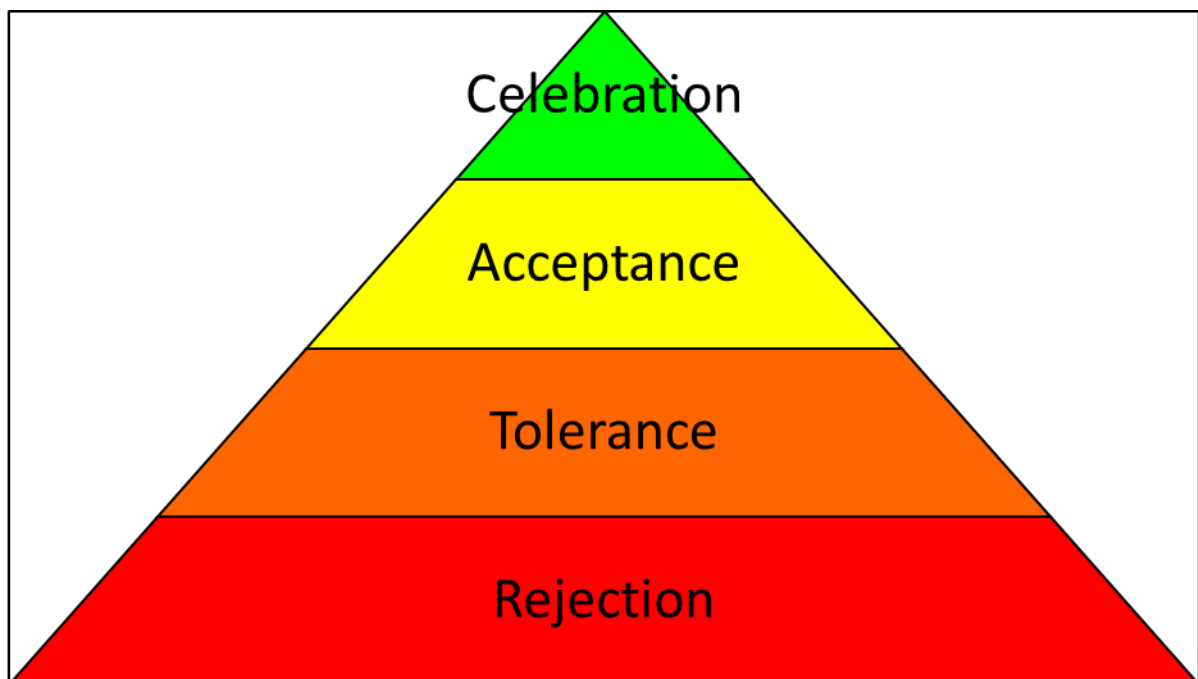


Figure 4:1 Pyramid graph indicating the stages in which Rafe searches for his identity

To return to the quote, it seems as if Mr Scarborough touches on these four stages when speaking about respecting and understanding differences. Rejection refers to the dismissal or refusal of something that the person views as negative. Tolerance is an improvement from outright dismissal or refusal, but it still refers to a rather half-hearted acceptance of something negative. Acceptance indicates approval or resignation and is an improvement on rejection and tolerance, but there is still something negative in the picture that indicates there can be something better. The last stage, celebration, though, is at the top of the pyramid: to fully embrace an individual for who that individual is. Littlefield (2016:8) mentions that fictional queer characters can be at different stages of the *Vivienne Cass Model of Identity Formation*; a model that helps to discuss each character's identity formation. Kenneady and Oswalt (2014:229) state that this model is "one of the most well-known and well-referenced models of identity development for gay males and lesbians". Figure 4-2 illustrates the Vivienne Cass model of identity formation:

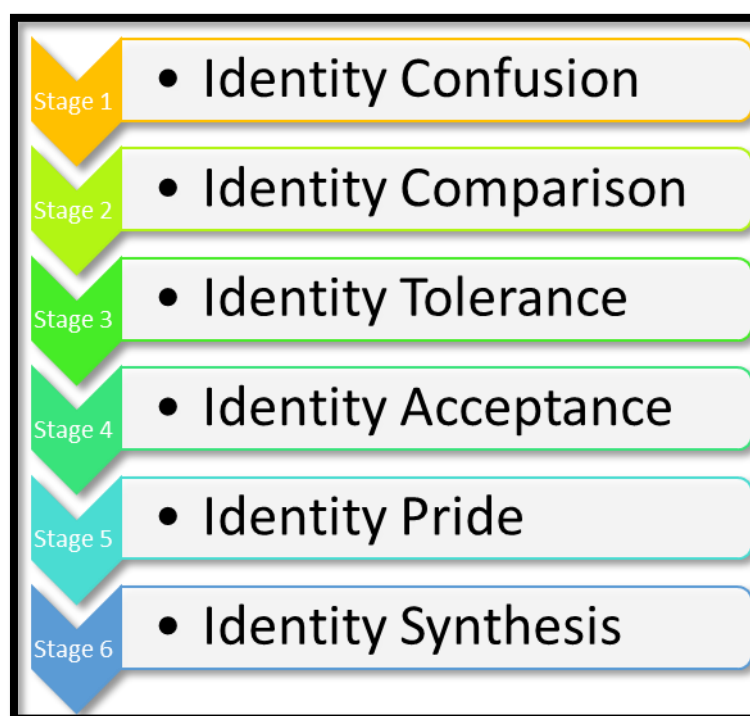


Figure 4-2 Vivienne Cass model of identity formation (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014:231–232)

There are similarities and differences between Konigsberg's four stages when searching for one's identity and Cass's six stage model of identity formation. Cass's first stage, identity confusion, is not included in Konigsberg's stages as this stage refers to individuals who are realising for the first time that they do not conform to the heteronormative norm. The individual in question can become confused. In Konigsberg's novel, Rafe has already identified as queer

at the time the story starts. Cass's second stage, identity comparison, and Konigsberg's rejection stage and progressive stage, acceptance, have a common denominator: the individual who is in the process of discovering that he or she is identifying as queer can either accept or reject this queer sexual orientation. Cass's third stage, identity tolerance, and Konigsberg's tolerance stage are similar: the queer individual is not rejecting the queer sexual orientation anymore, but has not fully accepted it yet either. Cass's fourth stage, identity acceptance, and Konigsberg's acceptance stage, are similar: the queer individual has accepted their sexual orientation – there is more interaction with the sexual orientation. Cass's fifth and sixth stages, identity pride and identity synthesis, and Konigsberg's celebration are similar: the queer individual has not only accepted their sexual orientation, but is celebrating it as well with other individuals. As a result, Konigsberg's four stages of searching for one's identity is very similar to Cass's six stage model of identity formation. Since Cass's model is well-known and well-referenced (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014:229), Konigsberg's four stages, which are similar, are valid to formulate Rafe's identity.

Littlefield (2016:36–37) mentions that Konigsberg wrote *Openly Straight* at a time when "homosexuality is more widely accepted than ever before". Therefore, Konigsberg wants to inspire his readers not to reject, or merely tolerate or accept queer sexuality, but to celebrate it instead. Rejection and tolerance can cause queer individuals to feel, for example, unloved or pestilent. Brown (2008:25) defines "tolerance" as "something one would prefer did not exist". Consequently, it involves the coping mechanism of the "undesirable, the tasteless, the faulty – even the revolting, repugnant, or vile". Brown (2008:10–11) further elaborates that tolerance of queer individuals in today's society is "often advocated as an alternative to full legal equality, this stance is significantly different from promulgating tolerance of homosexuals as an alternative to harassing, incarcerating, or institutionalizing them". The former refers to the juxtaposition of tolerance and equality and wants to maintain the dismal civic status of the queer individual, whereas the latter refers to the juxtaposition of tolerance and violence, cruelty, and/or civic expulsion. Brown (2008:89) furthermore explains that tolerance towards queer individuals allow heterosexual individuals to identify differences and to promote "inequality, exclusion, deviance, or marginalization". Conversely, acceptance and, ultimately, celebration can cause queer individuals to feel loved, to be part of society, and not to experience citizenship deficit (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:15).

Three of the aims for this study are to critically analyse the identified themes and the portrayal of queer characters in the chosen literary texts, and to determine what social messaging is prevalent in the queer texts that introduce learners to the realities (positive and negative) of fictional experiences of queer characters in a heteronormative society. The theme of the

search for identity that permeates *Openly Straight*, and the portrayal of the queer characters – Rafe, Ben, Toby, Robinson, Ben's uncle; Jeff, Caleb, and Albie – are critically analysed. The social messaging in the text – acceptance, GSA, coming out, labels and stereotypes, queer knowledge and assumptions, queer-phobia, bromance, love and perspectives on life – is also explored.

The main protagonist, Rafe, in Bill Konigsberg's *Openly Straight* (2013), unknowingly searches for his own identity as he experiences the above-mentioned four stages: acceptance, rejection, tolerance, and celebration (Littlefield, 2016:50). Other characters at Natick – Ben, Toby, Robinson, and Jeff – are also experiencing one or more of the above-mentioned stages. For example, Ben accepts his homosexual tendencies toward Rafe, but soon rejects these because he believes that his parents would reject him; Toby accepts his homosexuality, but he cannot celebrate it since Robinson – his mystery guy – is still in the closet; Robinson rejects his own homosexuality for the time being and mentions that he will accept and celebrate it once he finishes secondary school (Konigsberg, 2013:282). Over the course of the novel, Rafe goes through each stage with its challenges and struggles (Littlefield, 2016:16) in search of his identity. At first, he accepts his homosexuality, but due to the circumstances in his hometown, Boulder, and his previous school, Rangeview, he rejects it. At first it becomes clear to the reader that Rafe finds some level of comfort when he is labelled a jock at Natick (Littlefield, 2016:39–40), but as the novel progresses and he learns that there are consequences to the decisions he has made, he soon comes to accept and finally celebrate his identity: “Ben. He saw me. He saw who I was inside, and he liked it, and I liked it. I liked who he saw” (Konigsberg, 2013:292).

4.2.2.1 Rafe's period of acceptance of his sexual orientation

Even though the novel starts with Rafe explaining why he is rejecting his sexual orientation, he still comes from a position of acceptance. I will now elaborate on the stage during which he first accepted being gay and which ultimately leads him to rejecting it.

Seamus Rafael Goldberg, who prefers to be called Rafe, explains to the reader that he did not have an epiphany about his sexual orientation. When he accepted that he was gay, he did not say or think, “Wow! I'm gay! I had known that for a long time” (Konigsberg, 2013:78). Instead, he explains that he had a feeling and that he was the only one that knew about it. This feeling can refer to the fact that he finds other males sexually attractive (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:11). As for any other queer individual, they would most probably be the first to realise that they are queer, and it will depend on them whether they would like to share their sexual

orientation with other individuals. Rafe therefore elaborates on his coming out story and the acceptance of his sexuality:

Maybe I should tell Mom and Dad. So that was it. No major breakdown, no thoughts about whether I'd be homeless. More like, I could enjoy chocolate ice cream [...] I walked down the stairs, not scared, exactly, but surprised. Because I didn't wake up that day and think: Today I'm going to tell Mom and Dad I'm gay (Konigsberg, 2013:78).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Nell and Shapiro (2011:33) define “coming out” as the process through which a queer individual – in this case, Rafe – realises that he does not conform to a heteronormative norm and accepts that his sexual orientation or gender identity is queer, a pivotal part of his overall identity, and a perfect fit. Rafe tells how he decided to share his sexual orientation with his parents, and at that point he became open about being attracted to other males and he accepted it and shared it with those around him. Thus, when Rafe came out in his teenage years, it was a positive experience for him, because he self-accepted. Nell and Shapiro (2011:33) mention that for most queer individuals they interviewed, their coming out experience was positive. Worldwide, statistics suggest that the majority of queer individuals realise their sexual orientation at about the age of twelve (teenage years), but to come out, accept, and celebrate their sexual orientation with others can take many years. This does not mean that every queer individual's coming out story is as simple and without any consequences or complications as Rafe's. Nell and Shapiro (2011:13, 33) explain that coming out can lead to rejection by parents, guardians, family, friends, etc., or result in a possible eviction from home or termination of friendship. If queer individuals choose to come out, they do not necessarily follow the same process; every queer individual's process of becoming comfortable with their sexuality is different. Fortunately, networks have started to emerge – such as gay-straight alliances and the Love Not Hate campaign in South Africa – to support and assist young queer individuals, allowing many to feel more comfortable in the world in which they live (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:33).

With the above-mentioned in mind, members of support networks should have the needed knowledge to support queer individuals (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:24). In Rafe's case, his parents – Gavin and Opal – did not reject his sexuality. However comforting that may sound, Rafe ended up pushing against his own queerness since Gavin, Opal and others did not have the necessary knowledge to successfully celebrate and support his sexual orientation:

But for me, that's when the trouble started. I figured I'd come out to my parents, get my first boyfriend, and then just live my life. No. Instead, it was like this thing had happened, and

now we all had to mobilize. (I should have known. My mom is a mobilizer.) Suddenly there were six books I had to read about what it's like to be gay. I said to her, "Mom, can't I just be gay, and not read about it?" But she explained — and Dad backed her up — that we need to know history. Those who don't study history are doomed to repeat it, blah blah blah (Konigsberg, 2013:78–79).

Referring to the above-mentioned quotation, Rafe explains that being homosexual became like a chore he had to do but did not want to do; suddenly he had additional responsibilities. Instead of relaxing about the fact that he is gay, accepting it and sharing it with his parents, he suddenly had to do homework about queer history. The onomatopoeic, "blah blah blah", emphasises Rafe's teenage disinterest in learning more about the culture of his sexual orientation. He should be grateful that his parents are so perceptive and accommodating, but having to read about queer history can be seen as overdoing it – he does not see his sexual orientation as an academic topic to be researched. Nonetheless, Rafe's mother, or Konigsberg for that matter, may want to educate him about the struggles of queer history, a topic readers may find interesting and want to pursue. He does mention that the one book he read about the gay rights movement was interesting and that he did not know that the pioneers of the movement had all of these struggles to have the same rights as heterosexual individuals in a heteronormative society – reminding the reader that California, Colorado, New Jersey, and Illinois became the first states to legalise the teaching of queer history in schools (Leins, 2019). Many queer individuals would sympathise with Rafe's reluctance to engage with the history books about gay rights, as coming out is already a huge step in itself. In addition, Gavin and Opal organised a coming out party for Rafe, which may have contributed to him setting aside his sexual orientation. After he had accepted being gay and shared the news with his parents, they invited his Grandma Chloe, the rest of his extended family, his best friend, Claire Olivia, as well as her parents, to Hamburger Mary's in Denmark:

...they were all wearing tacky cone-shaped birthday hats. On the hats it said: Yay! Rafe Is Gay! It was APPALLING. I would have slid right under the table if I could have done it without Mom saying something like, "Oh, is that what gay kids do nowadays?" or something equally humiliating (Konigsberg, 2013:81).

The coming out party was not only negative, but the party itself – as is indicated by the emphasised capital letters – was a negative experience. The spotlight was on Rafe – which he did not enjoy – and he was not given a choice on how he wanted to come out to the individuals who were invited to the party. However, it was positive in that Rafe knew his parents are not ashamed or disappointed in him: "I never for one moment felt like my parents were

embarrassed about me or grossed out by me or disappointed in me” (Konigsberg, 2013:181). Instead of rejecting, tolerating, or accepting him, they immediately celebrated him.

Generally, when queer individuals decide to accept themselves, there is a reason behind the decision (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:33). Rafe explains that “FOR ME, the whole coming-out thing was about finding a boyfriend. I mean, why else would you come out? Because it’s so much fun to be oppressed? No, you come out because you want to find love”¹⁷ (Konigsberg, 2013:90–92). Opal, though, has a different idea of what Rafe’s coming out means. Before Rafe can fully adjust to his newly accepted sexuality, his mother signs him up for PFLAG. PFLAG stands for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (Konigsberg, 2013:46). Rafe had to spend a few hours with his mother and other strangers speaking about queer sexuality, a task he was not comfortable with. Each member would get a chance to receive a feather and talk. This PFLAG experience, too, was negative for Rafe: “I hadn’t loved the one meeting, and did this mean I would have to go back now? It meant worse” (Konigsberg, 2013:46). Rafe makes it clear that he was reluctant to attend future PFLAG meetings. Rafe was catapulted into sharing his sexual orientation without being ready to make it public outside his immediate family circle.

Rafe also mentions that the topic of conversation for dinner every night in his house was oppression. He explains that he is not insensitive towards queer-phobia, because he experiences sensitive emotions (unhappiness) when he watches *The Color Purple* and *Milk* movies¹⁸, but he does not want to talk about queer-phobia, heterosexism, and genderqueer every night. Rafe seems to think that his mother felt that he had become a different person now that he was gay and that their world should centre around queer sexuality. He became frustrated because he “was basically the same kid [he’d] been the year before. Still a virgin. Still not dating. Still texting with Claire Olivia until one in the morning almost always” (Konigsberg, 2013:92) – he is the same Rafe as before. So, Rafe does not want the world to come to a standstill just because he is open about his sexuality; he wants his life to continue as it was before with the added dimension of him being homosexual. Rafe provides more examples of situations that drove him to reject the sexual orientation he had actually come to accept.

¹⁷ Prejudice and abuse are not the main focus of the discussion on *Openly Straight*, because the queer text, *Geography Club*, will focus on this theme.

¹⁸ The movies, *The Color Purple* and *Milk*, are queer-themed movies that address queer issues in heteronormative societies.

Rafe explains that the next step was to come out publicly. This entailed him and Opal having a meeting with the school principal and the head guidance counsellor, Rosalie. Rafe states that during the meeting “I felt like a freak sitting there, with the principal overcompensating by making sure he looked directly at me every time he said something, and ... Rosalie ... who was way too excited about the fact I liked boys, grinning at me like I was her favorite pet” (Konigsberg, 2013:91–92). Here, Rafe reminds the reader once again that even though Opal, and now the principal and the counsellor too, want to support him, they do not know how to support him. Positively, though, Rangeview has a GSA as well as strict school policies to deal with queer-phobia and bullying. In Rafe’s situation, “those things didn’t happen to [him]. [He] came out by telling some people, who told other people, and there [they] were, a school with gays and straights, and no one died in the process” (Konigsberg, 2013:88). It seems Konigsberg (2013) wants to express something simple here: there is no need to overthink things or overreact in terms of queer sexuality. Rafe does not want to be treated differently now that he is openly gay. Rafe provides an example of how an individual can address queer topics.

Rafe becomes a role model to create awareness and understanding of queer issues such as suicide, rejection, homelessness, and prostitution at high schools. As he conducts research, he finds that queer individuals are 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide compared to heterosexual learners; 50% are rejected by their parents, 20% to 40% become homeless, and 50% – specifically gays – have succumbed to prostitution¹⁹. Rafe realises how lucky he is compared to other queer individuals whose parents or guardians are not as accepting and celebrating as his parents. He tells the readers that he can dress up as Lady Gaga who is dressed as Little Red Riding Hood and Opal will not care about the outfit, but instead ask him how his day was. Since he is homosexual and understands queer sexuality better, he could provide answers for students who have questions about queer topics:

“What was it like, telling your mom and dad?” this ... girl asked. “Well, my parents are awful, so ... oh, hey, Mom,” I said. “My mom is here, actually, so I can’t give you all the dirt.” There was polite laughter from the audience. “It’s kind of unusual, my situation,” I said. “I mean, my mom and dad always talked about how some people were straight and some were gay, so it wasn’t, like, shocking that when I told them, they were totally fine with it” (Konigsberg, 2013:138–139).

¹⁹ The statistics given in *Openly Straight* are not based on the statistics given by The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate (2016). The statistics are based on research that was conducted by Bill Konigsberg (2013:137) when he wrote the queer text.

Samelius and Wågberg (2015:24) state that queer individuals need support from schools, school management, and school counsellors that have the needed experience, training, and knowledge. As is evident from the quote above, Rafe is able to answer the girl's question not only based on his own experience, but he also addresses a serious topic by adding some light humour – being queer is not a deadly illness, but something that forms part of humanity (The Other Foundation, 2016:51). Rafe further explains that this one male student, maybe fifteen years old, raised his hand and asked, "What would you do if, like, you had a friend? And your friend was gay? And his parents were, well, they don't like gays at all, and they said they'd disown him if he turned out gay?" (Konigsberg, 2013:138–139). Rafe, who had done enough research and has his own personal experience, knows immediately that the boy is talking about himself: "I could see it in his drawn, tired, sad face. And I felt bad, suddenly, that I'd been acting like being gay isn't this big thing, when for a lot of kids, it totally is" (Konigsberg, 2013:138–139). For that reason, he knows he has to answer the question with the necessary sensitivity in terms of the student's friend. Rafe explains to the student that his friend should find outside support, such as youth groups or a gay hotline, and that the student (the boy who asked the question) has to be a good friend to his friend, because he needs good friends. Rafe wanted to tell the student that he has to stay strong, because if he has to be cruel to be kind, he would admit to the student that his situation may probably get worse before it improves. However, he cannot say that to the student as he would be risking exposing the student to his fellow peers.

Adolescence is a unique and vulnerable period during which young adults develop their identities. Support should be provided by experienced and educated adults or queer individuals with whom queer individuals can connect (Harper *et al.*, 2012, Difulvio, 2011, cited by Wilson & Cariola, 2019). Here the reader becomes aware of how such a situation can be addressed, for example instead of outing the student, speaking to him afterwards privately. Queer individuals in a heteronormative society should receive support and have constitutional protection. A positive attitude can result in positive actions such as an acceptance or celebration of queer individuals and support. Constitutional protection provides queer individuals the opportunity to choose and live out their sexual orientations. Social issues, such as discrimination, queer-phobia, and hegemonic heteronormativity can be combatted. Moreover, awareness and understanding of queer topics can inform and possibly change negative perceptions of queer individuals or groups by providing the necessary support (The Other Foundation, 2016:45, 49; Nell & Shapiro, 2011:5; Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:10).

Although Rafe accepted his sexual orientation and started to support other queer individuals that are in denial of their identities, there were still situations that annoy him and result in him

rejecting being gay. Rafe became “the gay kid” (Konigsberg, 2013:133) as he shared his sexuality with schools and participated in PFLAG. Rafe elaborates that “[He] wasn’t supposed to hold eye contact with jocks back in Boulder. It was understood: They accepted [him], and [he] didn’t freak them out with eye contact” (Konigsberg, 2013:133). So, the jocks only tolerated his homosexuality. Together with this, as the homosexual guy, “it was an unspoken rule that [he] wouldn’t gawk at [his] fellow athletes [...] That would be considered rude” (Konigsberg, 2013:133). Slowly, Rafe’s sexuality became a hotly-debated topic whereas he had had the desire for it to remain an insignificant thing. Rafe compares himself to a snake shedding its skin: “I was thinking about how snakes shed their skin every year, and how awesome it would be if people did that too [...] I was going to have a new skin, and that skin could look like anything, would feel different than anything” (Konigsberg, 2013:4). Kenneth Kardong (2018), zoologist at Washington State University, explains that a snake sheds its skin to get rid of damaged or worn out skin. For a snake, shedding is a process: its eyes turn a milky colour and it starts to wiggle out of the outer layer of dead skin. The reason why the eyes become milky is due to a new layer of skin that forms over the eyes. During this time, as the snake cannot see very well, it finds a place to hide. Furthermore, the snake usually finds something – like a rock, stick, tree, or plant – to rub against to help the shedding process along. The shedding process of a snake is a tiring and complicated process. Rafe’s use of this metaphor may explain that he knows that it would be a difficult process for him to get rid of his label and that he may endure some hardships. Rafe uses Natick as a rock, stick, tree, or plant to help his label-free process along and as a place to hide. Another interesting part of the skin-shedding process of a snake, is the eyes. Just like a snake cannot see clearly when its eyes have turned milky, Rafe does not see clearly when he wants to get rid of his label. In the process, he does not see that he is actually the only one staring at himself. As a result, Rafe decides to transfer from Rangeview to Natick to shed his skin. He wants a chance to reject his sexuality and accept the heteronormative norm – his new skin. He wants to watch instead of being watched. Littlefield (2016:36) explains that Rafe does not want to become a victim to tokenism. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020e) defines “tokenism” as “the policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort (as to desegregate)”. Rafe does not want to be a symbolic effort as a gay kid that lives in Boulder who creates awareness by speaking at schools. So, he leaves Boulder and Rangeview, the “supposedly utopian environment”, to attend Natick in the hopes that other individuals will not see him as a “two-dimensional caricature of homosexuality” (Littlefield, 2016:36). Some readers may find *Openly Straight* (Konigsberg, 2013) confusing and believe Rafe to be anti-gay since, in a sense, it propagates the same type of ideology that it undermines: one can switch off being queer or straight very easily. However, Rafe is not necessarily anti-gay, but he is experiencing the rejection stage of

finding his identity – he does not disapprove of queer individuals, but he does attempt to switch of his homosexuality, an action that is not easy.

4.2.2.2 Rafe's rejection of his sexual orientation

The previous section provided an in-depth discussion of Rafe's acceptance of his homosexuality and the development of the situation up to the point where he ultimately rejects being openly gay. This section focuses on Rafe's voluntary transfer from Rangeview, a homophobic small town where his family and friends do celebrate his open sexuality (McNair, Day, Möller & Zapata 2015:221) – to Natick (an all-male college) to receive “[His] chance for a do-over [...] [where he] could be just Rafe [...] Not the ‘different guy’ [...] Not the openly gay kid [...] A label-free life” (Konigsberg, 2013:4; Littlefield, 2016:36). McNair *et al.* (2015:221) explain that Rafe wants to bond with other males who are not influenced by preconceived notions of his homosexuality. In order for Rafe to become openly straight, he has to say good-bye to his queer-supportive family and friends, and the label – the gay kid – that is given to him. He aims to accomplish some level of normality – heterosexuality in a heteronormative society is deemed normal. He explains that his label defines him “only as one thing to everyone” and that “it was limiting [him]”; he wants to be seen as an individual with more attributes (Konigsberg, 2013:4; Littlefield, 2016:36, 38). He comes to the realisation that he has to bury the truth and live a lie at Natick. He has to act as a heterosexual individual (someone he is not) with the expectation that his other attributes will be noticed (McNair *et al.*, 2015:221). Rafe may be considered exceptionally brave, as he is willing to leave Boulder (his known life surrounded by accepting and celebrating individuals) for Natick (the unknown).

At the beginning of Rafe's rejection stage, he has many positive experiences. It becomes clear that he is in a paradoxical situation: how can there be positive situations in a rejection stage? Rafe explains, for example, that he can undress with his fellow peers when they have to shower and nobody will care that he is in the same bathroom. “I realized that not being the gay kid here [at Natick] allowed me more access” (Konigsberg, 2013:4). The access he is referring to does not entail sexual activity, but ordinary behaviour such as changing out of one's clothes and showering. Hostels generally have bathrooms where privacy is limited. Rafe becomes friends with some of Natick's jocks and enjoys that he has finally been “labelled something mainstream and acceptable” (Konigsberg, 2013:21–22), because he has never before been part of a mainstream group. The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020f) defines “mainstream” as “considered normal, and having or using ideas, beliefs, etc. that are accepted by most people”. Rafe, just like any other individual, regardless of sexual orientation, has the desire to be accepted. He wants to be treated like a heterosexual since this sexual orientation

is that of the majority group (Littlefield, 2016:39). McMillan and O'Neil (2012:33–34) explain that authoritative individuals decide whether something is acceptable or unacceptable. So, in heteronormative environments, those in authority dictate what is acceptable or unacceptable. This makes it difficult for queer individuals as they may desire to be accepted into environments where they may not be regarded as part of the group. Nonetheless, it slowly becomes clear to Rafe that being straight at Natick has more benefits in store for him compared to being gay at Rangeview. The reader may notice here that Rafe is comfortable in an acceptable, mainstream stereotype, “so long as that stereotype is celebrated like the athletes he befriends” (Littlefield, 2016:37). Yet, readers may wonder why Rafe is able to “switch off” his homosexuality so quickly, as he must be sexually aware of nude males around him.

However, being openly straight has challenges in store for Rafe, as he was previously openly gay. Being aware of this, Rafe has plans in place for possible scenarios that may pose the threat of his homosexuality being exposed at Natick. Rafe is ready to embrace heterosexism as everybody at Natick will assume that he is heterosexual. He makes it clear that he does not want to lie, but if he has to, he may very well do just that:

If I were asked directly, “Are you gay?” ... I'd say no ... I wouldn't go on about being straight [...] [A] direct question would receive a deflection of some kind [...] If someone asked if I had a girlfriend, the answer was no. If someone asked if there were some girl I liked, or if they tried to set me up with some girl at a party, the answer was “I'm focusing on getting into a good school” [...] If something came up about someone else being gay ... I'd ... totally [be] unconcerned. I'd say as little as possible about sex [...] I'd even thought about what I'd do if another gay kid told me he was gay (Konigsberg, 2013:52–53).

It is evident from the above that Rafe was planning to rather change the topic of sexuality if it is ever brought up, instead of discussing it (Littlefield, 2016:37). In fact, it does happen that another homosexual student tells Rafe he is gay. Toby, a friend of Albie (who is Rafe's roommate), tells Rafe that everyone knows he (Toby) is gay. Toby thinks that Rafe may be homosexual too, but Rafe quickly lies and explains that even though he is not gay, he “had gay friends in Boulder” and that he was “definitely cool with that” (Konigsberg, 2013:48). Rafe now has first-hand experience what it feels like to tell a homosexual person “that kind of thing” (Konigsberg, 2013:48). It is an evasive way of naming a sexual orientation, revealing that Rafe is not comfortable with being queer. He is irritated with himself since he wonders why Toby would even care if he knows other gay individuals. When heterosexual individuals said something like that to him back in Boulder, he was unimpressed. Rafe embraces a dishonest

persona to be accepted at Natick. However, there is also a queer-phobic occurrence concerning Robinson and Toby in which Rafe reacts and becomes concerned (which is discussed in the Tolerance stage). He states in the above-mentioned quotation that he would be unconcerned – the idiom, “pay lip service to something”, is relevant since he says that he supports heteronormativity, although, eventually he does not really (MacMillian Dictionary, 2020).

Rejecting his identity, Rafe begins to wonder “what would that be like ... to never return to the person I was before. To never again have to stand out as different, to fade into the crowd, to be this new, uncomplicated Rafe forever?” (Konigsberg, 2013:60). Rafe is prepared to be inauthentic, but also expresses a fear of such behaviour: not only will he be deceiving others, but also himself. Hutson (2017) explains that in Richard Dawkins’s 1976 novel, *The Selfish Gene*, the biologist Robert Trivers floats on self-serving biases: “We dupe ourselves in order to deceive others, creating social advantage”. Rafe is deceiving his peers at Natick for social advantage: to become a jock instead of the gay kid. Although the idea makes him shiver, he still thinks of the possibility where he can be comfortable in his own body and express himself. The question is, however, can one truly express oneself when one is not entirely oneself? This is a fundamental question that Konigsberg, through the character of Rafe, attempts to answer. Eventually, Rafe becomes friends with Ben, who is one of Natick’s jocks. It is this friendship that develops into a relationship that ultimately leads to Rafe accepting and celebrating his homosexuality. Nevertheless, for the time being, he still hides his sexual orientation and he cannot help to express his views, especially when Ben agrees, as is seen in the following conversation: Ben states, “Why do I have to be a type?” (Konigsberg, 2013:75). Rafe feels the exact same way and shows excitement over the topic, even though his purpose at Natick does not reflect this (Littlefield, 2016:43). Whereas Rafe has inner conflict concerning his sexuality, Ben has inner conflict about being labelled a jock when he has other attributes too. “I guess at first look I’m a jock, right? Except on the inside, I’m about a million things before I’d even get to the fact that I can throw or kick a ball. Like, who in their right mind would ever label themselves because of something so meaningless?” (Konigsberg, 2013:75). Ben also explains that in his hometown, New Hampshire, he is labelled a nerd since he enjoys reading and receives good grades. There they do not care that he is a good athlete, whereas at Natick they do not care that he is intelligent. Just as Rafe accepts being labelled a jock because it is mainstream and accepting, Ben accepts it too. “And then I come here, and I get labelled something else, and because it’s not negative, I buy into it, you know?” (Konigsberg, 2013:76–77). It is during this conversation that the reader becomes aware that Ben is tolerating his jock identity and that he is going to – unintentionally – lead Rafe to accept and celebrate his sexuality:

I too had come here to shed a label, and been given another one that didn't fit, and been okay with the mislabelling because at least it wasn't negative. And I wanted so much to tell Ben my story, because he seemed like the kind of person who would be totally okay with it. But I also knew that doing that would change everything. And I didn't want to change everything. So I said nothing (Konigsberg, 2013:76–77).

Rafe seems to feed into hegemonic heteronormativity here by indirectly juxtaposing being gay (negative) with being a jock (positive), even though being a jock sometimes has negative connotations as well. It definitely becomes clear that being labelled a jock, when one is heterosexual, is something mainstream and positive²⁰. Both Ben and Rafe accept this label, but both of them also experience inner conflict, because they are not truly being themselves. Ben additionally mentions that he and Bryce continuously talk about Natick being a microcosm of their country (the USA) in terms of type. “And it's not just a black and white thing. Jock. Geek. Stoner. No one is considered just a human being, it seems like” (Konigsberg, 2013:77). Rafe contributes by mentioning that “[He] want[ed] to be just a human being” and that “[He's] always trying on labels, and [he] want[s] to be entirely label-free” (Konigsberg, 2013:75). With this in mind, both boys wonder if it is possible to be label-free. It seems that being label-free in a world that assigns labels to pretty much everything can be difficult (Levithan, 2005:85). The two boys may consider the possibility not to react upon labels given to them which, in effect, can make them label-free.

Rafe expresses that after only three weeks it has already become tiring to be openly straight at Natick. He has to be aware all the time of not saying something that would reveal his true identity. Furthermore, he is willing to do things such as drinking alcohol while he is underage in order to fit in, even though he mentions that he does not enjoy it. Littlefield (2016:41) comments that even though Rafe is accepted by his jock friends as a fellow jock and although they are supposedly not queer-phobic (after the gay college football player came to Natick to speak to them about queer-phobia), he still chooses to remain openly straight and hide his queer sexual orientation. Rafe is also a different person when he is with Albie and Toby – who do not form part of the jocks – compared to when he is with his jock friends. Ben is the character in the novel that notices the difference when he says, “I think I like the Rafe I saw tonight with Albie and Toby better than the one at football and at the party” (Konigsberg, 2013:119). Rafe admits that he likes that Rafe too. Not only is Rafe rejecting his homosexuality and taking on heterosexuality, he is also changing other aspects of himself. However, it seems

²⁰ An example includes *13 Reasons Why* (written by Jay Asher in 2009). Characters that are portrayed as jocks are Justin, Marcus, Zach, and Bryce. Asher portrays these characters as being at the top of the pyramid as they are popular, play sports, and have money and girls.

as if his friendship with Albie and Toby keeps him sane while he is pretending to be somebody else. He does not have to act too much around them, but is mostly himself.

Rafe's new persona affects the people close to him who knows his true identity. His mother and father, Opal and Gavin, are tremendously disappointed when they learn that Rafe is acting openly straight at Natick while they are under the impression that he is openly gay. At first Opal is confused, asking Rafe if he is bisexual, bicurious, or genderqueer. When she learns more about Rafe's situation, she realises that he actually went back into the closet and, as a result, she and Gavin have to go back, too. "That's the closet, honey. You've been through this. Why would you go through it again? [...] You're telling me that I have to go back in the closet too! And your father. How could you not think about that?" (Konigsberg, 2013:132–133). Rafe, however, argues that he is not back in the closet, he is just not telling his peers at Natick that he is gay. Opal, again, states the obvious that if Rafe is not telling his friends, he is in effect lying. Rafe expresses his frustration with being openly gay to his mother:

I'm tired of it. I'm so tired of being the gay kid. I don't want this anymore. I just want to be, like, a normal kid [...] Back in Boulder, when people saw me, they saw the GAY kid. It was like, every second of my life, I had to be aware of the fact that I was different [...] I just – I just wanted something different, is all. I just want people to see me (Konigsberg, 2013:133).

Here, Littlefield (2016:38) explains that Rafe has "singled himself out by being 'the gay kid'", using the definite article to establish himself as a singular entity who distances himself from a homosexual community". Here, the reader comes to understand the deeper motivations for Rafe (or other queer individuals) taking on a different persona. Even when a person has accepted their queerness and has come out, these individuals still operate in predominantly heteronormative societies and still have feelings of being different, odd, strange, etc. Most queer individuals want to feel part of this heteronormative society without being seen as different.

One could say that Rafe is promoting heteronormativity. But, being defined only as one thing when there is more to an individual can result in negative experiences (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:33). Nonetheless, he should not be lying to his Natick peers as it is affecting those nearest to him (his parents). Opal furthermore reminds the reader that Rafe is unaware of how fortunate he actually is for being able to be openly gay in the 21st century compared to other queer individuals in previous centuries or decades. "If you had been born just ten years earlier, you would have been torn apart for being openly gay [...] Twenty years ago, you might have had to quit school. There would have been violence" (Konigsberg, 2013:134). Mr Scarborough

also sheds some light on this: “I guess we should be happy that you have the choice today [...] Ten years ago? Twenty? I’m pretty sure this situation wouldn’t happen” (Konigsberg, 2013:67). There have been prejudice, abuse and violence toward queer individuals in heteronormative societies in the past, whether it be from non-queer or queer individuals. Queer individuals, due to legal, medical, religious or cultural misconceptions, were and still are subjected to discrimination, violence and marginalisation (Bittner, 2018:5; Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:5). Contrastingly, being openly gay allows Rafe to be exactly who he is with respect to other aspects of his personality, and his family and friends love and respect him for it. Instead, Rafe embraces heterosexism, something he usually counteracted when he spoke at schools. Consequently, Littlefield (2016:40) raises the following question: has Rafe successfully built a heterosexual persona or has he merely fallen victim to heterosexism? It seems that Rafe at first believes he has built a heterosexual persona, but when his inner conflict – which is discussed in the section on the Tolerance stage – concerning his identity grows, it seems he realises he has become a victim of heterosexism.

Rafe’s decision to be openly straight at Natick starts to affect him more when Gavin and Opal come to the school for a family visit. Ben asks Rafe’s parents about his girlfriend, Claire Olivia, who is actually Rafe’s best friend from Boulder. Rafe notices that his “[m]om’s eyes opened wide, and she glanced over at my dad, who had a pained expression suddenly” (Konigsberg, 2013:176). Later, when Rafe and his mother speak to each other when Ben is not present, Opal realises that Rafe is in love with Ben. “Oh, I’m so glad. You love a boy [...] You’re still our Rafe, underneath this hideous straight disguise...” (Konigsberg, 2013:177). Rafe, who is becoming increasingly fatigued due to his difficulty with his sexual orientation, yells at his parents:

It’s not a disguise [...] I know you don’t get this, but there’s a part of me that this truly is, okay? I know, I’m gay. I’m your gay son. But could you just give me a fucking break for two minutes so I can be just me too? [...] I’m sorry. I love you guys. I just, I know you don’t get this. But please. Trust me, okay? I know what I’m doing (Konigsberg, 2013:177).

Rafe’s frustration is emphasised when he yells at and curses in front of his parents, something he explicitly states he has never done before. This may be because he realises that he failed in his façade as Opal realises soon that he is in love with Ben. Gavin and Opal, as a result, decide to give him the break and the space he has been asking for, but he is left with the words, “I’m not sure that you do, Rafe” and “I’m flabbergasted. I feel like I don’t even know who you are anymore, and that makes me feel like curling up in a corner somewhere and crying” (Konigsberg, 2013:177). Rafe consequently becomes scared that his parents might

consider him as a “monster who didn’t appreciate their love and acceptance and now wanted to be straight” (Konigsberg, 2013:186). When Rafe returns home, Opal reflects on the above-mentioned incident that occurred after the game: “Watching you play football there. I saw something I hadn’t seen before. You really were enjoying that, weren’t you? [...] I hadn’t understood that desire in you, the desire to do those sorts of boy things. I don’t know how I missed that” (Konigsberg, 2013:152). It is here where the reader realises that Rafe felt excluded in Boulder with regard to doing sports or being part of a group of heterosexual boys, and that his mom shows insight into her own inadequacies. Since he was openly gay at Boulder, he was restricted from doing certain things, and now, being openly straight at Natick where nobody knows that he is actually homosexual, he is not prohibited from doing certain activities just because he has a different sexual orientation:

I would never have said I needed that back home, because I didn’t know how much I liked being a part of a group of guys. But I knew I needed something, you know? [...] Now it just feels like this barrier that was up between me and these other guys is no longer up. And I love that (Konigsberg, 2013:152).

Consequently, Rafe experienced “citizenship deficit” – a sense among queer individuals that they can never feel part of society (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:15). It is here that the reader may come to understand Rafe’s decision to be openly straight at Natick. Interestingly though, Gavin provides a valid argument for Rafe’s current situation at Natick: “I just don’t understand why you can’t be honest and still be friends with a bunch of other boys. Here. Anywhere. What precludes you? [...] I think that’s self-limiting. Who says there’s a barrier? Maybe you put it up” (Konigsberg, 2013:176). What his dad is saying here is that a queer individual’s sexual orientation should neither be limited by the person nor by other individuals, but he may also have a misinterpretation of what happens in the real world as he is not in Rafe’s shoes. But, Rafe is supported by his parents, especially considering that they do not completely understand what he is doing: “I had the strong sensation that I’d underestimated my parents and their devotion to me. Of course they’d be on my side, whether they understood or not. That was just the kind of parents they were” (Konigsberg, 2013:181). Konigsberg’s depiction of very accepting parents may be a silent plea for this kind of unconditional acceptance, which is not always the case.

As Rafe goes through the rejection stage of searching for his identity, events slowly play out that leads him to the tolerance stage. One of these events is when Rafe is left with the following words of his father after he explains that he has an incredible bond with Ben, and instead of being in love with him, he loves him: “I still think that you’re overlooking something [...] You

say you have this great bond. But how can you, if he doesn't know you?" (Konigsberg, 2013:179–180). Rafe reflects on his father's words:

I could see he didn't understand that knowing a person is about more than knowing whom they fantasize about. That's the small stuff, actually. Not the big stuff. The big stuff is lying next to a guy on the floor and locking eyes and having deep conversations about philosophy. The big stuff is letting a friend know your hopes and your fears and not having to make a joke about it. That's what matters (Konigsberg, 2013:180).

Taking into account Rafe's reflection, one has to consider what "small stuff" and what "big stuff" would be for another individual. Rafe may consider his sexual attraction as something minor, when for Ben it is something major. Individuals can develop a bond by spending time together and having in-depth conversations, but dishonesty concerning an individual's hidden sexual orientation can negatively influence the bond in question.

A second event that leads Rafe to the tolerance stage is when he has to explain to Claire Olivia that he is openly straight at Natick. "What does that mean? [...] You went back in the closet?" (Konigsberg, 2013:132–133). Rafe, here, provides his own understanding of being in the closet: "To me, the closet is when someone won't admit they're gay at all. I already have. I'm sort of ... taking a break" (Konigsberg, 2013:132–133). Rafe's definition of the closet is similar to Nell and Shapiro's (2011:33–34) definition. The researchers also explain that "closeted individuals" are in "a shadowy place where things remain hidden in danger of discovery". So, an individual in the closet does not want to share their identity with the world and keeps it a secret – thus, not admitting to be queer. Conversely, Claire Olivia states that an individual cannot take a break from who they are, but an individual might be able to take a break from a part of themselves. She concedes that Rafe cannot take a break from being gay indefinitely, but he might take a break from being gay for a (short) period of time. Her words ring true when one looks at Rafe's bond with Ben. For Rafe, there is something more than just a queer and straight friendship.

A third event that causes Rafe to move from the rejection stage towards the tolerance stage, is the way he feels when he lies to Ben:

And then mostly what I felt was dirty. Lying to a friend sucked. But what choice did I have? Our friendship was amazing and getting better, and that made an occasional small white lie acceptable, right? Not great, but acceptable. In public, we toned the intensity of our friendship down, knowing that Steve and his posse would not quite get our strange and

unusual bond. But in private, we threw away most of our barriers, and that was more than fine with me (Konigsberg, 2013:186).

It is here that one notices that even though Rafe has lied to Albie and Toby and the rest of Natick, it does not bother him as much compared to the lies he is telling Ben. Since he is much closer with Ben, it starts becoming a problem for him. As explained in Chapter 2, self-identity can develop naturally, with awareness, or not at all, and queer individuals can struggle during the process of searching for their sexual orientation. This can ultimately lead to a complete rejection, which can also have (dire) consequence (such as higher rates of violence and victimization, hopelessness, attempted suicide, substance use or abuse, risky sexual behaviours, eating disorders, and mood disorders) (The Other Foundation, 2016:23; Wilson & Cariola, 2019). In Rafe's case, he does not experience violent behaviours, victimisation, suicide, risky sexual behaviours or eating disorders, but he does experience hopelessness, substance use, and mood disorders: "I was kind of drunk, and Ben was too, and it was all okay" (Konigsberg, 2013:119). He also experiences a feeling of losing out, as he could not be part of the jocks at Boulder and do "normal" boy things as he states, like playing football.

4.2.2.3 Rafe's progression towards tolerance of his sexual orientation

The previous section followed the process of Rafe rejecting his homosexuality and the positive and negative feelings that are associated with this endeavour. As Rafe becomes more aware of how his decision to be openly straight is affecting his parents and Claire Olivia, who all know about his "disguise" (Littlefield, 2016:41), he cannot help wondering how it will affect Ben as their friendship and bond snowballs towards a relationship. Thus, this section explores Rafe's toleration of his sexuality and the various incidents that take place and that lead to him celebrating it.

Rafe's decision to be openly straight at Natick is not only affecting him anymore, but it has an effect on those closest to him – Gavin, Opal, and Claire Olivia. This can be seen when Rafe reflects on his feelings:

The more I think about it, the more I realize that almost every time I did it, my feelings were actually a little hurt [...] Sometimes my feelings get hurt but I pretend they aren't hurt. Feelings hurt. I don't like having my feelings hurt [...] The more I think about it, the more I realize that when Steve and Zack started making homophobic comments in the shower, I didn't feel angry. I felt hurt because that's how they see me. I hate that they see me as

something to make fun of. I hate that I have to hide — I HATE THIS! AAARRRGGGHHH!
(Konigsberg, 2013:203).

Based on the quotation's capitalised interjection, there is a definite escalation in the intensity of his feelings of frustration with being seen as an abomination. Bittner (2018:15–16) explains that many queer young adults become frustrated with the ways in which they are different compared to the hegemonic expectations surrounding them. This may also be because he is tired of deceiving those around him. Rafe initially states that he will be unconcerned in any situation involving discussions on homosexuality, but he is affected and reacts to Steve and Zack's homophobic comments:

"Maybe if you weren't out getting your cock sucked by Toby twenty-four seven, this wouldn't have happened." [...] "Shut up," Robinson said. Zack took over [...] You screw that faggot in the ass too?" he asked [...] Zack continued, "Got a fag goalie who can't stop a fucking shot if it was kicked right at him...." [...] "Hey," I [Rafe] said, surprising myself. "Cut it out" (Konigsberg, 2013:201, 208–209).

As indicated in Chapter 2, Love Not Hate (2016:6) lists verbal abuse (55%) as the most common form of discrimination in schools. Rafe is frustrated with Boulder and its inhabitants, and at first enjoys being part of a mainstream heteronormative label at Natick. However, as the story progresses one can clearly see that he becomes extremely frustrated with his feelings that get hurt. Steve and Zack, for example, do not know that he is actually a queer individual, so they are unaware that they are in fact hurting a friend of theirs by using vulgar language that negatively describes his sexual orientation. Pascoe (2007:81) and Burns (2016:4) have determined that young males generally use homophobic language to substantiate their heterosexual statuses and to distance themselves from queer individuals. That leaves one wondering how many closeted queer individuals get hurt by those around them that have negative things to say about queer individuals, be it intentionally or unintentionally. Individuals' attitude towards queer individuals can be the basis for their actions concerning queer individuals in a heteronormative society (The Other Foundation, 2016:37). As is the case for Steve and Zack, a negative attitude can result in negative actions such as rejection, queer-phobia, and heterosexism. So, as Rafe reflects on his feelings, one becomes aware that this stage of tolerance may be the precursor of him ultimately celebrating his homosexuality.

Consequently, Rafe starts questioning himself:

Who was I? How could I stand up for gay people while at the same time hiding that part of me? And I felt so foreign [...] What was I doing here? Who was Rafe, really? Can you just put a part of yourself on hold? And if you do, does it cease to be true? (Konigsberg, 2013:211).

There seems to be more questions than answers in Rafe's mind. This highlights the uncertainty and the confusion in the minds of many queer individuals as they try to cope in a predominantly heteronormative environment. Even though Rafe is still lost and in search of his identity, he mentions that when he was openly gay, at least he was something, whereas now that he is openly straight, he feels like nothing. In terms of coming out of the closet, Rafe states that heterosexual individuals have it easier since they do not have to come out of the closet. Rafe further explains that heterosexual individuals do not understand what it feels like – the fear of coming out – since there is no such thing as openly straight.

During one of Rafe and Ben's in-depth discussions, Rafe becomes more aware of the types of love the Greeks described. In this discussion, it becomes evident that Ben is unsure about Rafe and their close friendship or relationship. They are both unsure of whether there is a label for two friends who love and are comfortable with each other:

The Greeks were smarter than us, and they had different words for different kinds of love. There's *storge*, which is family love. That's not us. There's *eros*, which is sexual love. There's *philia*, which is brotherly love. And then there's the highest form, *Agape* [...] That's transcendental love, like when you place the other person above yourself (Konigsberg, 2013:225).

Rafe and Ben thus come to the conclusion that their relationship can be labelled as "aga-gay" (Konigsberg, 2013:225) – a mixture of "agape" (ἀγάπη) and "gay" – which for them means a higher love between two males. They also explain that "aga-gay" is something that is transcending, and that it is not about sex or brotherhood, but two male individuals truly connecting. Littlefield (2016:43) elaborates that Ben does not confess to experiencing homosexual attraction, but he does state that he has feelings for Rafe. In turn, Ben's feelings and attraction relate to Rafe and his personality, and not his sexuality: "I've never had feelings like this for a guy ... I mean, I don't even know if I'm having them. It's you [Rafe]. It's not like towards a guy" (Konigsberg, 2013:260). So, Ben is attracted to Rafe as an individual, not as a sexual being (Littlefield, 2016:45). As Samelius and Wågberg (2015:11–12) explain, "the identity creation process is an intricate and complex dynamic of the relationship between the 'one' who has power to name a category and determine its qualities and the 'one' who is placed in a category's counteraction to renegotiate the qualities and nature that is ascribed to

the category". In Rafe and Ben's case, they self-defined their situation. Their situation (two boys loving each other at a higher level) and the characteristics (love, sex, and brotherhood) that may go along with it are not decided for them; they define these themselves as they feel comfortable with these.

Rafe is beginning to reflect more on how his openly straight disguise will affect Ben when he finds out. He invites Ben to his house in Boulder for a weekend, during which time his parents organise a "mountain luau surprise party" (Konigsberg, 2013:229). At his home in Boulder, Rafe is surrounded by family and friends who know his true sexual orientation and they have to pretend that he is straight as Ben is still unaware. Rafe explains that he "died a little inside ... [f]or the first time, I truly felt like I was playing a joke on Ben. I really wasn't" (Konigsberg, 2013:236). This comes as he realises that he is developing strong feelings for him. Littlefield (2016:41) elaborates that Rafe's heterosexual persona "only goes skin deep, as he doesn't repress the feelings he has towards ... Ben". This is also the first time that Rafe wonders whether his decision to be openly straight at Natick will result in something catastrophic as it is not only about him anymore, but also about others. His inner conflict indicates his search for identity:

I mean, why did it all have to feel so dirty, so fake? How did I wind up this far away from the real Rafe, when my only goal had been to find him? And how could I get back to myself without any major damage – not to Ben, and not to me? Here was the person I was falling in love with, but how did you get from this ugly-feeling, unreal place to a real, romantic relationship with a guy like Ben? I'd never wanted anything more in my life... [...] I felt ... grotesque and in the spotlight and horrible, dishonest in a way that felt so basic that it hurt me behind my eyes to think of it (Konigsberg, 2013:236).

Rafe wanted to fit in and he no longer wanted to be in the spotlight. He decided to move away from Boulder to have a chance to be openly straight at Natick. In a way, this can be seen as an experiment. However, it is not a cold, clinical, scientific experiment, but one that involves feelings and a human element that he did not consider. He thought he was prepared for everything, but he never thought about the possibility that he might fall in love and about the consequences his decisions might have. His decisions and their consequences can be described by the word "grotesque". The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020e) defines "grotesque" as "strange and unpleasant, especially in a silly or slightly frightening way". The dictionary also provides the following synonyms: ghastly, hideous, ugly, unattractive, etc. So, in Rafe's case it wasn't just a feeling of disgust, but also a physical repulsion. From his parents and Claire Olivia's points of view, his openly straight persona is strange, unpleasant, and ugly.

It also means departing from the natural, the typical, in this case, his true nature. Ironically, he left Boulder in order not to be labelled and stand out, but here he sees himself as “grotesque”, and in fact standing out, albeit as openly straight. Rafe is slowly moving towards telling Ben and the rest of Natick that he is actually openly gay – a decision that will result in him starting to celebrate his identity.

When Rafe and Ben are skiing on the mountain, he shares with Ben a saying of his mom: “Lean forward, and head on down the mountain [...] It means to be unafraid. Lean into the challenges [...] Lean forward and head on down the mountain” (Konigsberg, 2013:247). This saying will ultimately lead Rafe to admit that he is not openly straight, but openly gay, and that he will face the consequences of his decisions made. He is going to head down the mountain and face the challenges that await him on the pathway to celebrating his homosexuality.

4.2.2.4 Rafe’s celebration of his sexual orientation

The previous section provides an in-depth discussion of Rafe starting to tolerate his sexual orientation when he realises that the decision he has made to be openly straight has a negative effect on those closest to him. It becomes known to the reader that Rafe is not a sadistic, selfish character, but compassionate and selfless – he responds to other individuals’ feelings. He starts to reject the openly straight persona he took on, almost like a body rejecting a foreign organ. Therefore, Rafe has now entered the celebration stage. He decides that he is going to embrace who he is. Toby is the first person he confides in. “Another gay friend. Yay!” (Konigsberg, 2013:276) is Toby’s reaction.

Rafe also knows that another obstacle ahead of him is that he has to come out not only to his peers at Natick, but also to Ben, with whom he has an “aga-gay” relationship. While Rafe experiences inner conflict about lying to Ben, Ben is also experiencing inner conflict about him and Rafe’s relationship. Ben has uncertainties and he is tormented by these. Ben knows he loves Rafe, and that Rafe is his closest friend at Natick and in the world. However, before Ben is told the truth about Rafe outright, he has deliberated that Rafe is gay:

The thing is, I’m pretty sure you’re gay. I just know it. You never talk about Claire Olivia unless I bring her up. I think you’re gonna figure out over time that you’re gay, and I’m totally okay with that. But the thing is, this, us, is something that’s just not gonna happen, because it can’t (Konigsberg, 2013:286).

Here it becomes clear that both friends at some level sense each other's sexual orientation (Ben considers himself heterosexual, but actually seems like a queer individual in the closet; Rafe considers himself homosexual) without either one being told explicitly. Rafe knows that Ben has had relationships with girls before, and Ben states that Rafe barely mentions Claire Olivia, who is supposedly his girlfriend. The reason why Ben and Rafe cannot be together, has to do with Ben's parents. He explains to Rafe that his parents do not have the same view of queer individuals as Rafe's parents do. He himself is "totally [being] okay" (Konigsberg, 2013:286) with people who are gay, but here he speaks of those who only pay lip service. Konigsberg here offers another alternative to acceptance and celebration of queer individuals, one that is very often the case with parents. They cannot be together since Ben's parents will reject him. They will not support him and he is still dependent on them. Coming out can lead to rejection by parents, guardians, family, friends, and other possible relationships the queer individual might have (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:33).

It is during this conversation that Rafe confesses about being openly gay, and as he has feared, Ben reacts: "It's normal not to share every inner thought with someone. It's not normal to actually BE openly gay and not share that little fact" (Konigsberg, 2013:291). It does not seem as if Ben is downplaying the importance of sexual orientation. His reference to sexual orientation as a "little fact" is a sarcastic euphemism that indicates that Rafe's homosexuality is, in effect, a big deal and very important to their relationship. Ben feels as if their relationship is based on lies. At first Rafe thinks that Ben's reaction is because Rafe is gay. Rafe does not have insight into that Ben is uncertain about his sexuality. Ben explains to him that it is Rafe being "fundamentally dishonest" that upsets him. Littlefield (2016:45) clarifies that "Ben is getting to the heart of the moral that Konigsberg has delivered". Rafe wants to be with Ben, but their "aga-gay" relationship comes to an end due to his false pretences. Konigsberg in a way punishes Rafe for his dishonesty. After some time in which they both reflected, Ben explains to Rafe that he loves and likes him, because after Bryce left to receive treatment for his depression, Rafe became his only true friend. "You were all I had, and then you broke my heart" (Konigsberg, 2013:305). As a result, Ben wants to spend some time away from Rafe. Rafe's decision to be openly straight therefore does have a dire consequence: when the truth comes out, he loses Ben.

Afterwards, Rafe reflects on his situation:

I don't think being gay is a curse. Definitely not. But we all know that being open about it comes with a lot of things that make life harder. Even if you have great parents and a school where you're treated well, it adds stuff to your life. The worst to me is how everybody looks

at you differently. I got so tired of being looked at [...] So maybe being openly gay isn't a curse, but it's fucking exhausting. Always wondering what people are seeing, and feeling separated from so much of the world, that's hard (Konigsberg, 2013:296).

The things Rafe refers to that make being queer harder include things such as morality (right vs wrong, with queer sexuality being considered as wrong as it is interpreted as sin) and religion (sin and hell); the rejection or tolerance of parents, friends and extended family; heteronormative societies, queer-phobia and hegemonic heterosexism (school environments) (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:21, 33; Barton, 2010:471; Banks, 2009:34–35; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Reygan, 2013:229). In order to avoid the spotlight, he comes to Natick to be openly straight, to try and remove the barrier between him and heterosexual males. However, the barrier is replaced with another – perhaps not between him and his heterosexual peers, but it was between him and those closest to him: Opal, Gavin, Claire Olivia, and Ben. The irony of Rafe's decision to be openly straight is seen when he explains that:

Ben. He saw me. He saw who I was inside, and he liked it, and I liked it. I liked who he saw. Me but not the label [...] I wanted that. I needed it. I didn't tell him I was gay because I didn't want anything to come between us [...] I didn't want who I am to come between us? (Konigsberg, 2013:308–309).

The lies Rafe tells to fit in and to be accepted as mainstream are in effect instrumental in ruining Ben and Rafe's relationship. Rafe realises this when he questions, "I didn't want who I am to come between us?" (Konigsberg, 2013:308–309). Rafe's child-like naivety due to his lack of experience in relationships becomes evident here. The reader knows that Rafe is authentic when he is with Ben, but he did not admit that he was openly gay due to the fear of losing Ben. One never knows how Ben would have reacted if he had known from the beginning that Rafe was gay: would they still have been friends? Would they have become such close friends that it would transform into a relationship? Rafe, at first, does not know that he is going to fall in love with another boy at Natick and does not have a contingency plan for what happens between Ben and him:

How could I not have seen that? [...] I didn't want anything to come between us, so I withheld a part of me? How hadn't I realized that doesn't make sense? How was I expecting to get closer to someone by not being truly me? [...] Not brilliant to try to get closer to someone by hiding the truth from them. I guess I decided the gay thing was an accessory, not an actual internal part of me. Like a sweater I could take off. And I can't, can I? It's as simple as that. It's inside me. And I've never really stopped to think about how I feel about that (Konigsberg, 2013:308–309).

Konigsberg reveals here that it is pivotal to realise that one's sexual orientation forms a central part of who one is, and that one cannot just reject it without any consequences. Even though Rafe referred to it as a small thing before, he now realises that it is the opposite. Rafe hurts his parents, Claire Olivia, and Ben in the process, and only realises afterwards that being gay is something he cannot, like a sweater, take on or off. Referring back to the snake metaphor, Rafe interpreted the skin as his sexuality: he wants to get rid of his homosexual label (old snake skin) to take on a heterosexual label (new snake skin); instead, Rafe does go through the "snake shedding process", but instead of taking on a new sexuality, he realises the relevance and importance of his homosexuality to his life (a new skin). Rafe considers if having it too easy when he came out to his parents – as they did not reject him in any sense – did not result in him downgrading his sexual orientation. He wonders if he would have realised the pivotal role his sexual orientation plays in his life should his parents and friends have rejected or tolerated his first phase of acceptance – maybe experiencing challenges in the beginning contributes to identifying its importance. His parents, family, and friends celebrated it from the very beginning, and Rafe thought he had too, but in reality, he was unsure how he felt about being gay:

How do I really feel about being gay? I always thought I was okay with it. Am I, though? I mean, I stopped being open about it, so maybe I wasn't okay? I need to get better, because it's not a part of me I can remove. As soon as I tried to remove the label, a lie formed. In the end, that lie created a barrier way worse than the original one [...] I created a barrier getting rid of a barrier (Konigsberg, 2013:308–309).

When Rafe started attending Natick, he seemed sure about his homosexuality, but the reader notices his introspective questioning; it is an ordeal before he has any certainty about it. Thus, it is pivotal even for the queer individual to realise the importance of their sexual orientation, because it does not only affect (positively and/or negatively) that person, but those around them (such as parents, guardians, friends, religions, societies, and schools) as well (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:21). Positively, Rafe realises that he was wrong and that he unknowingly replaced one barrier with another.

As a result, Rafe wonders how he truly feels about being homosexual: "I'm not ashamed of being gay" (Konigsberg, 2013:308–309). Opal explains to Rafe that she never thought he had been ashamed of being gay, and that Rafe can be anything he wants to be, but he cannot go against who he is, because when an individual's inside does not match with the outside, it does not feel good – there should be balance. Opal also differentiates between "guilt" and "shame":

“Guilt is about something you do. Shame is about who you are.” Guilt, she’d explained, was useful because a person could learn from it and do the right thing next time. Shame, on the other hand, was useless, she’d always said. What is to be gained from thinking you’re a bad person? I [Rafe] wasn’t bad (Konigsberg, 2013:302).

Rafe ultimately realises that he felt ashamed of who he is for a brief period of time and, in effect, experiences guilt for taking on a false persona. The above quotation has significance for all human beings and not just queer individuals: “guilt” and “shame” are human emotions. Instead of others really looking at him, he is the one who is looking at himself too harshly. It does not matter what other individuals think of you, it is what you think of yourself (Schmidt & Renzi, 2014:125). So, Rafe learns something from being openly straight: he realises that he does not want to look at himself critically anymore, he wants to look at others in a non-judgemental way instead. There are many individuals around him that he does not know, and instead of focusing on himself unnecessarily, he can see and get to know other individuals for who they are. There is a sign of maturity as he manages to project his attention away from himself towards others. Similarly, they can get to know him as he is: gay. Littlefield (2016:15) concludes that *Openly Straight* offers a narrative that portrays Rafe as questioning his sexuality, and it ends with a firm understanding of his homosexual identity.

Ultimately, the aspirations of young individuals are to have relationships, to marry, to have children, and to be part of society. On the whole, the aims are to bring individuals, families, and communities together, to foster mutual respect, and to support one another emotionally and financially where possible (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:46).

The next section examines the queer characters in *Openly Straight* – Rafe, Ben, Toby, Robinson, Ben’s uncle, Jeff, Caleb, and Albie – and how Konigsberg portrays them in this queer text.

4.2.3 Queer characters

In Chapter 2, I explained that there are four types of fictional queer characters (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:xx). However, since I am analysing queer texts, only three are relevant²¹: a character who is open about their sexuality or a character that is outed as queer; a character that is born queer or is aware of being queer from a very young age; and a character that experiments –

²¹ I am aware that there are various types of characters, but I do not agree with placing individuals in rigid categories.

knowingly or unknowingly – in queer- and non-queer contexts to determine their sexual orientation.

Additionally, Littlefield (2016:17, 21) explains that Alex Sanchez, writer of the queer text *Rainbow Boys*, portray queer characters in “different homosexual performance[s]”: “hyper masculine”, which represents a privileged, heteronormative homosexual; “effeminate nelly stereotype/flamboyant”, which represents a silly person that is the opposite of masculine, and “in-between” hyper masculine and effeminate nelly stereotype²². The masculine queer characters are less subjected to abuse compared to the nelly stereotype.

I have also mentioned that the evolution of queer literature has caused depictions of queer characters to become more positive and inclusive (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:17, 134). Queer literature generally now has characters that can disrupt the norms of sexuality, same-sex desire, and the behaviours of queer characters (Blackburn *et al.*, 2015), whereas early depictions consisted of characters that were flawed, stereotypical, and plots that were predictable and centred on their miserable lives (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:17, 134).

4.2.3.1 Rafe

Generally, in young adult literature there is a young adult character that is depicted in relation to certain themes, such as searching for one’s identity. Moreover, this character is often the protagonist (Van Aswegen & Mayo, 2011:61). In *Openly Straight*, Rafe is the protagonist who is in search of his identity after he rejects his homosexuality. Since the theme that is explored in *Openly Straight* is the search for identity and it is discussed in 4.2.2 with the main focus on Rafe, I am not discussing the character in-depth. However, Konigsberg portrays Rafe as an “in-between masculine and effeminate” character since he plays football, is seen as a jock, and becomes popular (masculine), but he is also as sensitive, silly, and queer from the beginning (effeminate).

4.2.3.2 Ben

Ben is the second protagonist of *Openly Straight*. Ben portrays the character who unknowingly experiments in a heterosexual setting to determine his sexual orientation and who realises

²² I only discuss Rafe, Ben, Toby, and Robinson in terms of Sanchez’s portrayal of queer characters. There is not enough information provided for Ben’s uncle, Jeff, and Caleb to determine the portrayal of the characters in terms of Sanchez, and Albie’s sexual orientation is only assumed in *Honestly Ben*, the sequel to *Openly Straight*.

that there are other possibilities (queer sexual orientations) compared to the single possibility in the heterosexual norm (which is male and female relationships). For many years, he adheres to the heterosexual norm of being straight and he is attracted to females, but once he meets Rafe and gets to know him, he develops feelings for him. He starts out as a “hyper masculine” character as he is a jock, is attracted to girls, and does not appear to be effeminate.

Rafe also describes Ben as a character who thinks he does not care about labels, but deep inside, it matters to him too. Ben was very close to his bisexual uncle who has passed away and he admires the fact that his uncle was open about his bisexuality. Nonetheless, Ben still buys into his parents’ simplistic viewpoint of life: “You work hard, you suffer, you die” (Konigsberg, 2013:249). Thus, even though Ben represents a smart character that can have in-depth philosophical discussions with peers, he is still chained to what his parents think and believe. Accordingly, Ben follows the heterosexual norm and accepts the mainstream and acceptable label, “jock”, at Natick. Rafe mentions that, “What [he] saw was this incredible person who was exactly who he was. I admired the hell out of that. Maybe he was gay, maybe he wasn’t. But he was always Ben” (Konigsberg, 2013:250). When Ben and Rafe become close friends and are on the brink of entering into a relationship, Ben asks Rafe whether they are bisexual or not. Thus, Ben is also unsure about his sexuality and is in search of his identity (Littlefield, 2016:8) – he can consider bisexuality as a safe option, especially since his uncle used to be bisexual, too. This can be considered problematic since the text will teach its readers that one is not necessarily gay, but only experimenting with bisexuality.

After Ben visits Boulder with Rafe, he explains that he has lied to him about being homosexual. Ben experiences inner conflict, because he thinks he is straight, but now he has developed feelings for another male. As a result, he explains that he cannot be gay or bisexual, because if “I told my parents I was gay, they would probably throw me out of the house”, “My family just isn’t like yours [Rafe’s]”, and I’m not ready to give them up ... They’re all I have” (Konigsberg, 2013:285–286). Ben accepts the heteronormative norm, but then tolerates an “aga-gay” relationship – a sexuality where one male experiences a higher love for another male. However, he ultimately rejects it (Littlefield, 2016:8). Littlefield (2016:44) contributes by explaining that Konigsberg provides Ben with a unique choice: he can choose his sexual orientation. So, even if Ben’s attraction is not necessarily contingent on choice, he has the opportunity to choose and accept the sexual orientation he wants. It is not until the sequel, *Honestly Ben* (Konigsberg, 2017) that Ben celebrates his “gay-for-Rafe” sexuality. It is a self-defined sexuality where Ben explains that he is not straight, gay, bisexual, or bicurious, but in love with another boy named Rafe. This reminds the reader that sexual orientation is complex and that some queer characters may prefer to be seen as “hyper masculine” since there are

more privileges (such as popularity, treatment, and support) compared to the “in between” or the “effeminate nelly stereotype” characters. Ben is an example of a character who represses his sexual orientation in order not to lose the love and respect of family members who do not accept any orientation other than heterosexual.

4.2.3.3 Toby

Rafe describes Toby as “extremely skinny, and his spiky hair was platinum in places ... If this were Boulder, he’d definitely be a gay kid” (Konigsberg, 2013:23). Rafe also mentions that Toby is different compared to his other peers at Natick.

Toby shares the fact that he is gay with Rafe right from the start of their friendship. Whether he was born homosexual or he realised later on in his life that he is gay, is unknown. However, he portrays the character that is open about his sexuality. At Natick, though, Toby explains to Rafe and Ben that he is different just as Bryce, who is the only black student at Natick, is different:

“I mean, he’s different, like me. He’s different, and that can be really, like, depressing. Really depressing.” He turned to Albie. “Remember last spring?” Albie nodded solemnly. “That could have been me. I was, like, so close to running away from here, it’s not even funny” [...] “Well, it’s not exactly a bucket of ice cream to be different around here [Natick]” (Konigsberg, 2013:113).

Here, Toby explains that being different with respect to factors such as sexual orientation and race is not easy in predominantly heteronormative or white environments, despite the fact that Bryce is brave enough to challenge the status quo. Even though *Openly Straight* is a queer text, Konigsberg explores other differences, such as race, to emphasise that there are other factors that may marginalise individuals.

Rafe realises that Toby has been given his own private room at Natick since he is openly gay. While one could perhaps argue that Toby is receiving preferential treatment compared to the other students at Natick, the treatment in actual fact makes him feel like an outsider. This isolation makes him feel that he is something to be avoided. Even though Toby tries not to care what other individuals see when they look at him, he is still negatively affected by the attitudes of others towards him. As a result, Toby has accepted rather than celebrated being homosexual, and it is unknown whether he rejected and tolerated it at first. Additionally, Toby

is portrayed as an “effeminate nelly stereotype” since he does not play sports and is only tolerated by the jocks. He is not as popular as Robinson who is an in-the-closet gay jock.

4.2.3.4 Robinson

Rafe explains that as he was walking on the school grounds, Robinson, one of his straight jock peers, emerged hurriedly and guiltily from the woods. Soon afterwards, Toby also emerged from the woods. The reader is let in on the fact that Robinson is Toby’s “mystery guy” (Konigsberg, 2013:143).

Rafe explains that Robinson is known as a “Jockhead”, a name used to refer to a very masculine athletic heterosexual individual, and “Gorilla Butt” (Konigsberg, 2013:139) at Natick. He is flabbergasted when he realises that Robinson is either gay or bisexual: “lots of people you’d never think could be gay or bi actually are. I knew that, everyone knew that. But ... Toby and Robinson? For reals?” (Konigsberg, 2013:143). Konigsberg, here, comments on the stereotypical views individuals have of queer types. Rafe is astonished that Robinson, a jock, and Toby, an effeminate boy, may be together. It seems as if he thinks that a jock-and-jock and effeminate-and-effeminate pairing may be better suited.

Toby finally talks to Rafe about Robinson and him, and “how annoying it was that they couldn’t be open about it” (Konigsberg, 2013:282). Toby explains that Robinson “was deep in the closet and scared to death that people would find out” and that “[he] kept saying he couldn’t wait for college ... where he could start over and be himself, and avoid assholes who wouldn’t respect him” (Konigsberg, 2013:282). Robinson’s reasoning seems naïve, since ignorant and judgemental people are everywhere. However, Robinson just wants to do what Rafe is already doing. Rafe moves from one school to another to have a second chance at being defined as something else. Robinson will be the one to do so when he finishes with school and starts studying at a university. Rafe reflects on Robinson and his current situation:

He was about as non-stereotypical a gay person as you could get. His face was strong but covered in that acne. His body strong but covered in fur. There had always been a part of me that thought guys like that were the luckiest because they could pass as straight. But now I realized just the opposite was true; being able to pass for something you’re not is a kind of curse. Especially if you try it (Konigsberg, 2013:282).

Robinson portrays a queer character who is aware of his sexuality, but who is in the closet. Later he is outed by Zack and Steve: “Maybe if you weren’t out getting your cock sucked by

Toby twenty-four seven, this wouldn't have happened" [...] "You think people don't notice you guys going into the woods separately, coming back separately? What are we, fucking stupid? You screw that faggot in the ass too?" (Königsberg, 2013:208–209). This example just shows how rude and mean peers can be. Not only do they directly out Robinson, they also indirectly abuse Toby with vulgar language. Robinson is waiting for college, as he feels that people like Zack and Steve will respect him then. This may be possible as The Other Foundation (2016:38) found that adults aged 20–24 years, the general age for individuals to attend universities or colleges fulltime, tolerate queer individuals best. For the time being, he will continue to reject his homosexuality. He has to shoulder the curse of verbal abuse. He would most probably accept and celebrate it once he is at a university where other individuals are probably more open-minded, or so he hopes. Robinson is an example of a queer individual who performs the role of the masculine heterosexual norm, but is closeted. When his peers hear about it, they express their derision.

Robinson portrays the "hyper masculine" character as he is considered heterosexual at first. He plays sports and is popular, and even though his peers know he is secretly gay, it is not necessary for him to get his own room, like Toby.

4.2.3.5 Ben's uncle

The bisexual character, known as Ben's uncle, only emerges in *Openly Straight* when Ben talks about him. The reader of the novel knows that his uncle has passed away, but valuable information is still given:

...he didn't care what everyone else thought about his life. If it weren't for my uncle, I wouldn't be sure of anything [...] He was basically the black sheep of the family. Went to college. Travelled the world. Never married. When my parents talked about him, there was always something in their tone. Like he wasn't quite right [...] He was the one person who made me realize that it was possible to do more [...] He lived a full life (Königsberg, 2013:249, 264).

Ben's uncle portrays a character who celebrated his life. Even though he was seen as the black sheep of the family, thought of as different, and considered otherwise because he was bisexual, he still lived a full life and supported Ben where he could. Ben's reluctance to reveal his sexual orientation to his parents may stem from him having observed their reaction to his Uncle Ben. He knows that his parents will not accept any sexual orientation other than being heterosexual.

4.2.3.6 Jeff

Jeff is a secondary character that is introduced near the end of the novel. He is also homosexual and is part of the GSA at Natick. Jeff explicitly states that “[g]ay is just one thing I am ... It doesn’t define me” (Konigsberg, 2013:307–308). Similar to Rafe, Jeff does not want to be known as the gay kid. It is unclear in the novel whether Jeff is open about his sexual orientation or whether he portrays a queer character who was born queer or is in the closet. Thus, he is most probably in between the rejection and tolerance stages.

4.2.3.7 Caleb

Caleb is a secondary character in *Openly Straight* who is rather insignificant. It is important though that Caleb is the only other openly homosexual student at Rangeview in Boulder. Since this is the case, many assume that Rafe and he are close friends, when they really are only acquaintances. “Anyway, almost every day someone said to me, ‘You know Caleb?’ – like we must be close, since we shared a sexual orientation. It made me a little crazy” (Konigsberg, 2013:56). Konigsberg may here be trying to inform his readers that the assumption that all queer individuals know each other is false. Caleb portrays a queer character that is open about his sexual orientation and has accepted or is celebrating it.

4.2.3.8 Albie

Albie, who is Rafe’s roommate, does not contribute much to Rafe’s search for identity. I have included him as a queer character since his friends assume that he is asexual. Ferguson (2019) defines asexual as an individual who “experiences little to no sexual attraction”. Asexuality also falls under the queer umbrella. His assumed sexual orientation is not revealed in *Openly Straight*, but only in the follow-up novel, *Honestly Ben*:

Okay, you see, most people in the world take paths that are expected. They go to school, get a job, get married, have kids. Then there are the rest of us. We’re on left-handed paths. It’s not what’s expected. The world would like it better if we didn’t take these paths, because the world doesn’t know what to do with people who buck the system, or explore things that are new. I’m on a left-handed path. So is Rafe. Albie too, even, because I’m pretty sure he’s asexual, and that’s definitely left-handed (Konigsberg, 2017:194).

Ben includes asexuality as a left-handed path. He explains that right-handed path individuals follow the natural order of things: go to school, get engaged, marry, have children, become

grandparents, etc. Since Albie is asexual and not attracted to any male or female individual, he still goes to school, but he will not get engaged, marry, have children and become a grandparent. He will continue to explore his interests either alone or with family, friends, or acquaintances. Moreover, whether asexuality forms part of the four stages of one searching for one's identity is up for debate. Since it is only assumed that Albie is asexual and that this is not mentioned in *Openly Straight*, I will not pay any more attention to it.

Considering the portrayal of queer characters in *Openly Straight*, Littlefield (2016:19) states that "[m]ultiple viewpoints and characters often come at the expense of meaningful character development and dynamic character types, often causing these characters to become caricatures". I do not believe this to be the case in *Openly Straight*. Rafe undergoes Konigsberg's four stages of searching for one's identity because of his interactions with other characters. As a result, Rafe is not a static character. He eventually finds his identity by learning more about himself through others. The same, however, cannot be said of all the characters. There are caricatures as there are definite categories of queer characters in the novel: Toby and Robinson remain at the acceptance and rejection stages of homosexuality respectively; there is no character development. Ben does not remain a static character throughout the novel, but his development is not completed.

Littlefield (2016:21) states that "Sanchez²³ has privileged a masculine, heteronormative homosexual". So, the following question may be asked: Is Konigsberg also privileging a heteronormative homosexual? I believe this question has a yes and no answer. Yes, because Ben and Robinson reject their queer-sexual tendencies to remain or be seen as heterosexual until further notice, and Rafe rejects his homosexuality in order to be seen and be treated as heterosexual. Toby is not considered as popular as Rafe, Ben, and Robinson, as he is not considered masculine and he does not play any sports. The answer could also be no, because Rafe rejects his false heterosexual identity in the end and celebrates his homosexuality, and Toby accepts being gay at Natick from the beginning. He does not feel the need, as Rafe did, to be treated as heterosexual.

4.2.4 The social messaging that emerges from the text

Young individuals are exposed to positive or negative sources of messages, such as homes, parents, televisions, schools, educators, and literature (Zitlow, 2000). Konigsberg uses the

²³ See Section 4.2.3.

literary element, social messaging, from different sources. The section below discusses the themes that are addressed by means of this device.

4.2.4.1 Acceptance of queer learners

After a week's classes with Mr Scarborough, Rafe is informed by Mr Scarborough that he knows Rafe is different from the majority of the boys, that he is homosexual, and that Natick does have a GSA. Littlefield (2016:40) states that Natick is not depicted as a homophobic environment, "the year before, they'd even had a former college football player who was gay come speak", and "...Natick was adjusting to the 'new world order' where gay was okay" (Konigsberg, 2013:4).

Even though Rafe's previous school, Rangeview back in Boulder, "[was an] open and accepting school ... A safe place [...] And no one's head exploded ... And nobody got beaten up, or threatened, or insulted [...] It all went pretty great" (Konigsberg, 2013:2–4), Rafe still wanted to leave the school in order to have a second chance at not having the spotlight on him. Both schools send the positive message of supporting queer learners. However, queer is seen as merely okay, accepted but not celebrated. Rafe explains that "okay" is something that should not be shared: "...is supposed to help kids understand how hard it is for gay people when they are told, like, 'It's okay if you're gay, just don't talk about it'" (Konigsberg, 2013:41–42). "Accepting" is progress towards the celebration stage, but Rafe explains that it is still problematic. Although both schools are accepting for queer learners, they should only share their stories in GSAs.

4.2.4.2 Gay–Straight alliance (GSA)

At the end of the novel, Rafe joins the GSA when he becomes openly gay at Natick (Littlefield, 2016:50). The GSA is depicted as similar to any group of individuals who share a common problem, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The positive message from a GSA is that queer and straight individuals may align and learn from and about one another. Learners also receive the chance to speak from their hearts and to express that which they want to share with other individuals but are too scared to do in other situations. Himpe (2017) agrees that the purpose of a GSA is to give as many queer and straight students a place to meet where they can feel safe, where they can align, and where they can be themselves, regardless of how they identify. Littlefield (2016:50) contributes by explaining that Konigsberg gives an example of queer and non-queer individuals dealing with queer sexuality in an appropriate way. Generally, since

groups have members that share a common interest, there is no judgement, allowing those attending to share openly:

“I [Rafe] just wanted to be me for a bit. Without my sexuality being on display, you know?” [...] “I get that,” Jeff said. “Go under the radar a little. I’m like that sometimes too. Like, why do we have to march in parades and all that stuff?” “But if we don’t march in parades, people don’t see us,” Mickey said [...] “What do you mean?” Jeff said. “People aren’t going to stop seeing gays because they don’t march in some stupid parade. Straight people don’t march in a parade” (Konigsberg, 2013:307–308).

Jeff understands what Rafe did, hiding his sexuality, since he felt like doing it too. There are also discussions about assumed topics. One discussion centres on the fact that queer individuals do not have to march in a parade to be seen or heard. There are other ways, such as writing or making films or drama productions, for them to make their voices known. In addition, non-queer individuals can also march in parades, it depends on the parade’s purpose (e.g. stop drug testing on animals, the power of women, etc.). Konigsberg illustrates in *Openly Straight* that a GSA can be used for queer and non-queer individuals to form an alliance by sharing with one another.

4.2.4.3 Coming out

When Rafe attends the GSA at Natick, Mickey states that heterosexual individuals do not have to come out of the closet as queer individuals do. Almost comically, as if asking a “knock-knock joke”, he asks Jeff, “What do you call it when a straight person comes out?” When Jeff responds, “What?” Mickey replies, “A conversation” (Konigsberg, 2013:307–308). As a result of heterosexism, heterosexual individuals do not have to come out of the closet as it is already assumed that they are straight²⁴. Mickey further explains that,

²⁴ I would like to add that a few years ago, I saw a video on *Facebook* about a woman who spoke about her son coming out. When she provided the information, it sounded like an average coming out story. She explained that her son, who was very young, came to her and asked if he could speak to her. He told her that he had a friend who was not straight and that he was wondering about it. He decided that it was time to tell her about his sexual orientation. The woman explained that she was very nervous, waiting for her son to state that he was homosexual. As it turned out, since her son’s friend had decided it was time to come out of the closet, her son decided to do the same, and he told her that he was heterosexual. Expecting that the woman would be relieved that her son was not homosexual, the testimony surprises the audience when she states that she learned a valuable lesson from her son. If it was difficult for him to come out as heterosexual, she could not imagine what it must feel like for an actual queer individual to come out of the closet. She decided to make the video to inform others about her son’s coming out experience. She said that she wanted to do the same, and she subsequently came out as heterosexual. I found the video very interesting and admired both the woman and her son for sharing their sexual orientations with the world, even if they are heterosexual.

Straight people don't have to think, every time they talk, about whether they are coming out. We do. That might be hard, but that's also why we have to come out. If we don't, it's pretty much impossible to have a conversation about anything beyond the weather without lying (Konigsberg, 2013:307–308).

Konigsberg expresses through Mickey that if one is not open about one's sexuality, one would have to lie at some point. If a person is living a lie, they have to be constantly aware of what they say and to whom they say it in order not to expose themselves by mistake. In this regard, non-queer individuals have it easier since they do not have to come out of the non-gay closet and they do not have to be aware of what they are saying all of the time as their sexualities are already assumed, exposed and accepted in a pre-dominantly heteronormative society.

4.2.4.4 Labels and stereotypes

It is part of human nature to judge. Judgement can occur consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, to inflict pain or by accident. Two types of judging that is relevant to *Openly Straight* are labels and stereotypes. I discuss this further by way of example.

Rafe makes several statements on judgement, "Who the hell were they to judge me?" and "...who was I to label?" (Konigsberg, 2013:21–22). Rafe feels as if others are judging him. However, Rafe knows that he, too, is guilty of judging other individuals. Section 4.2.3.3 shows how he judged Toby.

Judgement can also take the form of stereotypes. This is quite evident from Albie's words to Rafe: "You scream like a girl" and "You're a jock who screams like a girl" (Konigsberg, 2013:82). Konigsberg creates the stereotype of a "jock". It is the stereotype that mandates that sportsmen are supposed to be manly, unafraid and that they never scream like a girl. Albie, though, does not know that Rafe is actually gay. It is also an insult to the female gender, as if their ways are the ingredients of mockery.

Since Rafe was openly gay at Rangeview, he was labelled a drag queen when he dressed up like an 80s rocker chick for Halloween. However, when two football males dressed as females, they were considered funny. Rafe says in this regard, "When the two football guys wore women's clothing, I'm pretty sure nobody called them drag queens" (Konigsberg, 2013:152). In Rafe's case, individuals assume that his "outfit [was] like a political statement, or proof that deep inside [he] really wanted to be a woman" (Konigsberg, 2013:152) – straight individuals are able to accept gay men when they are in drag and acting like women. That explains why

straight men dress up as women to mock. Ignorance results in individuals placing different queer individuals in one camp. There is a difference between an individual who is gay and an individual who is transgender – drag queens fall into the category of transgenderism (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:11–12). The second aspect here is that the queer individual is judged more harshly than non-queer individuals in the same situation. In Rafe’s case, he is not seen as comical, but is judged instead.

Even Gavin, Rafe’s father, falls into the trap of stereotyping. When Rafe is affronted by the actions of other people, Gavin says, “You’re no fag, okay? You don’t owe those idiots any explanation about who you are. They’d be lucky to be half the man you are, Rafe. Okay? We love you. Don’t fight those idiots” (Königsberg, 2013:207). Gavin stereotypes by referring to the boys that verbally abused his son as “idiots”. “Fag” is a derogatory term for a homosexual man: fag is “used as an insulting and contemptuous term for a male homosexual” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020b). An “idiot” would be someone lacking intelligence. Just as Rafe is labelled as “fag”, the boys are labelled as “idiots”.

Carlton, one of the GSA members at Natick, states, “I hate labels ... I’m just me” (Königsberg, 2013:307–308). Königsberg uses Carlton to show that no-one, whether queer or non-queer, wants to be labelled as labels reduce the label holder to a single aspect (Littlefield, 2016:36).

4.2.4.5 Queer knowledge and assumptions

Gavin states that “[t]he universe is infinite [...] I’m just a guy ... What do I know?” (Königsberg, 2013:6). This quotation emphasises that no person understands everything, and making assumptions can result in dire consequences. Queer individuals can provide insight into queer culture. They can create awareness and bring understanding. The following example shows how queer individuals can be confronted by ignorance:

...this ... girl from school ... had chatted me [Rafe] up on Facebook. We talked about normal things..., and then she was like, “If you let me, I could switch you.” I was like, “Switch me?” She said, “Yeah. It’s cool you’re gay. But I could make you bi” (Königsberg, 2013:88).

Königsberg emphasises here that a queer individual’s identity is not something that can change like fashion. Kissing a female will not suddenly make Rafe bisexual or straight. This is again a stereotypical assumption made by most people that given the right circumstance, a female can “correct” a gay man and make him straight.

However, ignorant individuals are not entirely to be blamed as they do not have knowledge of queer individuals in a heteronormative society. This is why education in this regard is necessary. Konigsberg brings the novel to a point where the reader comes to realise that all individuals are just human beings, each in their own right. Ben and Rafe has a conversation where Rafe emphasises this:

“‘I’ve never had a gay friend before,’ Ben said ...

‘I mean, I [Rafe] have. But it’s the same. People are people’” (Konigsberg, 2013:161).

4.2.4.6 Queer-phobia

Although queer-phobia is not central to *Openly Straight*, the issue is relevant. Love Not Hate (2016:6) found that verbal abuse was the most common form of discrimination in schools. Queer learners generally experience more verbal abuse than anything else. Konigsberg expressed the view in the novel that the purpose of verbal abuse is for the abuser to emphasise that the abused is different:

“It used to be pretty bad for him [Toby],” [Ben] said. “The guys could be really mean. I mean, not me and Bryce. But some of them were. And then, last year, this gay guy came and spoke on Diversity Day. He used to play college football. That really changed things. All of a sudden, the whole soccer team starts talking about homophobia like it was this issue that had always concerned them, you know?” (Konigsberg, 2013:102).

When those students who abused Toby are made aware of what queer-phobia is by a gay football player (an idol), they realise that it is a serious social issue and that it can have and probably has had a negative influence on Toby. This retold event reminds the reader of how understanding can combat ignorance. Berry (2018:510) adds that queer individuals can be stigmatised in social and school environments, and they continue to face queer-phobic school climates and the impact of queer bullying. This makes it ever more important that schools, educators, administrators, board members, etc., create spaces that are warm, enriching, and inclusive for queer learners. Queer learners will be able to form their own identity and be themselves in a safe environment. They can share unique stories of their lives. However, sometimes there is little difference between rejecting and tolerating a queer individual:

But they totally ignore him now. And sometimes they say shit behind his back [...] Wouldn’t it be nice if we lived in a world where no one thought being gay was even something to ride someone about? [...] And Toby lucked out. The head of student life got this idea that

perhaps an openly gay kid should have his own dorm room, a single. So he got one (Konigsberg, 2013:102).

Toby feels isolated even though he is tolerated by his school peers. He may not receive as much verbal harassment anymore, but he still feels unwelcome and as if his homosexuality is something negative that the school is simply tolerating. The message from the school is to isolate, not integrate. The underlying assumption here is that this was done to “protect” the heteronormative individuals from the gay boy, possibly as a result of parent pressure on the school management.

4.2.4.7 Bromance

Konigsberg depicts a “bromance”, which refers to two males that have a brotherly connection with each other. He shows how males view this with fear and criticism. Two males – whether both are straight, one is straight and the other gay, or both are gay – that have a bromance is frowned upon in a heteronormative society, out of fear that the two males might actually be in a relationship. Rafe and Ben explain perfectly what a bromance is:

“That connection. It’s hard to replace. I [Ben] can’t tell you how many times last spring I’d hang out all night with Bryce, talking about Cindy. It was like, that friendship, that closeness with Bryce. That was my replacement” [...] “Yeah, I [Rafe] feel in a lot of ways closer to you than I ever did to Claire Olivia” (Konigsberg, 2013:179).

A bromance does not necessarily refer to two males having a sexual relationship. It refers to two individuals who can confide in each other about personal issues or secrets. It is a connection that is stronger than being merely friends. However, this is mostly frowned upon in a predominantly heteronormative society: male intimacy is not manly (Miles, 2015). Hanish and Fabes (2014) found that boys become more active, more dominant, and more aggressive when they play with other boys, whereas girls are more compliant and prosocial. As a result, bromances may be frowned upon as this type of relationship is not active, dominant, and aggressive, but compliant and prosocial – it is better suited for girls or women than for boys or men.

4.2.4.8 Love and perspectives on life

Konigsberg shows in this novel how love and a different perspective on a situation can influence a young person’s development. Consider the following example:

“Thanks for bringing me here,” Ben said softly. “Your family is so open and accepting. I love them. I wish my family were like them” (Konigsberg, 2013:236).

Ben indicates here that his family is not as open and accepting as Rafe’s parents. Consequently, Ben wishes that Rafe’s parents could have been his parents, something that is, in fact, sorrowful.

Another example of a scene where one character provides another with perspective is when Opal reacts when Rafe confides in her about his situation with Ben. “There are so many different kinds of relationships out there, sweetie. The thing that makes one okay and another not is whether it comes from a place of love. Nothing that comes from love could ever be wrong” (Konigsberg, 2013:254). In Opal’s view, being queer is not a sinful act. Sin is everywhere, and any individual can make any given situation sinful (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Opal focuses on the love any two individuals can share with each other. Appreciating love is something anybody can do, whether they approve of queer sexuality or not.

Bryce, the only black student at Natick who becomes depressed for being different (Littlefield, 2016:42), explains that people have lenses that they use to look at the world:

Bryce said it’s like lenses that you see the world through. They shift your perspective on everything you see. They create what’s real for you, and unlike glasses, you can never take them off and see what normal is to other people, you know? Bryce had two [being sensitive and black], and he said it was hard to relate to some of the students here, who seem to have none (Konigsberg, 2013:220).

If an individual looks at the world through a negative lens, they will only see negativity. Contrastingly, if an individual looks at the world through a positive lens, they will see the good there is in the world (The Other Foundation, 2016:37). According to Bryce, ignorant individuals often have a negative or distorted lens. For example, if one looks at queer individuals with a queer-phobic or heteronormative lens, it can lead one to reject or merely tolerate the individuals in question. However, if one looks at the world through a lens of love, one will not focus on the fact that two queer individuals are in a relationship, but one will focus on the love that is shared between the individuals in question. Konigsberg shows how the lenses one uses to look at the world may have a positive or negative effect. Education can play a pivotal role in fostering an understanding of queer individuals and to change or improve negative perceptions of these queer individuals. Since young adults are exposed to queer individuals

more often, queer literature should be implemented in their school curriculum to combat queer-phobia and the hegemony of heteronormativity (The Other Foundation, 2016:43).

4.2.4 Summary

Konigsberg's *Openly Straight* introduces four possible stages through which a queer character goes while searching for their sexual identity: rejection, tolerance, acceptance, and celebration. At first Rafe accepts his homosexuality, but due to circumstances that affect him negatively, he rejects it and accepts a heteronormative, mainstream label, "jock". Even though Rafe has positive experiences in the beginning of his rejection phase, he soon has negative experiences as his decision to be openly straight has an influence on his parents, Claire Olivia, and Ben. His feelings of guilt and shame cause him to move to a stage where he tolerates his sexuality, and though he loses Ben due to his dishonesty, Rafe reaches a point where he celebrates his homosexual identity as he learns that it is not something he can switch on and off.

The queer characters – Rafe, Ben, Toby, Robinson, Ben's uncle, Jeff, Caleb, and Albie – were critically analysed and discussed to explore the different ways in which individuals go through the stages of searching for an identity. It becomes clear that each queer character is influenced by another individual and the given settings. Some characters are dynamic and develop throughout the text, while others remain static and little or no development occurs.

The social messaging in *Openly Straight* was discussed at length, including acceptance of queer sexuality, GSA, the process of coming out, the effect of labels and stereotypes, queer knowledge and assumptions, queer-phobia, bromance, love and perspectives on life. The social messages contribute to the meaning of the text and the positive and negative influences they may have on queer individuals and on other readers.

CHAPTER 5: PREJUDICE AND ABUSE

***Geography Club* – Brent Hartinger**

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the search for identity as addressed by Bill Konigsberg's 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight*. Chapter 5 focuses on Brent Hartinger's 2004 queer text, *Geography Club*. The chapter starts with a short synopsis of the text. *Geography Club* is discussed with a focus on the theme of prejudice and abuse²⁵. The exploration of this text also includes an examination of the experiences and the portrayal of the queer characters and social messaging of the text.

5.2 *Geography Club* – Brent Hartinger

5.2.1 Synopsis

Russel Middlebrook is an in-the-closet gay male who has not shared his sexuality with any friends or family. Becoming tired of being alone and lonely, he decides to join an internet gay chatroom where he can meet fellow homosexuals. He discovers a fellow student from his school on the chat room, and he is curious to meet him, since he has no idea who it can be. The two individuals agree to meet at night at a picnic gazebo so that nobody else would know of their sexual orientation. Russel soon learns that the fellow gay peer is a very popular jock at Robert L. Goodkind High School, Kevin Land.

Russel's best friends, Min and Gunnar, are unaware of his sexual orientation. Russel agrees to help Gunnar find a girlfriend even though he has to partake in heterosexual double dates. Min, on the other hand, is the first friend to learn that Russel and Kevin are gay when Russel confides in her. However, instead of questioning or judging Russel, Min confides in him that she is bisexual and that Terese, one of the soccer players at their school, is homosexual. Russel is flabbergasted when he becomes aware that he is not the only queer student at his school. The four friends, Russel, Kevin, Min, and Terese, together with Ike, a homosexual friend of Min, meet at a pizza restaurant to become better acquainted. It is during this meeting that the five decide that they should meet again. Since another student, Brian Bund, who is

²⁵ This theme also manifested from the studies conducted by The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate (2016) (as discussed in Chapter 2).

not queer, is abused by some of the jocks for being different, the queer individuals fear that they would be abused if exposed. They therefore decide to form a secret club with the title, *Geography Club*.

Gunnar, who is still in search of a girlfriend, sets up a double date with two girls (Kimberley and Trish) from their school. Russel does not want to go on the date, but he agrees since he does not want to break a promise.

Russel joins the baseball team and becomes part of the jock crowd to be closer to Kevin. Soon afterwards, some of the jocks abuse Brian. Russel, who is now a fellow jock, has to join them in order to prove his allegiance and to keep his sexual orientation a secret. Min, though, witnesses everything and is furious. Min suggests that the Geography Club, which has become a support group, should allow Brian to join, but the majority of the members is against the idea: they fear possible consequences for being a queer club.

Gunnar puts pressure on Russel to go on a second double date with the same girls. As Russel is pressured to have intercourse with Trish again, he leaves the cabin where they are and waits for Kevin to rescue him.

After the ill-fated date, Kimberley and Trish start spreading a rumour that Russel is a homosexual student at Goodkind who wants to establish a GSA. As the students now all think that Russel is gay, he becomes an outcast and he joins Brian at his cafeteria table. Brian turns out to be a friendly, courageous, and forgiving heterosexual character.

Subsequently, Brian fills in an application to form a GSBA (Gay-Straight-Bisexual Alliance) at Goodkind to deceive the school about Russel's homosexuality. He figures he is already an abused outcast; it is unnecessary for Russel to become one as well.

A re-vote during one of the Geography Club's meetings takes place, during which Brian is allowed to join. Russel, Min, Terese, Ike, and Belinda, who is a heterosexual student who is allowed to join the Geography Club since she needs support as well, decide together that the club will in effect become a GSBA for other students at Goodkind who are in need of support or who want to give support. Kevin, however, does not want to lose his popularity once his sexual orientation becomes known. As a result, Russel and Kevin's relationship²⁶ comes to an

²⁶ This is a similar ending as *Openly Straight* in the sense that the protagonist's love is ultimately not reciprocated.

end and the Geography Club is converted into a GSBA. Gunnar also joins the club to support Russel and other members who can finally be open about their sexual orientations.

5.2.2 Prejudice and abuse as a theme

Brent Hartinger does not reveal the queer content of his novel in the title. The content of the book is as hidden as the purpose of the geography club in the story. The Geography Club serves as a secret support group for queer individuals. The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020d) defines “geography” as “the study of the systems and processes involved in the world's weather, mountains, seas, lakes, etc. and of the ways in which countries and people organize life within an area”. The name of the club and the title of the queer text is apt since the members of the club get together to share and discuss what it is like to be queer and the organisation of their lives within the specific context of a high school environment.

When one looks at the front cover of the novel (see Appendix C), it depicts an unhappy or lonely student in a classroom setting. The classroom is a type of prison as there are crossed-barbed wire covering the glass door. The front cover suggests that a student, which readers later learn is Russel, is feeling alone, secluded and imprisoned in his school environment – he cannot be his true self. Brown (2006:321–322) also proposes that the classroom space as it is used in *Geography Club* serves as a metaphor for queer closet. It is a private space for emotional intimacy and a zone of secrecy, creativity, safety, and nurturing. The secret support group for queer individuals meet in one of the classrooms of Goodkind High School.

Hartinger (2004) introduces three levels of popularity at Goodkind. The main protagonist, Russel, experiences each level at a different time and, as Brown (2006:320–321) explains, the character's emotional state is expressed in terms of geography. Loch (2010:72) argues that Russel “ride[s] on the popularity roller coaster and the supposed hopelessness of his momentary situation”. Brown (2006:314) also adds that high school life for adolescents is a milieu that they experienced intensely and social and emotional success can be navigated by carefully decoding cultural geographies:

Over the past few weeks, I'd been exploring the Land of the Popular, and the Landscape of Love, but they weren't the only two places I'd visited. I'd covered the whole terrain of a typical high school. I'd gone from the Borderlands of Respectability, to the Land of the Popular, and now to Outcast Island, also known as Brian's lunch table (Hartinger, 2004:195–196).

As can be seen from the above quotation, the three levels of popularity are: Land of the Popular, Borderlands of Respectability, and Outcast Island. The Landscape of Love is not a popularity level on its own, but possibly forms part of the Land of the Popular or the Borderlands of Respectability popularity levels. Figure 5-1 represents the three levels of popularity as a pyramid:

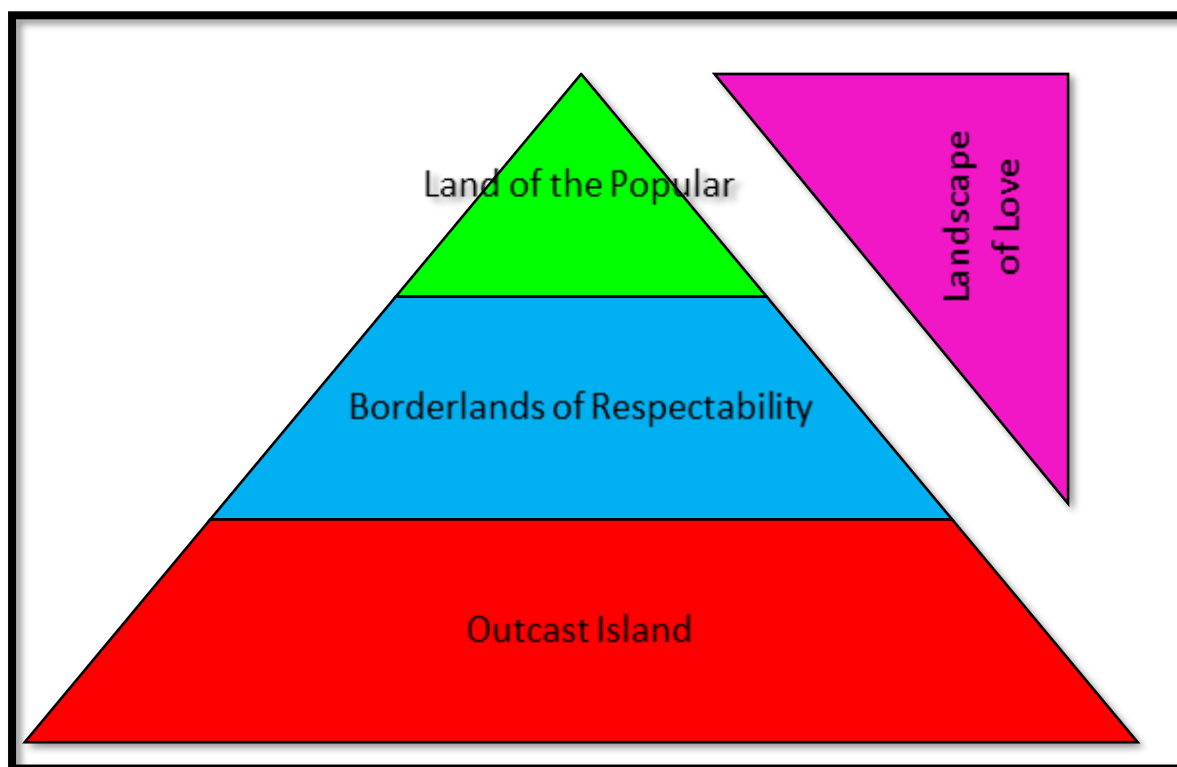


Figure 5-1: Brent Hartinger's (2004:195–196) levels of popularity

Hartinger uses geography as a metaphor for the different popularity levels and for the social landscape at the school. The Land of the Popular level is the pinnacle of Goodkind High School's social ladder. The popular students have a kind of social territory that affects all other levels of popularity. The Borderlands of Respectability level is in-between the top and bottom levels. The word "respectability" indicates that this level is seen in a positive light as one can expect to be respected instead of being abused. These borderlands surround the Land of the Popular. The Borderlands of Respectability is less central compared to the Land of the Popular, but there is a possibility for students to cross over between the two levels. However, one does not have to be popular to be respected. The Landscape of Love is accessible from the central and borderland territories, but not from the third territory – Outcast Island. Outcast Island is at the bottom of Goodkind High School's social ladder. Students who are outcasts have their own island that does not form part of the main land or the borderlands between popularity and respectability. The outcasts are not even part of the mainland; they have only an island that is divided from the rest of world by a sea. This shows how students who are

cast out and marginalised lose their access to the lands of popularity and respectability. The idea of isolation is emphasised by the island metaphor. The students who form part of the central land or borderlands are treated with respect as they are popular or at least respected, but students who form part of the island are treated with disrespect due to their unpopularity²⁷. Image 5-1 geographically represents the levels of popularity:

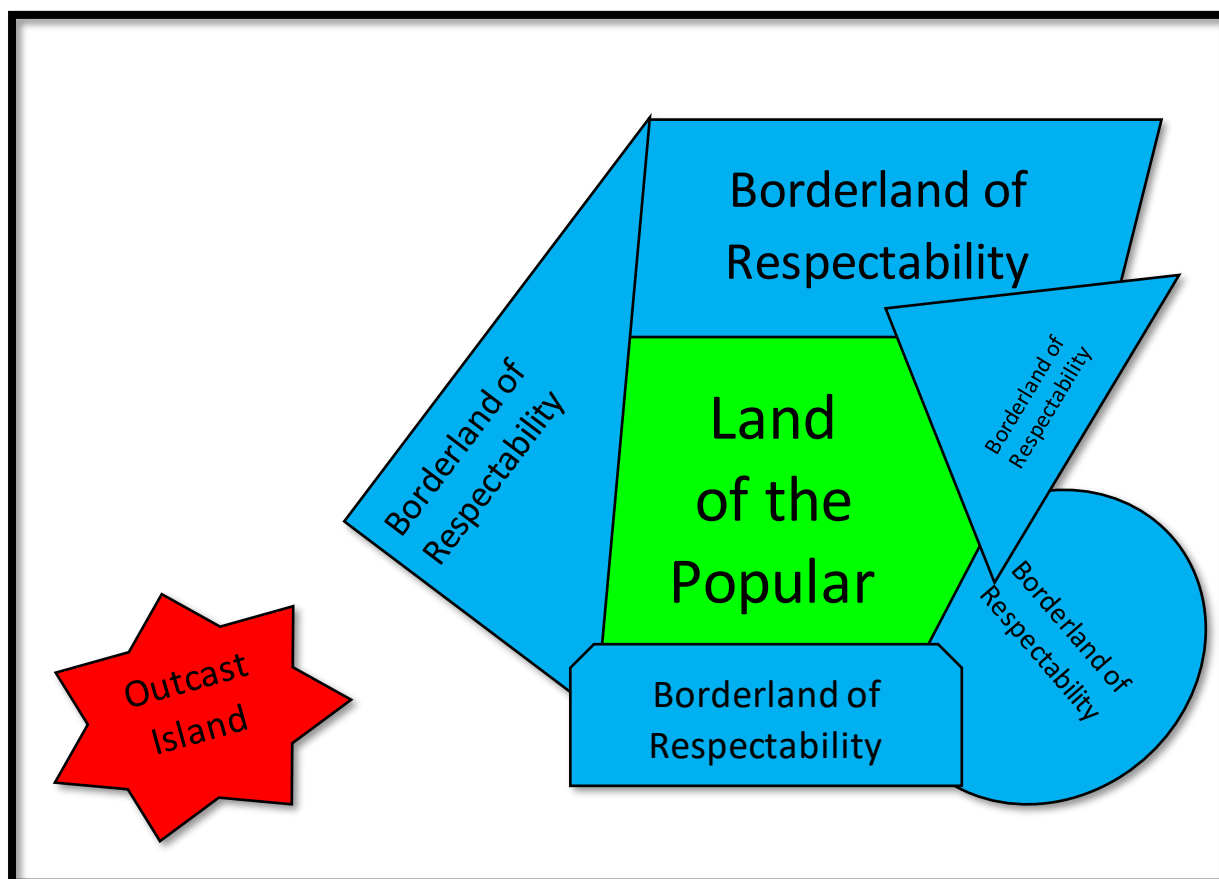


Image 5-2: Geographical representation of Brent Hartinger's levels of popularity

It is clear that Russel starts out in the middle level of popularity: the Borderlands of Respectability (Loch, 2010:68–69). Once he joins the baseball team, he enters the Land of the Popular (Loch, 2010:70). However, when the students of Goodkind High School are made aware of his homosexuality, first through a rumour and afterwards by confirmation, he becomes an outcast and is sent to the Outcast Island (Loch, 2010:71). *Geography Club* in summary features an adolescent male protagonist who faces difficulties that are linked to his

²⁷ Referring back to Konigsberg's stages of searching for one's identity, the labels "rejection", "tolerance", "acceptance", and "celebration" correspond with Hartinger's various popularity levels. The individuals who form part of the Land of the Popular are celebrated; the individuals who form part of the Borderlands of Respectability are either accepted or tolerated; and the individuals who form part of Outcast Island are definitely rejected.

rise and fall on the social ladder of his heteronormative social school environment (Loch, 2010:2, 36).

Carey (2019) explains that researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), in collaboration with colleagues from the University of Texas at Austin, have determined twelve common cliques in any given high school. They also explored where these cliques rank on the high school social ladder of popularity. Gordon, lead researcher of the study, and Anna Dworzecka, provide the following pyramid graph (Figure 5-2) that portrays the modern high school peer crowd hierarchy:

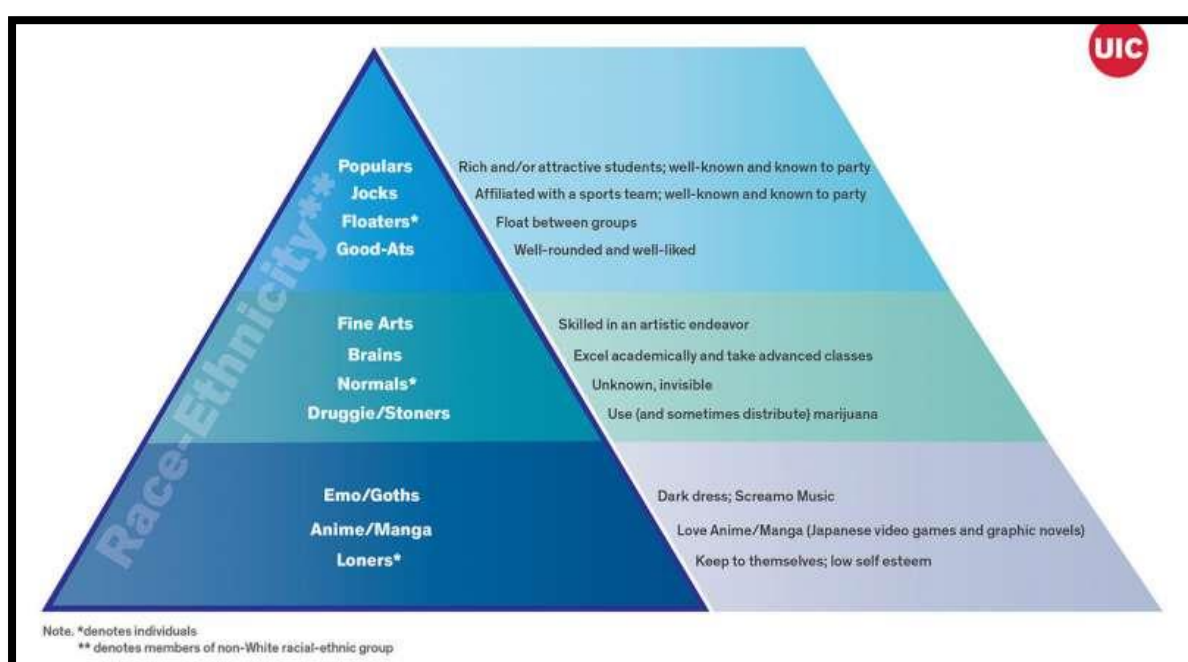


Figure 5-2: Peer crowd hierarchy of modern high school (Carey, 2019)

As can be seen, at the top of the high school social ladder are the populairs, jocks, floaters, and good-ats. These crowds are generally associated with money, partying, various sport teams, and are well-known. On the second level of the high school social ladder are the fine arts, brains, normals, and druggies/stoners. These crowds are generally associated with skills and academia, but also invisibility or substance use. At the bottom of the high school social ladder are the emo/goths, anime/manga, and loners. These crowds are generally associated with being different and alone (Carey, 2019). It is also interesting to note that in each of the three levels there is also a ranking from most popular to least popular. For example, even though the populairs, jocks, floaters, and good-ats form part of the most popular crowds, the populairs are more popular than the good-ats, since they are associated with money and partying rather than being well-known for a skill.

When linking *Geography Club*'s levels of popularity to Gordon's modern high school peer crowd hierarchy, it is clear that the highly respected popular individuals often treat individuals who are considered unpopular badly. The theme of prejudice and abuse as addressed in *Geography Club* is subsequently analysed critically. This is followed by a discussion on the portrayal of the queer characters Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, Ike, and Brian. Lastly, social messages of "queer knowledge and support" and "peer pressure" that are prevalent in *Geography Club*, are explored.

5.2.2.1 Borderlands of Respectability

Russel Middlebrook as narrator makes it known from the beginning that his school, Goodkind High School, is a heteronormative school environment. The school's name is ironic as "Goodkind" – "good" and "kind" – refers to well-behaved students that respect one another. However, the student outcasts are not treated with goodness or kindness at this school. Brown (2006:320) elaborates that the school's name seems like "an ironic appellation made by adults who have little sense or worry about the ways the high school is not a good place". Goodkind, for example, is "rigidly hierarchical, and brutally torturous for outcasts, nerds and nonconformists". Nevertheless, whether a student is popular or unpopular, all feel the pressure of possible abuse: from Kevin Land, who is very popular, to Russel Middlebrook and Min, who are nerdy and intellectual, to Brian Bund, who is an outcast.

The novel starts off with Russel in the Borderlands of Respectability level of popularity, but he explains that he is only respected because his fellow peers do not know that he is homosexual:

I WAS DEEP BEHIND ENEMY LINES, in the very heart of the opposing camp. My adversaries were all around me ...[M]y disguise was holding, but still I felt exposed, naked, as if my secret was obvious to anyone who took the time to look. I knew that any wrong action, however slight, could expose my deception and reveal my true identity ... The enemy would not take kindly to my infiltration of their ranks... [...] Why exactly did I feel like the boys' locker room ... was enemy territory? (Hartinger, 2004:1).

Russel uses words that are usually associated with the negativity of war, such as "enemy lines", "opposing camp", "adversaries", and "infiltration" when he refers to Goodkind's heterosexual jocks. Hartinger carefully chooses his diction as these words refer to soldiers, in this case Russel, who are in dangerous territory, the boy's locker room. They are about to go to war if they are found; in other words, if their queer sexuality is found out, by the enemy – the jocks.

Taking into account the modern high school peer crowd hierarchy, the jocks form part of the Land of the Popular. Therefore, Loch (2010:38) explains that *Geography Club* “clearly lends itself to the assumption that the school's exemplars of desirable manhood are the ‘jocks’, a group of male athletes²⁸”. Russel's homosexuality is described as a “disguise”, “secret”, and “deception” in the boy's locker room. He has to be aware at all times of what he says or does in order to keep his sexual orientation unknown²⁹. Heterosexism is an obstacle at Goodkind and Russel pretends to have accepted the heteronormative norm as he makes it clear that the jocks will react negatively towards queer sexuality (Loch, 2010:55). Moreover, Russel elaborates that for an individual to become very unpopular and an outcast at his school is “to have people think you might be [queer]” (Hartinger, 2004:3). Consequently, in order to fit in and be treated with respect, he pretends to act heterosexually, especially around the jocks. He tries to prove that he is not gay or different but one of them, even though it makes him feel uncomfortable. Due to the circumstances at Goodkind, Russel has to hide his sexuality³⁰. Loch (2010:47) points out that Russel is well aware that a homosexual violation may lead to severe sanctioning by the heterosexual domineering group of jocks. In Russel's reality, “I wasn't one of them, I didn't fit in, but they didn't need to know that [...] ...which was also why I guess I never felt that comfortable around them” (Hartinger, 2004:3). Gordon's (Carey, 2019) modern high school peer crowd hierarchy does not show where queer sexual individuals would rank on the pyramid, but according to Hartinger, they are seen as outcasts. This in itself is significant as queer individuals are compared to groups such as Emo/Goths, Anime/Manga, and Loners that are different and alone.

Love Not Hate (2016:6) and Wright and Smith (2013:1, 9) indicate that verbal abuse (55%) is the most common form of discrimination in schools. They mention that queer learners can frequently and consistently be exposed to prejudice as their queer-phobic peers in a heteronormative school environment abuse them. Russel provides an example of a peer, Brian Bund, who is abused verbally, emotionally, and physically at Goodkind for being different. He is regarded as an outcast. Brian has “acne and he smelled bad ... Brian probably seemed so different that he was like another species” (Hartinger, 2004:21). Brian is teased and abused for believed to being queer. He reveals to Russel that he is heterosexual; he is rather abused for looking different and having a skin problem. Nonetheless, “Brian Bund was

²⁸ The same trend was apparent in *Openly Straight*. The jocks are also popular as they are the mainstream group.

²⁹ A sentiment that is also expressed in *Openly Straight* by Rafe.

³⁰ The reader may notice some irony when relating *Geography Club* to *Openly Straight*. Russel has to hide his sexuality at his school in order to avoid abuse; he does not have much of a choice. Rafe, in contrast, purposefully rejects his sexuality at Natick. He could have been open about his sexuality from the start since he had the choice.

the unquestioned outcast of the school [...] ...he was the lowest of the low... [...] The jocks teased him mercilessly, and almost everyone else watched and laughed while they did it” (Hartinger, 2004:7–8). Here, the crowd mentality is apparent; a fellow student being abused is seen as comical entertainment. The study by Love Not Hate (2016:5) reveals that 55% of their 2 130 participants expressed fear that their sexual orientation might leave them vulnerable to discrimination. Although the abuse towards Brian is improper, the majority of Goodkind accepts it (Loch, 2010:39). Russel, as a result, fears what the abusers might do to him and how the rest of the school might react should he be exposed. Should Goodkind learn he is homosexual, he will – without having a choice – move from the Borderlands of Respectability to Outcast Island. He does not want to be “completely alone” (Hartinger, 2004:11). As a result, he is careful not to display any homosexual behaviours in public in order to avoid being sanctioned by the jocks (Loch, 2010:47).

Russel soon finds out on a gay chatroom on the internet that one of his peers is queer “and it had never occurred to [him] that there might actually be other gay people there [Goodkind]” (Hartinger, 2004:23). To his astonishment, Kevin Land, “Baseball Jock Incorporated” (Hartinger, 2004:20), is the gay peer: “It had just never occurred to me that Kevin Land – Kevin Land! – could be gay”³¹. The reader learns here that Kevin is very popular at Goodkind and he, just like Russel, has accepted the heteronormative norm as “[h]e had a hell of a lot more to lose” (Hartinger, 2004:20). Kevin forms part of Goodkind’s Land of the Popular and he explains that he felt “out of place ... around his jock friends, and that all his macho posturing in the locker room was really just an act to make sure no one ever questioned his sexuality or whatever” (Hartinger, 2004:22). The reader becomes aware here that Russel and Kevin are in the same boat, hiding their sexual identities (similar to Rafe) from their peers in order to remain popular and be treated with respect. The differences, however, are that Russel forms part of the Borderlands of Respectability whereas Kevin forms part of the Land of the Popular; Russel is not considered a jock at his school while Kevin is; Russel is not friends with the jocks while Kevin is; Kevin is on the baseball team and Russel is initially not. Should he be found out, Kevin will not only lose his status and his friends, but due to prejudice, the baseball team will also not allow him to play for their team. Loch (2010:42) explains that the jocks will not accept homosexuality, and if anybody commits such a violation, he will be socially isolated. As a side note, the reader learns that Russel is prejudiced towards Kevin as he never thought

³¹ Konigsberg’s (2013:143) mentions in *Openly Straight* that “lots of people you’d never think could be gay or bi actually are”. Kevin, similar to Robinson, is automatically assumed to be heterosexual due to his manly exterior, popularity, and participation in sport activities. It seems that both Konigsberg and Hartinger highlight that the general crowd finds the possibility that a masculine male character would be queer, very slim.

that a jock could be gay. Even though the two boys are terrified of meeting each other in public, they still risk it since they do not want to be alone and lonely anymore.

Russel confides in Min, one of his best friends, about Kevin and his homosexuality because Russel has a bond of trust with Min. During this conversation, he learns that Terese Buckman is a lesbian, Min is bisexual, and Ike is gay. Furthermore, the two girls are secretly dating. Russel starts to think that there may be more than five queer students at Goodkind, since the school has 800 students.

Five queer individuals are in hiding at Goodkind High School to avoid abuse. One would think that a queer individual would avoid making themselves guilty of queer-phobic verbal abuse, but this is not the case for Kevin:

“Min’s a big ol’ lesbo, huh?” Kevin said. Kevin was gay, but he could still sound like kind of a stupid jock sometimes [...] “I think the word she used was ‘bisexual,’” I [Russel] said. “And Buckman’s a dyke too? Can’t say that one comes as a total shock” [Kevin continued]. I never knew what to say when someone said stuff like this. It was one thing to think it. It was another thing to say it out loud (Hartinger, 2004:41).

Kevin uses terms such as “ol’ lesbo” and “dyke” when he refers to Min and Terese. One should think that Kevin, who secretly identifies as homosexual, would show more respect towards other queer students, but he does not. It seems his “jock” status and his mimicking of his fellow jocks has caused verbal abuse towards others to become a natural reaction. Kevin automatically shows prejudice towards Terese since she is a “soccer player” and “butch”. The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020b) defines “butch” as a woman “looking or behaving like a man”. Kevin states that he does not find it surprising that Terese is a lesbian since she looks more masculine than feminine. In other words, if a female looks or behaves less feminine and she plays sports, she is automatically seen as a lesbian. Ironically, Russel is prejudiced against Kevin when he himself refers to Kevin as a stupid jock. Jocks are stereotyped as stupid as they are sport orientated and sometimes not academically inclined (Orzel, 2016). Russel is used to being around jocks who make queer-phobic comments such as these, but he makes it very clear that there is a difference between saying something like this out loud and thinking it: the former may hurt other individuals whereas the latter does not (Loch, 2010:65–66).

As several characters realise that there are queer individuals at Goodkind High School, which is predominantly a heteronormative environment where queer sexuality may lead to abuse, the five queer individuals decide to meet at a restaurant to talk openly about their sexual

orientations. The restaurant is a frequent gathering place for teenagers (Brown, 2006:325). "Then we took the booth farthest in the back, like we were spies having a rendezvous to talk about something top secret, which I guess we kind of were" (Hartinger, 2004:45). Russel continues to use the military metaphor by adding a simile. The simile emphasises the top secret nature of their sexualities that only aligned "spies" may know about. The five of them also fear meeting in the open, but they decide that gathering in a restaurant will not seem queer. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:5) state that queer individuals, due to legal, medical, religious or cultural misconceptions, can be subjected to discrimination, violence and marginalisation. Nonetheless, they are excited and interested to meet, as this is a first for them all. During their conversation, the reader learns the following:

"We're all alone," [Russel] said ... Then Terese said, "Man, is that true." "Sure can't tell your family," Kevin said. "My dad would go feral." "Mine too," Min said. "I'm not even sure my mom knows what 'gay' is. And even if I could get her to understand that, how do I ever get her to understand 'bisexual'?" "Can't tell your friends either," Ike said ... "Even if they say they're radical. They're not radical about this. Not when they're still in high school" (Hartinger, 2004:48).

The above information reveals that being queer at Goodkind causes these five individuals to feel alone and lonely. Kevin and Min fear coming out to their parents. Min states that her mother might not even know what homosexuality is and that bisexuality will even be more complicated. Hartinger here touches on the fact that the general public is often uninformed about queer sexuality. Samelius and Wågberg (2015:64) explain that it can be difficult for queer individuals to find the correct approach(es) to explain the various sexual orientations. There is no simple or straightforward answer for a question of this complexity and magnitude. Ike further mentions that his friends are not radical enough to approve of queer sexuality at their high school level of maturity³². The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020d) defines "radical" as "favo[u]ring extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions". Taking the provided definition into account, Ike expresses that his friends are not mature enough yet to favour an extreme change, such as queer sexuality, at Goodkind High School. Terese also makes it clear that her friends joke about her being a lesbian, but "I know what they'd say if they knew they were right". She here refers to verbal, emotional or even physical abuse. Goodkind High School is obviously an environment where abuse against and marginalisation of queer individuals is rife (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:5). Berry (2018:505) explains that abuse and neglect would not exist without a means of relating. Consequently, young adults,

³² Hartinger, similar to Konigsberg, indicates that colleges or universities could become environments where queer individuals are better tolerated, accepted, or celebrated instead of rejected.

such as Nate and Brent (who are jocks of Goodkind), who abuse and neglect fellow peers do so purposefully to cause harm, instead of conveying compassionate and non-judgmental messages.

During this short part of their conversation, the reader realises that all five queer individuals have experienced these issues sometime or another. The five individuals make it clear that they can never relax when they are around other individuals of their school. They are afraid of rejection should these individuals learn about their sexual orientation. They have to wear masks in order to remain hidden. Russel silently wonders if “all gay kids felt like this” (Hartinger, 2004:51) and Kevin explains that he submitted to alcohol abuse at school as it is a challenge to suppress one’s sexual orientation and to never really share one’s feelings. He further elaborates on his jock status and the negative effect it has on him:

Especially when you’re a jock or whatever. You probably think it’s great being popular, and yeah, sometimes it is. But there’s pressure. Sometimes, there’s so much pressure, it feels like you’re gonna burst! You wanna be honest and open, even if it’s just with yourself. But it’s hard. Sometimes, it’s just so damn hard (Hartinger, 2004:41).

With the above-mentioned in mind, the reader realises why Kevin, who is a homosexual jock, succumbs to abusing others. The juxtaposition, “homosexual jock”, highlights that a homosexual may not be a jock and a jock may not be homosexual. He willingly succumbs to the pressure to fit in as he wants to avoid being abused by others. Loch (2010:54) agrees that there is pressure to remain popular and to be accepted as one of the jocks.

The five queer individuals’ conversation in the restaurant takes a darker turn when Ike admits he tried to commit suicide: “I was just tired of trying so hard to not be gay [...] I never told anyone that before. I never even told my therapist” (Hartinger, 2004:41). Ike rejected his sexual orientation to such an extent that he was willing to take his own life. The mention of a therapist suggests that Ike is most probably depressed³³. The Other Foundation (2016:33–34) and Nell and Shapiro (2011:13, 29, 46) explain that adolescence and early adulthood are notoriously fragile periods. Young people are at risk of isolation, exclusion, and rejection, which can result in depression and suicide. Berry (2018:502) and Brown (2006:328) agree that queer individuals tend to be at a greater risk when abused as they are more vulnerable in a heteronormative society than non-queer individuals. Nevertheless, the five queer individuals’ conversation has a silver lining:

³³ Another relation may be made to *Openly Straight*. The heterosexual character, Bryce, is also depressed as he is the only black student at Natick – he is considered different compared to his peers.

"If it wasn't for Terese these past three years, I don't know what I would've done." Min glanced around the pizza place, which was still empty. Then she took Terese's hand. "Probably gone insane," Min said [...] But it was like I [Russel] could be completely honest for the first time in my life. We were telling each other things we'd never told our best friends before, things we'd never even said out loud. The five of us may have been alone in the pizza place, but we weren't really alone. Not anymore (Hartinger, 2004:42).

Hartinger emphasises the importance of support for queer individuals. Since there is a point of similarity between these five individuals, they may share mutual support and empathy among them (Brown, 2006:327). Terese and Min have been able to support each other for the last three years and Russel feels that he can be honest for the first time in his life. With their conversation in mind, the five queer individuals grasp that they do not have to be alone and lonely anymore. As they realise that they have more to say to one another, that all of them comprehend what is being said, and that it feels good to have friends from whom they do not have to hide, they decide to start a support group – though hidden – at Goodkind High School. Loch (2010:74) elaborates by saying that the sympathy the five queer individuals have for one another's problems conveys a "sense of belonging" and facilitates "social cohesion".

Russel narrates a scenario that shows that Goodkind is a heteronormative school environment. In their cafeteria, everyone has lunch with the same individuals every day. This reminds one of the idiom birds of a feather flock together. The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020a) defines the idiom as "people who have similar characters or interests, especially ones of which you disapprove, and who often spend time with each other". At Goodkind there are the cheerleaders, the druggies, the girl jocks, the theatre crowd, the lefty radicals, the Christians, the orchestra members, the computer geeks, the nerdy intellectuals, and Brian Bund (Hartinger, 2004:105). Each group shares a characteristic that is frowned upon by the other groups. For example, the computer geeks may disapprove of the jocks because of their abusive behaviour, while the jocks disapprove of the computer geeks because they are disinterested in sports. The reader also becomes aware here that Brian forms a group on his own: the single member of the outcasts. Russel continues to explain that "[t]here was no neutral territory on a high school campus. The land was all claimed, and the borders were solid. We couldn't just cross them at will" (Hartinger, 2004:54). Russel refers here to the various groups that have already been formed. This means that the five of them cannot suddenly leave their groups to form a new group (e.g. GSBA). What is more, Russel states that if one spends too much time outside one's group, one will become an outsider and one's group will not accept one back because the citizens of the countries should be loyal.

Based on Goodkind's heteronormative school environment, queer individuals – by association – express fear of being seen together or of being outed. Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese and Ike soon search for a place they can meet to converse with one another about their sexual orientations. At first they decide to meet “deep in the stacks of the library” (Hartinger, 2004:44) since it was the perfect place of solitude to meet (Brown, 2006:326). If anyone asks why they were there, they could reply that they “all just happened to be looking for a book in the same aisle at the same time” (Hartinger, 2004:44). They have to lie and be secretive in order to accomplish this. Ike is the one who expresses his frustration since they have to meet in secret all the time: “We shouldn't have to hide like this, like political dissidents or whatever. Why can't we be seen together like normal people?” (Hartinger, 2004:59). It is interesting here that he refers to them as political dissidents. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020a) defines a “dissident” as “disagreeing especially with an established religious or political system, organization, or belief”. Dissidents often have to hide since they challenge a norm; a religious or political system, an organisation, or beliefs. Others may not react kindly to such individuals. As is the case for the five individuals, they disagree with Goodkind's heteronormative culture, but they also remain hidden in order not to be singled out and taunted by the fellow students as they challenge this norm.

The group knows they should decide on a place where they can meet in secret and have privacy. They consider the pizza restaurant, the library, and the woods. They realise that they cannot return to the pizza restaurant, because others may notice their repetitive attendance as it is close to Goodkind. They cannot keep continuing to meet in the library, because it is a public space that does not guarantee privacy (Brown, 2006:326). They cannot go to the woods because it is too cold and wet. Min concludes that they can actually start a real after-school club that meets in a classroom and that forms part of the school. However, there are some challenges they have to overcome to start their club: it cannot be known as a Gay-Straight-Bisexual Alliance (GSBA), because they still want to remain hidden. However, the school has a policy that any student may join any club. Loch (2010:76) explains that the Geography Club has a specific code of conduct that only allows the current members of the club to join and restricts the rest of Goodkind High School. This, in effect, is prejudice since they are discriminating against the rest of the school. Kevin has the idea of naming their club the Geography Club, because “nobody would ever in a million years join [...] a club that's so boring” (Hartinger, 2004:63). Kevin here expresses prejudice towards geography. He and the other four individuals might find it boring, but it may not be the same case for other individuals that may enjoy the subject in question. Brown (2006:313-314) explains that “geography” becomes “a textual metaphor for abject boredom”, but in Hartinger's queer text it is also “a spatial metaphor for the closet”. Brown, who is an American geographer at the University of

Washington, explains that geography is sometimes an unenlightened discipline in the USA. As a result, geography illiteracy is perpetual amongst high school students. The subject is often treated “as a sort of intellectual closet”, one that stands for the “concealment, denial, erasure and oppression of queer [individuals] and culture” and also a “material, spatial form of oppression”. Geography as an intellectual closet explains that queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity are in a sense geographical. These issues are not only apparent in the USA, they are widespread. For example, queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity are also relevant in the South African context (as was discussed in Chapter 2). Geography has largely been folded into American schools’ history-dominated “social studies”, where it is reduced to “dry, static descriptions of almanac facts”. The geography in Geography Club therefore serves as a metaphor for a group of people that is reduced, absorbed into a whole where they are insignificant, and shunned by the majority.

The five queer individuals succeed in establishing the Geography Club at Goodkind, but they cannot help to say that they still “can’t shake this feeling that something bad is going to happen” (Hartinger, 2004:82). Their fear becomes a reality when it soon happens that an unknown student of Goodkind speaks to Ms Toles – who is a health teacher – about a support club for queer individuals. The students of Goodkind do not know who the queer individual is, but “[e]veryone’s talking about the gay club and who the gay kid might be” (Hartinger, 2004:95). A non-queer student, Belinda, also wants to join the Geography Club as she is under the false impression that the club has the aim of discussing geography content. The five queer individuals realise that if they reject her, they will not be able to continue with their secret support group as they will not be allowed to use the classroom any longer as all students may join any club. More prejudice is apparent here: the queer students do not want a non-queer student to join their support group. This is ironic, because as the queer students want to be part of Goodkind and not be rejected, they want to reject a non-queer student who wants to join their queer club. They could allow her to join, but then they would have to inform her that they are queer – something none of them wants to do. Russel’s agitation shows when he states, “It’s not fair! [...] Why can’t there be just one place for gay kids, where we don’t have to hide who we are? Hell, straight people have the whole rest of the world!” (Hartinger, 2004:59). Here Hartinger again touches on the metaphor of geographical spaces. Queer individuals do feel unwelcome in heteronormative environments. They want a place where they can be themselves without any prejudice and abuse.

Russel wants to express his experience of non-queer individuals as a selfish group since they want to dominate all landscapes. Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, and Ike realise the importance of a support group for all individuals who are in need of support. They are worried when

Belinda wants to join the Geography Club. However, when she learns that it is a club for queer students, the five queer individuals learn that she, too, is putting on an act and that she has something in common with them: she is a good liar and she has her own problems. She has an alcoholic mother and is overweight. Since she identifies with the group at some level, she promises the members that she will keep their club a secret and will leave them be, but they agree for her to join as she is also “an outsider, a vagabond, with no place to call home” (Hartinger, 2004:139–140). At first, she is confused as she is a straight student. Kevin, all the same, explains that the Geography Club is an after-school club and they are not allowed to discriminate. “And that was how the all-gay Geography Club got its first straight member” (Hartinger, 2004:139–140).

The purpose of the Geography Club shifts to being a place to call home for anybody who feels like an outsider in the school environment. It also becomes apparent that the five queer members have reached some level of maturity as they do not reject Belinda but welcome her into the club. Loch (2010:77) explains that the Geography Club first attempts segregation, but, as Brown (2006:327) explains, the Geography Club can be seen as a world that has “a totality unto itself for its members” as it is a place that contains both similarity and difference, as well as a place that is both experientially utopian and ordinary. It is a complete world with different races, genders, classes, and sexual orientations, and it includes various crowds: the jock (Kevin), the alternative (Terese and Belinda), the nobody (Ike – and later on Brian and Gunner), and the nerdy intellectual (Russel and Min).

Although the Geography Club offers Russel and the other members a place of their own, they still have to negotiate the social world that is the school. The section below examines Russell’s process of navigating the social lands of the school.

5.2.2.2 Land of the Popular

Before Russel joins the baseball team, he feels like “a spy in a hostile territory” (Hartinger, 2004:146–147) when he is in the locker room. He wants to join the team to be closer to Kevin, and because he knows that Kevin is there, he does not feel like an outsider anymore. He now has the opportunity to laugh and joke with his new team members:

I felt this strange sense of camaraderie. It was as if I’d never even been in this locker room before. As if all my life, I’d been dressing and undressing in the cold hallway outside, only overhearing little bits of the conversation. But now my membership had been accepted, and I’d been welcomed inside (Hartinger, 2004:146–147, 154).

The above quotation depicts the moment Russel transfers from the Borderlands of Respectability to the Land of the Popular (Loch, 2010:70), but his attitude towards his teammates may be seen as ironic. His teammates are still unaware of his sexuality. Russel has still not made his sexual orientation clear to them and before he joined the baseball team, his sexuality was a secret to everyone. Russel is therefore still a queer individual in a heteronormative school environment that tolerates abuse, but feels part of their team and not an enemy anymore. So, even if Russel's perception of his teammates changes, his teammates' perception of him remains the same: they still treat him with respect as they believe him to be heterosexual, even if he is popular now as well. In other words, if a boy at Goodkind manages to obscure his homosexuality and to successfully construct a masculinity that adheres to the hegemonic variety of maleness, the boy's social status is not negatively affected (Loch, 2010:43).

There is a positive and a negative side to Russel's acceptance of his status as a jock. The positive side is that he is able to walk in deserted hallways and he does not have to be scared when he hears "loud, obnoxious, male voices" (Hartinger, 2004:146–147, 156) that make him feel uneasy. In the past, he would have taken another route to arrive at his destination, even if it was a detour. He would sacrifice his time to avoid running into jocks. Now, for the first time in his life, he does not have to be afraid. Russel further elaborates that "I'd also been traveling to a place called the Land of the Popular, and the view from there was pretty damn good" (Hartinger, 2004:161). Not only has Russel been accepted by the jocks, he has become popular too³⁴. Not only does he have his new queer friends and the Geography Club, he is also in a relationship with Kevin and becomes good friends with the jocks. Russel refers to his situation as paradise. After only two days he does not want to return to the Borderlands of Respectability.

The negative side is that Russel yields to the pressure to treat Brian Bund badly. The whole school treats Brian like something that is worthless from the start of the novel; when people get the idea that Brian is homosexual, they treat him even worse. Russel initially believes that since he is actually homosexual, he would not join his jock friends when they abuse Brian. However, he verbally abuses him too, even though he hates doing it: "He looks like a mouse trapped in the coils of a python. Look at his face – you can almost see his whiskers quivering" (Hartinger, 2004:157–159). Russel abuses a fellow student because he is different, something

³⁴ Again, there is a similarity between *Openly Straight* and *Geography Club*. Both Rafe and Russel accept the mainstream heteronormative label, "jock". Rafe accepts the label to be defined by something more than just homosexuality; Russel accepts the label not only to be closer to Kevin, but also to become popular and avoid being disrespected. Being a jock seems to have more benefits for whoever has the label compared to other labels.

he was afraid of when he was still part of the Borderlands of Respectability. Hartinger shows here that fear makes individuals do things they will not normally do in order to fit in, to be accepted, and to avoid discrimination. Min, though, witnesses the verbal abuse directed at Brian, and since he is being ridiculed by the majority of Goodkind, she wants to invite him to join the Geography Club. She argues that everyone at the school thinks he is homosexual and is abusing him: "They rip into him because they think he's gay. And we're a support group for gay kids and kids who can relate to us" (Hartinger, 2004:139–140). She points out their hypocrisy. She also states that it is their responsibility to support Brian where possible. Brown (2006:328) explains that for Min, the club must admit Brian, because its mission is to provide support "not just to gay, lesbian or bisexual students but to all those who, because they are in some way 'queer', get violently marginalized in the world". Russel silently agrees with her: "...we were a gay club. And Brian was being teased because people thought he was gay. Min was right. If we stood for anything at all, we did have a responsibility here" (Hartinger, 2004:164). Yet, when there is a vote to decide if Brian may join the club or not, Russel decides with the majority to deny his membership. Not only are they afraid he will out them to the school, they are also afraid that if he joins the school will link Brian, who they think is gay, to the Geography Club and believe them to be queer too. So, Russel, Kevin, Terese and Ike allow prejudice to influence their vote against Brian out of fear. Loch (2010:66) emphasises that the Geography Club's members at this time are regarded as heterosexual by the students and teachers of Goodkind High School, whereas Brian has been labelled as gay. Therefore, they want to distance themselves from an assumed, known queer individual in order to be separated from him and to avoid discrimination. It is ironic that they do exactly what they fear will be done to them in a predominantly heteronormative environment.

The Other Foundation (2016:33-34) found that young adults of all races between the ages of 16 to 19 years old are three times more likely than other age categories to stereotype, abuse and use violence towards queer individuals. There is a scene where Brian is physically abused and humiliated in the school's cafeteria in front of everybody present:

...there was Brian Bund standing by a pair of double doors that led into the darkened school theater. Someone on the other side of those double doors had just pushed him out into the cafeteria. That wasn't all they'd done. They'd also wrapped a bra tightly around his chest, then smeared lipstick and rouge all over his face (Hartinger, 2004:182–183).

The school's reaction to seeing Brian's predicament is not sympathy and empathy, but ridicule and laughter. The students start laughing at Brian and he, already humiliated and scared, claws desperately at the undergarment that is tied around his back and rushes towards the

bathroom to wash off the make-up that is on his face. “And while the makeup was thick, it couldn’t cover the terror on his face. He looked like a tortured four-year-old, and I wondered how anyone could possibly find that expression funny” (Hartinger, 2004:184). The simile Russel uses is quite disturbing as it likens the situation to support for child abuse. Russel also notices that one of the two lunchroom monitors is smiling, finding it comical with the rest of the school³⁵. None of the lunchroom monitors approaches Brian to assist him or to find the two jocks who perform this prank. Equally disturbing, Russel notices that Terese, one of the members of the Geography Club, is laughing with the rest of the students; Min, Belinda, and Ike do not join in the ridicule. Loch (2010:39) mentions that the jocks’ dominant position in the social hierarchy at Goodkind allows for abusive behaviour to take place. If the jocks’ positions did not have such a great influence on the school, the abusive behaviour towards Brian would most probably not have been tolerated. Nell and Shapiro (2011:19) explain that when there is no support in the classroom environment concerning various sexual orientations, as is the case at Goodkind High School, it is not surprising that many young queer individuals experience abuse in a heteronormative school environment. The educators, learners and broader community seem to regard queer-phobic bullying as a trivial offense. The students of Goodkind laugh at Brian and the two lunchroom monitors do not assist him. These students and lunch monitors may feel that it is not their responsibility to intervene and to come to Brian’s rescue as they see him as different and see it as inevitable that he would be bullied.

Soon after Brian leaves the cafeteria, Nate Klane and Brent Ragell, the abusers of the school, round the cafeteria corner. Russel makes it clear that “[t]hey were both jocks – Nate was even a member of the baseball team” (Hartinger, 2004:184). They are regarded as popular and form part of the Land of the Popular. At first, they pretend that they do not know what is going on, but:

No-one in the cafeteria was buying it. They knew Brent, they knew Nate, and they knew what they had done [...] Brent and Nate acknowledged their deed with little smirks and tiny little bows. I doubted they’d get in trouble for their actions [...] ...no one, not even Brian, would tell on them. Besides, they were jocks. Jocks got special treatment (Hartinger, 2004:184).

The above-mentioned quotation proves that Brent and Nate physically and emotionally abused Brian in front of the rest of the school (Loch, 2010:39). The Other Foundation

³⁵ There are many examples in the South African context. One can only think of the many videos of abuse going viral, with all the bystanders doing nothing but recording. Examples include: *South Africa: Man Seen Assaulting a Woman in a Video Going Viral Out On Bail* (SAPS, 2020) and *Shocking rape video goes viral in South Africa* (CNN, 2012).

(2016:33-34) found that men from all races are twice as likely compared to women to abuse and use violence towards queer individuals. Russel concludes that even though he has been getting special treatment since he had been eating lunch with the jocks, he feels alone and lonely. He does not take any joy from Brian's abuse. However, Russel's special treatment stops once Trish and Kimberly spread the rumour that Russel is gay and link him to the gay kid that went to Ms Toles for support.

The next section follows Russel's banishment from the Land of the Popular to Outcast Island. He is rejected by his jock friends and the rest of the school after being outed as a homosexual (Loch, 2010:71).

5.2.2.3 Outcast Island

Russel's popularity and citizenship in the Land of the Popular are short-lived. As he learns from Jarred Gasner, a fellow jock, that a rumour is being spread about his homosexuality, Russel is not even deported back to the Borderlands of Respectability, but immediately to Outcast Island.

Jarred Gasner makes Russel aware that the school believes he is the homosexual student that went to Ms Toles to start a Gay–Straight Alliance. Not only does Jarred have a funny expression when he looks at Russel, but he also says, "Is it true? [...] That you're a fag [...] And that yesterday you turned in an application to start some kind of faggot club" (Hartinger, 2004:193). Jarred's attitude towards Russel and his homosexuality is immediately noticeable: he rejects him and throws verbal abuse at him. Jarred, similar to Steve and Zack, uses homophobic language to distance himself from queer individuals and to assert his heterosexual status (Pascoe, 2007:81; Burns, 2016:4). As Russel becomes aware of the rumour, he expresses fear: "I felt my blood flash-freeze" (Hartinger, 2004:193) and describes it as "the worst day of [his] life" (Hartinger, 2004:193).

Russel states that he is now known as "The Gay Kid" at Goodkind High School:

People I had never spoken to before whispered my name in the hallways. Groups of kids fell silent as I walked by [...] Now they were looking at me with pity or contempt – mostly contempt. As for the teachers, they no longer had glints in their eyes when they talked to me; now they had little quivers of hesitation, like they were thinking, If I'm nice to The Gay Kid, will I be fired like Ms Toles was? (Hartinger, 2004:194–195).

Not only are the students treating him differently, but the teachers are as well. While one would expect the teachers to support Russel, they are afraid instead. Having been rejected and deported to Outcast Island, Russel – again – feels alone and lonely. During lunch he is not welcome at the jock table or any other table, so he sits down at the table that has the only other outcast: Brian Bund (Loch, 2010:72).

Russel has verbally abused Brian before, and while one would expect Brian to reject him as well, the opposite happens. Brian welcomes him to his table, and once he gets to know Brian, he learns that he has “pimples, [a] scrawny body, and a stutter”. These are all aspects he has no control over, yet it leads to him being abused. Hartinger shows here just how cruel individuals can be towards other individuals based on physical attributes.

While being part of Outcast Island, Russel reflects on his situation:

I'd made the complete circuit. But Outcast Island was the end of the line. In the world of high school, you could go from Respectable to Popular, or from Popular to Respectable, but you couldn't go anywhere from Outcast. Once you were there, you were stuck. That was the whole point of being exiled from someplace: you couldn't ever go back (Hartinger, 2004:195–196).

Russel makes it clear that he believes he will not become popular or even be respected ever again. He paints a very bleak picture of the consequences of being outed as queer. He expects to be abused as Brian is abused. Hartinger creates a situation in which there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel for either Russel or Brian. Positively, though, Russel apologises to Brian for verbally abusing him. At first Brian does not know what he is talking about: “Apparently, that kind of thing happened to him so often that he didn't really remember the separate incidents” (Hartinger, 2004:195). Afterwards, Russel confides in Brian that he is gay, but that he is not the gay kid that went to Ms Toles. There is another queer student at Goodkind that is alone and lonely, one that remains unknown. Russel expects the worst, thinking Brian is going to reject him, too: “That you're g-g-g-gay? [...] That would make me some k-k-k-kind of hypoc-c-crite, wouldn't it?” (Hartinger, 2004:195). Brian uses an interesting word to describe himself if he were to reject Russel. Brian states that he is not queer-phobic and accepts Russel for who he is.

As Russel is relieved that his fellow outcast is not going to reject him as well, he is curious to know how Brian tolerates the abuse he suffers. Brian explains that “[y]ou get used to it” (Hartinger, 2004:196). So, Brian is tolerating the abuse as he feels there is nothing he can do

about it. The students will continue to disrespect him and the teachers will continue to ignore the situation. Russel feels like bursting into tears as his fellow peers keep staring at and whispering about him, and he has only experienced Outcast Island for a few hours, whereas Brian has experienced it for much longer. Brian explains to Russel that “[y]ou c-c-c-can’t think like that. [...] You can’t c-c-care what people think. You’ll go c-c-c-crazy. You’ve g-got to save your energy for when people really d-d-d-do stuff” (Hartinger, 2004:196). Brian is referring to instances where food was thrown at him, when he was pulled into the theatre to be dressed as a female, and being trapped in a deserted hallway after school to be mocked (Brown, 2006:320). Consequently, Russel and Brian wonder if their situation of disrespect may ever change, since for the moment they do not see it getting better as long as they are at Goodkind High School.

Following the cafeteria scene, Russel not only learns that he is going to be verbally abused in public, but he learns that Kevin is going to treat him badly too:

“Middlebrook, [w]hat were you doin’ back there? Waitin’ for your boyfriend?” [Nate said] [...] “Either that, or he’s lookin’ for something to eat,” Ramone said. “What about it, Middlebrook? Find any wieners?” Nate and Ramone and Kevin laughed some more. Finally, Kevin said, “He don’t want a wiener—he wants a big ol’ sausage!” [...] There was finally a smile on Kevin’s face, but it wasn’t the one I’d [Russel] been expecting. It was a cruel sneer, the kind that Brian Bund was usually on the receiving end of [...] “Cocksucker,” I heard Nate mumble (Hartinger, 2004:203–204).

Nate, Ramone, and Kevin walk away after they verbally abuse Russel as if he “was an inanimate object, like the Dumpster itself, not worthy of even the vaguest of good-bye nods” (Hartinger, 2004:204). They see Russel as something dirty and disgusting. Despite Kevin’s behaviour, Russel knows he is only scared. If he stops being a jock and his sexuality is exposed, he may become an outcast like Brian and him. When Kevin’s homosexuality is threatened by homosocial situations, he hides his “deviant” tendencies and he meets the heterosexual demands of a jock, such as verbally abusing Russel to achieve a degree of disassociation (Loch, 2010:66-67). The reader also becomes aware that Nate, Ramone, and Kevin are using queer-phobic language as they taunt Russel about wanting a male’s genitals³⁶. Furthermore, it becomes clear that Russel is an outcast as he is disrespected and receives the same sneers Brian usually gets. Russel, after being made fun of for being homosexual, reflects that he now knows what Brian experiences on a daily basis when he is

³⁶ There is a similar occurrence in *Openly Straight* when Robinson is outed by Steve and Zack in the showers.

verbally, physically, and emotionally abused. A person can try to understand and relate to an abusive situation, but the person will never truly know what it entails if not experiencing it first-hand.

There is a sudden change of events the day after Russel's exposure. As he runs into Jarred once more and expects more abuse, Russel receives an apology from him instead: "Yo, man. Sorry about yesterday [...] 'Bout calling you a fag and everything. I didn't believe it, but everyone was sayin' it, so I decided it must be true" (Hartinger, 2004:212). Jarred wanted to remain popular and treated with respect by adhering to the school's view of Russel. If he had objected to the view, his peers may have started to disrespect him as well. Jarred openly discriminates against queer individuals. He will treat a heterosexual individual with respect, but a queer individual with disrespect. When people react negatively to a queer individual who is open about their sexual orientation, they make more of a statement about themselves than anything else (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:33). This is also true for Jared. When investigating Jarred's sudden change of behaviour, Russel learns that Brian has filled in an application for "The Goodkind High School Gay–Straight Alliance" (Hartinger, 2004:215) in an effort to deceive the school of Russel's homosexuality. Jarred continues to explain that "[i]t's Brian. He's the one starting this whole fag club and shit. He's the one Toles was talking about. That's what I always thought anyway" (Hartinger, 2004:215). Again, Jarred uses queer-phobic language and expresses his views on a GSA as something disgusting and filthy.

Russel, who appreciates Brian's action, decides that he is not going to allow Brian to take the fall for his homosexuality. Russel's maturity grows and he decides that popularity and respect are not as important to him as it was before. It is more important to support others and to find support for himself. He knows Brian is trying to do him a favour by taking on more abuse for being considered homosexual. So, instead of allowing Brian to do this, Russel gives up his jock status, his reunion with the Land of the Popular, his reunion to the Borderlands of Respectability, and his relationship with Kevin (since Kevin is not going to make his sexual orientation known), by joining Brian once again at the outcast table. By openly being friends with Brian, he loses his popularity and "respect" (Loch, 2010:57, 72). Furthermore, he decides to start a GSBA at Goodkind High School. Russel also knows that he cannot judge Kevin for wanting to keep his sexuality a secret: "Russel, I'm not that strong! The pressure – it's just too much! I like being popular!" (Hartinger, 2004:221). For many, popularity is very important. Kevin strives to keep his homosexual tendencies a secret in order to remain at the highest peak of Goodkind's social school hierarchy (Loch, 2010:63).

The Geography Club is eventually turned into the GSBA at Goodkind High School. Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, and Ike are the initial pioneers and the original members of the club and they all enjoy the fact that they could get together and share stories and experiences while no-one knows of them. "I [Russel] thought how glad I was to be here, surrounded by smart, funny friends [...] Everyone was taking the club seriously [...] The Geography Club was a kind of support group" (Hartinger, 2004:75, 91, 139–140). Russel expresses that they can all laugh and that for the first time they all feel close to a group of queer individuals.

The Geography Club allows Russel to reflect and to express that he is tired of the lies he is telling and the loneliness he is feeling. The interaction he has with other queer members is important as it allows him to realise that he can be open with others about his inner thoughts. Three weeks after Russel is exposed as the gay kid at Goodkind due to the rumour that is spread by Kimberley and Trish, he finds himself in the same classroom in which the Geography Club used to meet. However, instead of the Geography Club, it is now known as "The Goodkind High School Gay–Straight–Bisexual Alliance" (Hartinger, 2004:215). Four of the original members, Russel, Min, Terese, and Ike, decide to be open about their sexual orientations and to support queer individuals at Goodkind. They are in turn supported by the club's first straight member, Belinda, the school's outcast, Brian, and Russel's best heterosexual friend, Gunnar. This means that there is an alliance between queer and heterosexual students, with the possibility of teachers, such as Ms Toles, joining.

Russel explains that he is still receiving his share of queer-phobic names, even though the school still believes Brian to be homosexual instead of him. Nonetheless, he still believes there are more than five queer individuals in his school of eight hundred students. Love Not Hate (2016:4) reported that of their 2 130, 3% (64 individuals) indicated that they completely hide their status from all around them. In *Geography Club*, there is also a small percentage of Goodkind's students that are keeping their sexualities hidden. The six pioneers of the GSBA do not know what to expect once the students and teachers of Goodkind become aware of the support group, but they are not going to allow queer-phobia to stand in their way: "Would we be banished to Outcast Island? Or would we maybe, just maybe, be allowed to stay in the Borderlands of Respectability?"³⁷ (Hartinger, 2004:222). Nell and Shapiro (2011:6, 33) explain that queer individuals who are open about their sexual orientations, want to celebrate these with those around them. Moreover, coming out usually involves opposing heteronormativity.

³⁷ Hartinger does not provide answers for these two questions and leaves them for the reader to interpret. For example, Goodkind may have become more tolerant towards queer individuals and put a stop to abuse.

As the GSBA is established, the members accept that it may lead to rejection by other students, teachers, and parents of Goodkind High School.

Clark and Blackburn (2009:25-26) mention that a school context can limit the assimilation of queer sexuality. In a heteronormative environment, the politics and power of the majority group (non-queer individuals) overshadows the politics and power of the minority group (queer individuals). Thus, ignorant people's viewpoint on queer sexuality as "unimaginable" and "inappropriate" in the school context, results in rejection. Griffin and Ouellett (2003) add that Christian fundamentalists – such as Reverend Blowhard, a minor character in *Geography Club* – believe that discussing queerness with anything other than contempt, puts innocent youth at risk as immoral and deviant sexual behaviour is promoted. In this view, exposing students to queer sexuality is "wrong", because it may lead to the view that any sexual orientation that deviates from a heteronormative one, is not a sin.

In the novel, the GSBA is a support network that slowly emerges to support young queer individuals at Goodkind. This will allow queer learners to feel more comfortable in their heteronormative school environment. As a result, the GSBA, firstly, has a voice that will be heard by queer and non-queer individuals. Secondly, queer individuals may receive support from the GSBA in terms of the abuse they face at Goodkind. Thirdly, the GSBA may provide queer learners with additional support networks and become more aware of other queer individuals' experiences as a whole. Lastly, the GSBA may contribute to a more tolerant Goodkind High School as far as diversity and human rights are concerned. The GSBA may create a safe workplace and environment for queer learners (Wright & Smith, 2013:9).

To conclude, Russel explains that there is a difference between being alone and being lonely. For four years at Goodkind, he may not have been alone, but he felt lonely: "I desperately wanted to be somewhere where I could be honest about who I was and what I wanted". As a result, the GSBA may allow him and other queer individuals to become aware that "[they] might not have to feel that way" (Hartinger, 2004:14). Even though queer individuals are stigmatised in Goodkind's heteronormative school environment and they continue to face queer-phobia, the GSBA offers queer learners with a space that is warm, enriching, and inclusive (Berry, 2018:510). Brown (2006:328-329) agrees and states that it may be a place where individuals can provide empathy, overcome difference, and experience equality, mutual respect, and social justice.

The next section focuses on the queer characters of *Geography Club* (Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, Ike, and Brian³⁸) and explores how Hartinger portrays them in his queer text.

5.2.3 Hartinger's depiction of queer characters in *Geography Club*

For the purpose of this part of the analysis, I highlight the characters of *Geography Club* as I return to Cart and Jenkins's (2006:xx) types of fictional characters and Sanchez's (2001)³⁹ different homosexual performances.

Cart and Jenkins (2006:xx) identify four types of fictional queer characters: The first are characters who are open about their sexuality or characters who are outed as queer; then there are characters who were born queer or who were aware that they are queer from a very young age. The third type are characters who experiment, knowingly or unknowingly, in queer and non-queer contexts to determine their sexual orientation. The fourth type are queer characters who are present in non-queer heteronormative contexts. *Geography Club*, however, includes a new kind of character, namely a non-queer character that is assumed to be a queer character in a queer text's heteronormative context.

Littlefield (2016:17, 21) explains that Sanchez (2001) portrays queer characters in different homosexual performances⁴⁰: "hyper masculine", "effeminate nelly stereotype", and "in-between". Although there are gay, lesbian, and bisexual characters in *Geography Club*, Sanchez's portrayal is only relevant to male characters.

5.2.3.1 Russel

Hartinger uses Russel as the main protagonist of *Geography Club* (Van Aswegen & Mayo, 2011:61). He is a homosexual character who is afraid, lonely and alone in a heteronormative school environment. Hartinger follows Russel as he meets a fellow queer high school student in the middle of the night. However, Brown (2006:325) mentions that the picnic gazebo is a spatial strategy that allows Russel and Kevin to physically meet safely at night at a place where no one will notice them.

³⁸ I have included Brain Bund as a queer character even though he is actually a heterosexual character in *Geography Club*; Goodkind High School believes him to be a homosexual character.

³⁹ Sanchez's (2001) different homosexual performances are mentioned in the discussion of the queer characters of *Openly Straight*.

⁴⁰ See Section 4.2.3.

Brown (2006:320) analyses Russel's surname, *Middlebrook*. The researcher explains that this surname suggests that Russel is "in the middle of a flowing stream". He can move either with or against the stream, but he is unlikely to stay in one place. As a result, he has to endure turbulent waters as he navigates the "emotional and developmental turbulences of adolescence".

Russel is also portrayed as an "in between" masculine and effeminate character. At the beginning of the novel, he is regarded by Goodkind as a heterosexual individual, but he is not popular, he does not play any sports and he does not have a girlfriend. However, once he joins the baseball team, his popularity increases as he expresses himself as more masculine. He is not popular from the beginning to the end of the novel as his sexuality is exposed, which makes him an "in between" character. Taking this into account, Hartinger also portrays Russel as a character who was probably born queer and knows that he is queer. He is also outed as queer. The rumour may have been spread by fellow peers, but the rumour, in Russel's case, is true. Russel embraces his homosexuality and becomes one of the pioneers of the GSBA at Goodkind High School. Therefore, Russel's maturity level increases as he does not allow fear and loneliness to make him feel alone.

5.2.3.2 Kevin

Hartinger portrays Kevin as the second main character in his queer text. He is a closeted homosexual character with a great fear of losing his popularity. Hartinger uses Kevin, just like Russel, to portray what actions an individual might take to hide their sexual orientation, such as meeting a queer peer in the middle of the night.

Kevin forms part of the Land of the Popular at Goodkind High School. Hartinger portrays him as a character who is very much respected by his fellow peers since they are unaware of his homosexuality. In order for Kevin's popularity to remain the same, he embarks on actions to keep his sexual orientation a secret: he verbally abuses Russel when other jocks are around even though they are having a relationship. He is willing to abuse a fellow pioneer of the *Geography Club* in order not to be deported to Outcast Island. At the end of the novel, he loses Russel and their relationship (Loch, 2010:67). Out of fear, he does not partake in the GSBA at Goodkind.

Brown (2006:320) analyses Kevin's surname, *Land*. The researcher explains that Kevin's surname suggests that he is coded as almost fixed, inert, and immovable. As a jock who enjoys popularity, Kevin is unwilling to expose his homosexuality and to lose his status.

Kevin is also portrayed as a “hyper masculine” character⁴¹. He is regarded throughout the novel as a heterosexual, very popular individual who plays sports. However, Hartinger also portrays him as a character who was born queer and who is aware that he is queer, “I guess I’ve always known” (Hartinger, 2004:20). One can also consider him to be a character that experimented as he had had sex with girls. However, Kevin does not embrace his homosexuality as Russel does because he wants to remain part of the Land of the Popular. Compared to Russel, Kevin’s maturity level remains the same; he remains lonely and alone, and has a fear of his sexuality ever becoming known. Hartinger uses Kevin’s character to show young adults’ desire to be popular can even mean that they would be deceptive about their true identities.

5.2.3.3 Min

Min is another main character in *Geography Club*. She is a bisexual character who emphasises that she would have lost her mind in Goodkind’s heteronormative school environment if she did not have the support of her girlfriend, Terese. Hartinger also portrays through Min the extent to which Terese and she have to go to be with each other:

So we never told anyone. Not just that we’re together. Not even that we’re friends. We meet in this old warehouse down on Fracton. All these years, my parents think I’ve been doing volunteer work down at the YMCA. Twisted is what it is. Really sick and neurotic and twisted⁴² (Hartinger, 2004:58).

Min and Terese lie to their friends to maintain the impression that the two of them are not even friends. Min is also lying to her parents. They believe her to be at a charity, which they would regard as a safe place, while she is actually at a warehouse, most probably a dangerous place.

Throughout the novel, Min forms part of the Borderlands of Respectability at Goodkind High School since she is intelligent and her sexual orientation is assumed to be heterosexual. Min, compared to Russel, Kevin, and the rest of the Geography Club, shows the highest level of

⁴¹ Referring back to *Openly Straight*, Rafe is considered an “in-between” character (just like Russel) and Ben a “hyper masculine” character (just like Kevin). Taking this into consideration, there are similarities and differences between the two pairs. Both Rafe and Russel are willing to reject their sexual orientations for popularity. Both characters also celebrate their sexual orientations in the end – there is an increase in maturity. Contrastingly, both Ben and Kevin experiment with their sexual orientations and they reject it to remain popular – their maturity levels remain the same.

⁴² This physical repulsion at their deception reminds of Rafe’s self-description of “grotesque” in *Openly Straight*. Both Min and Rafe are repelled by their decisions and behaviour.

maturity. She is the one who wants to allow Brian to join their club in order to support him as the school is treating him with disrespect.

Hartinger also portrays Min as a character who was probably born queer and knows that she is queer – she is comfortable with her sexuality. The reader does not know if Goodkind will start disrespecting Min when the GSBA becomes official. The reader only knows that she is one of the pioneers who establishes a GSBA at Goodkind in order to support queer individuals and to possibly prevent queer-phobia in their heteronormative school environment. Min's maturity has an influence on Russel, Terese, and Ike, as they, together with her, in the end decide to no longer allow fear and loneliness to make them feel alone. She helps the other characters develop.

5.2.3.4 Terese

Hartinger (2004:48) portrays Terese as a secondary character in *Geography Club*. Furthermore, she is an in-the-closet homosexual character who is mocked by her friends for “looking like a lesbian” since she is a soccer player and has a less feminine (butch) physique.

Throughout the novel, Terese forms part of the Borderlands of Respectability at Goodkind High School. Terese, compared to Min and Ike, does not have the same high level of maturity as she laughs with the rest of the school at Brian when he is humiliated in the cafeteria. She also does not want him to join the Geography Club out of fear of association. She treats Brian with disrespect as he is an outcast.

Hartinger also portrays Terese as a character who was probably born queer and who knows that she is queer. Terese's growth in maturity increases when she learns to place other queer individuals above herself and becomes one of the pioneers who establishes a GSBA at Goodkind.

5.2.3.5 Ike

Hartinger portrays Ike as a secondary character in *Geography Club*. He is an in-the-closet homosexual character who mentions that he wanted to commit suicide as being gay became problematic. He mentions to the others that he sees a therapist.

Throughout the novel, Ike forms part of the Borderlands of Respectability at Goodkind High School since the school is unaware of his sexual orientation. Ike, compared to Terese, has a

higher level of maturity. At first, he is also too afraid for Brian to join the Geography Club, but when he does not find the abusive cafeteria incident amusing, he changes his vote and feels that Brian should be allowed to join their support group. He never disrespects Brian for being an outcast even though he, too, fears that his sexuality – should it become known – will cause him to become an outcast.

The portrayal of Ike fits in with the “effeminate nelly stereotype” as he is regarded throughout the novel as an unpopular heterosexual individual who does not play any sports and who does not have a girlfriend. Hartinger also portrays Ike as a character who was probably born queer and who knows that he is queer. Ike grows in maturity and he becomes one of the pioneers who establishes a GSBA at Goodkind.

5.2.3.6 Brian

Hartinger portrays Brian as a secondary character that receives much attention in *Geography Club*. He is a heterosexual character who is assumed homosexual in a heteronormative school environment. Goodkind believes him to be the homosexual student who went to Ms Toles to form a support group for queer individuals. Whereas Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, and Ike fear to be alone and lonely, Brian actually is, but he deals with it in his own way. The school disrespects him for being different: he has a skin problem and he stutters. Once the students of the school assume him to be the gay kid who went to Ms Toles to establish a support group, they disrespect him even more.

Moreover, Brian falls into the category of Outcast Island at Goodkind High School. He is disrespected, neglected, and abused verbally, physically, and emotionally on various occasions in the novel. Hartinger uses the character of Brian to show what it is to endure an abusive heteronormative school environment. However, he is determined to get through the school year. Hartinger also portrays Brian as an accepting, forgiving, brave, and selfless character: he does not reject Russel at his outcast table. He mentions that he is not a hypocrite when it comes to queer individuals, he forgives Russel for his one moment of abusive behaviour towards him, and he is willing to take on more abuse to prevent Goodkind from treating Russel similarly. Thus, Brian has the highest level of maturity of all the characters.

Brian, like Ike, is also portrayed as an “effeminate nelly stereotype”. He is very unpopular, he does not play any sports, and he does not have a girlfriend. Even though Brian is heterosexual, Hartinger portrays him as a character that is wrongly outed as queer. This causes him to become one of the pioneers who establishes a GSBA at Goodkind. Although it is unknown

whether the school starts treating Brian with more respect or not, he is not alone and lonely anymore as he now has friends who will support him.

The next section focuses on the social messaging in *Geography Club*.

5.2.4 The social messaging that emerges from the text

5.2.4.1 Queer support and education

Hartinger (2004:49) introduces Ms Toles, health teacher at Goodkind, as a teacher who wants to expose her students to topics that are frowned upon (such as sex, the functioning of their bodies, and queer sexuality) so that they would not remain ignorant. The fundamentalist Reverend Blowhard is introduced into the story to facilitate the start of this dynamic. Reverend Blowhard, who is a representative of those groups who will do anything to prevent queer topics from forming part of the school curriculum (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003), is against discussing such issues at school level and gets worked up “over something as innocent as a teacher talking about contraceptives in a health class” (Hartinger, 2004:50). Consequently, Russel imagines what his and other concerned parents’ reactions will be if they learn of the existence of a GSBA at Goodkind. “The mushroom cloud would be visible for miles around” (Hartinger, 2004:71). Russel’s use of military and war metaphors continues here as the mushroom cloud refers to the aftermath of an atomic bomb – there would be war between the teachers of the school and the parents of the students.

However, Ms Toles continues to speak her mind and her statements are considered to be controversial. She expresses her feelings on sex education, the availability of condom machines in bathrooms, and her rejection of abstinence-only curriculums. She fights the exclusion of topics such as sex, drugs, and queer sexuality that are deemed appropriate for adults only:

“As a health educator, it’s my job to teach all the students,” Toles said. According to Toles, that even includes [queer] students [...] “There are [queer] students at every high school in town, including ours,” Toles said. “Just last week, I talked to one of them about a support group for gay teens” (Hartinger, 2004:91).

The above-mentioned quotation creates a link to Russel’s awareness of queer students at Goodkind. He believed at first that he was the only queer student; Ms Toles, who has more experience, is aware that there will be queer students at the school. Ms Toles wants to teach

her students more; she does not want to be limited by abstinence-only curriculums. She is therefore considered a representative of teachers who are progressive in their thoughts. After Ms Toles' interview is published in the *Goodkind Gazette*, Russel makes it clear that she lost her job at the school: "If I'm nice to The Gay Kid, will I be fired like Ms Toles was?" (Hartinger, 2004:194–195). This perhaps leaves the other teachers afraid to speak their minds as they can lose their jobs too. Clark and Blackburn (2009:25) mention that queer sexuality, from a teacher's point-of-view, may seem impossible. Due to limited or a lack of queer-sexuality training, as well as teaching in a heteronormative environment, it can become too much of a challenge for teachers to address queer-phobia and hegemonic heterosexism.

Goodkind High School is a space that leaves room for prejudice and abuse due to queer individuals being regarded as different and "abnormal" and something that a heteronormative society needs protection from (The Other Foundation, 2016:9). Ms Toles attempts to create awareness and understanding of queer individuals in her classroom by mentioning the possibility of a support group in order to inform and possibly change negative perceptions, and to counteract discrimination (Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:10).

5.2.4.2 Peer pressure

Since Gunnar, Russel's best friend, longs to have a girlfriend and Russel promises he will support him, Russel cannot refuse to go on a double date with Kimberley and Trish. During the date, when Trish wants to have sex with Russel, he explains the difficult situation he is in. When Trish does not understand that Russel does not want to have sex with her, she questions his sexual orientation: "Are you gay or something?" (Hartinger, 2004:118). Her reaction shows her very rudimentary understanding of abstaining. This causes Russel to be uncertain of whether he should turn her down or not, because he is afraid if he does so, Trish and the rest of his school will realise he is homosexual. In the end, Russel lies to Trish in order to avoid having sex:

"It's not you!" I said quickly. "It's just...you were right. I'm, like, you know, a virgin. And I always thought my first time would be different. Special, I guess. Not in the front seat of a car. I really like you, but if we ever do this, I think it should be special (Hartinger, 2004:126).

Russel does not want to have intercourse with Trish, because he does not experience any emotional feelings towards her. He also wants his first time having intercourse to be meaningful. Kevin afterwards explains to Russel that it seems as if Trish was trying to pressure him into having sex while he did not want to.

After this, Gunnar makes the statement that he does not remember Russel ever showing attraction to females. Russel becomes stressed as his sexuality is being questioned. "Suddenly, I was sweating, but not from the racquetball. This was the cold, clammy sweat of fear" (Hartinger, 2004:154). Russel believes that Trish may have told other individuals that he is gay. Gunnar, on the other hand, also tells Russel that "[i]t just seems funny. I mean, a big baseball star like you, but you don't have a girlfriend? Don't you think that's funny? I think people might think that's funny" (Hartinger, 2004:154). Russel, again, experiences pressure. Gunnar is so desperate to find a girlfriend that he plants fear and insecurity in Russel's head about other individuals finding it strange that he does not have a girlfriend. It seems to suggest that if a boy does not have a girlfriend at Goodkind, he is not considered heterosexual. Loch (2010:43) states that having a girlfriend is the ideal heterosexual disguise for boys at Goodkind, as their attraction to the opposite sex is affirmed. They prove that they are heterosexual, which allows a higher position in the social hierarchy of the school.

Once Russel's sexual orientation is made public by means of a rumour, Gunnar confides in him that he has known for approximately five years that Russel is gay: "Well, I'm not a complete idiot! [...] I mean, it's kind of obvious. Animated Disney musicals?" (Hartinger, 2004:83, 208). The reader becomes aware here that Gunnar has known for a long period that Russel is homosexual, and despite this knowledge, he pressured him into going out with a girl. Gunnar also shows prejudice towards Russel and the fact that he is homosexual. The suggestion here is that heterosexual males may not enjoy Disney animations as it is not considered manly; he alludes to the stereotype that queer men like musicals. Gunnar, however, does not care that Russel is homosexual; he remains his friend.

The Other Foundation (2016:41) reports that many heterosexual individuals do not have or barely have contact with queer individuals. This can have a negative influence on individuals' perceptions of queer individuals. Nevertheless, Gunnar has been friends with Russel from a very young age, and he has suspected for five years that Russel is homosexual. He has been exposed to a queer individual and therefore has a positive influence on his perception and the acceptance of queer individuals.

5.3 Summary

Hartinger's *Geography Club* introduces three possible popularity stages at Goodkind: Land of the Popular, Borderlands of Respectability, and Outcast Island. As the theme of prejudice and abuse was critically analysed and discussed it became evident that the inhabitants of the Land of the Popular, mostly, and the Borderlands of Respectability, abuse the inhabitants of Outcast

Island. The reader is exposed to Goodkind's abuse through Russel's first-person narrative. At first, he forms part of the Borderlands of Respectability, but once he joins the baseball team, his popularity increases to the Land of the Popular. However, when he is outed as homosexual, his popularity takes a turn for the worst and he ends up at Outcast Island. One becomes aware how various students at Goodkind are treated and abused depending on their popularity level and sexual orientation. Whereas heterosexuals are treated with respect, queer students are at best ignored at worst and abused physically, verbally and emotionally.

Russel is carried through his experiences on each level of popularity by four other queer individuals – Kevin, Min, Terese and Ike – with which he has formed a secret support group that only the five of them may join. However, soon Belinda, a heterosexual student, and Brian, the school's outcast, are allowed to join as they qualify for and need support. When the abusive behaviour at Goodkind increases, Russel, Min, Terese, Ike, Belinda, Brian, and Gunnar form a GSBA to support all learners who are in their queer-phobic, heteronormative school environment.

The main characters – Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, Ike, and Brian – were also critically analysed and discussed. The fear that each queer individual experiences in a heteronormative school environment is explored, as well as what they are willing to do not to be alone, not to be lonely, not to lose their popularity, and to be treated with respect.

The social messages of *Geography Club* – queer support and education, and peer-pressure – were also explored. The character of Ms Toles foregrounds the fact that queer education is very important to inform ignorant individuals and that it is relevant to Goodkind's students. The negative influence that peer pressure may have on fellow peers is also explored by means of the character of Gunnar.

CHAPTER 6: RELIGIOUS ZEALOTRY

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit – Jeanette Winterson

6.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an analysis of Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. The discussion is preceded by a short synopsis of the text. Thereafter, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is discussed with a focus on the theme, religious zealotry⁴³. This is followed by an exploration of the experiences and portrayal of the queer characters and the social messages that emerge from the text.

6.2 *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson

6.2.1 Synopsis

Jeanette, an adopted child, grows up in a very strict religious household as one of God's elect. Her mother, a religious zealot, sees the world and its inhabitants either as friends or enemies. Jeanette explains what their household is like: praying, listening to religious shows and stories, pop quizzes on the Bible, and writing reports for her mother's congregation. Early on in the novel, there is a foreshadowing event when a gypsy woman predicts that Jeanette will never marry.

The reader learns about Jeanette's adoption. Her mother wanted to find a child whom she could train to become a missionary of God. Jeanette is raised with an awareness of a world that lives in sin and that needs change. Her mother introduces her to Pastor Finch, a visiting preacher who is also a religious zealot and who speaks to her about good and evil.

Jeanette receives homeschooling from her mother. The curriculum basically only entails the Bible; she is not allowed to go to public school due to her mother's fear of sex and sin. She believes that a public school will have a negative influence on Jeanette. However, the government soon intervenes as her mother's teachings are not considered adequate.

⁴³ This theme also emerges from the studies conducted by The Other Foundation, the Atlantic Philanthropies, and Love Not Hate (as discussed in Chapter 2). Religious zealotry refers to a religious individual who has very strong and radical opinions about religion and who forces them on other individuals – whether they are religious or non-religious (*Cambridge English Dictionary*, 2020h).

There is an occurrence where Jeanette loses her hearing and the church believes her to be in a state of rapture. However, Mrs Jewsbury, another member of the church, realises that Jeanette is deaf and needs surgery. After the surgery, Jeanette's mother does not seem overly concerned as she barely visits her in the hospital and leaves her a bag of oranges, as oranges were considered the only fruit. Her mother's attention is rather needed at the church. When Jeanette has to stay with Elsie after she is discharged from hospital, Jeanette learns from Elsie that there is more to the world than what Jeanette knows.

When Jeanette goes to school, she reflects her mother's religious zealotry. Parents complain that their children get nightmares because of the stories Jeanette tells about hell. The school determines that Jeanette's religious behaviour is too excessive, but her mother is proud.

During a sermon on perfection, Jeanette realises that she has developed her first theological disagreement. She believes perfection does not derive from flawlessness, but from one's character. She also starts questioning the relationship and marriage between men and women.

Jeanette notices a girl, Melanie, and soon starts to form a bond with her. As their friendship grows, they spend one night together, believing it to be natural and true love. When Jeanette confides in her mother about her affection for Melanie, the two girls are outed in the church for being lesbian and committing to Satan's sins. Jeanette defends her love for Melanie, but Melanie immediately repents her sins.

When Jeanette returns home, there is an intervention where the church members pray for Jeanette. When she does not repent, the pastor instructs her mother to lock her away without any food and light. This lack of food and isolation in the dark causes Jeanette to become delusional and sees an orange demon that she thinks is inhabiting her. In order to escape her isolation and to receive food, she falsely repents and learns that Melanie has been sent away.

As Jeanette starts preaching more at church, her eye catches a new convert, Katy. Katy and Jeanette also form a bond that later develops into a relationship. Jeanette again believes their love to be true and she continues to preach at church. She will not succumb like Melanie and be forced to become heterosexual, to marry a man, and bare his children. However, when her mother finds out that Jeanette has committed this "sin" yet again, she is asked to leave the house. Jeanette realises she loves God and her church, but that she does not want to become a missionary and that she is attracted to the same sex.

Jeanette leaves her hometown and returns for a visit over Christmas. She reflects that she still loves God, but she does not love his false servants. Her mother also reaches the conclusion that oranges are not the only fruit anymore when she prepares pineapples for converts of African descent. She comes to accept Jeanette's homosexuality to some extent.

6.2.2 Religious zealotry as a theme

The title of the novel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, reflects two attitudes. First, something or someone has singled out oranges as the only fruit. This is a metaphor for Jeanette's mother who has singled out heterosexuality to be the only acceptable sexual orientation. Her attitude is that only church-abiding heterosexuals who are pure can obey God and be welcome at church (Chen, 2014:23). The second part of the metaphor supposes that something or someone else disagrees with this viewpoint. There are many fruits and oranges are just another type of fruit that fall into the category of fruits overall (Chen, 2014:23). "Oranges" therefore refer to heterosexual Christians whereas "fruits" include the various sexual orientations – homosexuality, bisexuality, transgenderism, intersexuality, and additional queer sexualities (French, 1999:234; Chen, 2014:24–25). Readers take from the novel that heterosexuality is not the only sexual orientation in the world or the only correct option, and that queer-sexuals also obey and love God and go to church.

When one looks at the original front cover of the novel (see Appendix D), one notices two characters. It seems the character on the left represents Jeanette whereas the character on the right is her mother. Both of them are holding oranges, but Jeanette's mother is also holding an orange above her head with a zealous expression, as if it is very important. Jeanette, though, looks at her mother with pretentiousness, questioning the singled-out status of oranges. The cover also shows various fruits (apples, grapes, and cherries) aligned with the orange Jeanette's mother is holding. This signifies that even though Jeanette's mother has singled out heterosexuality, the other fruits are there and cannot be ignored.

The title and the front cover of the novel reveals that Jeanette's mother has singled out heterosexual Christians while Jeanette is questioning the status quo. Chen (2014:24–25) and Xhonneux (2012:109) therefore explain that *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is a coming out and coming-of-age novel describing Jeanette's struggles to accept her true self and desires and to break free of the church and her mother's religious zealotry.

Jeanette Winterson wrote *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* in the form of a semi-autobiographical fictional novel based on a combination of true-life events and mythical stories

that are based on the first eight books of the Bible's Old Testament. She portrays in it the influence her mother's religious zealotry had on her while she came of age (Çeker, 2016:56; Al-Shara, 2015:238; Chen, 2014:34; Wang & Yin, 2016:20). The novel deconstructs religious stories, but it does not force its interpretation on the reader. When Jeanette reflects, she provides an interpretation of her understanding of the world and its inhabitants that may be close-minded and hypocritical (Al-Shara, 2015:243–244), and the silencing damage (the soft-voiced violence of sexuality) that may be done to a group of individuals (such as queer individuals) that do not abide to the heterosexual norm (Merleau, 2003:90). Since it is implied that human reason – through a rigid way of thinking – is both limited and harmful (French, 1999:231), imagination becomes a counter force to the dehumanising effects of hyperrationality as it contains more fluid conceptualisations of the world, its inhabitants, and the self. In other words, imagination may be used to act against human reasoning. Instead of failing to identify nuances and ideocracies, which may result in irrationality, it can be identified instead and lead to rationality.

Çeker (2016:56) states that *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* mainly recounts the story of Jeanette's evolution from "an obedient religious follower to a 'critical defiant' who attempts to make sense of the world, its inhabitants, and her sexual orientation". Çeker (2016) identifies four stages in which Jeanette deals with her mother's religious zealotry: obedience, discovery, critical defiance, and spirituality. The following process diagram illustrates Jeanette's evolution with respect to religion:

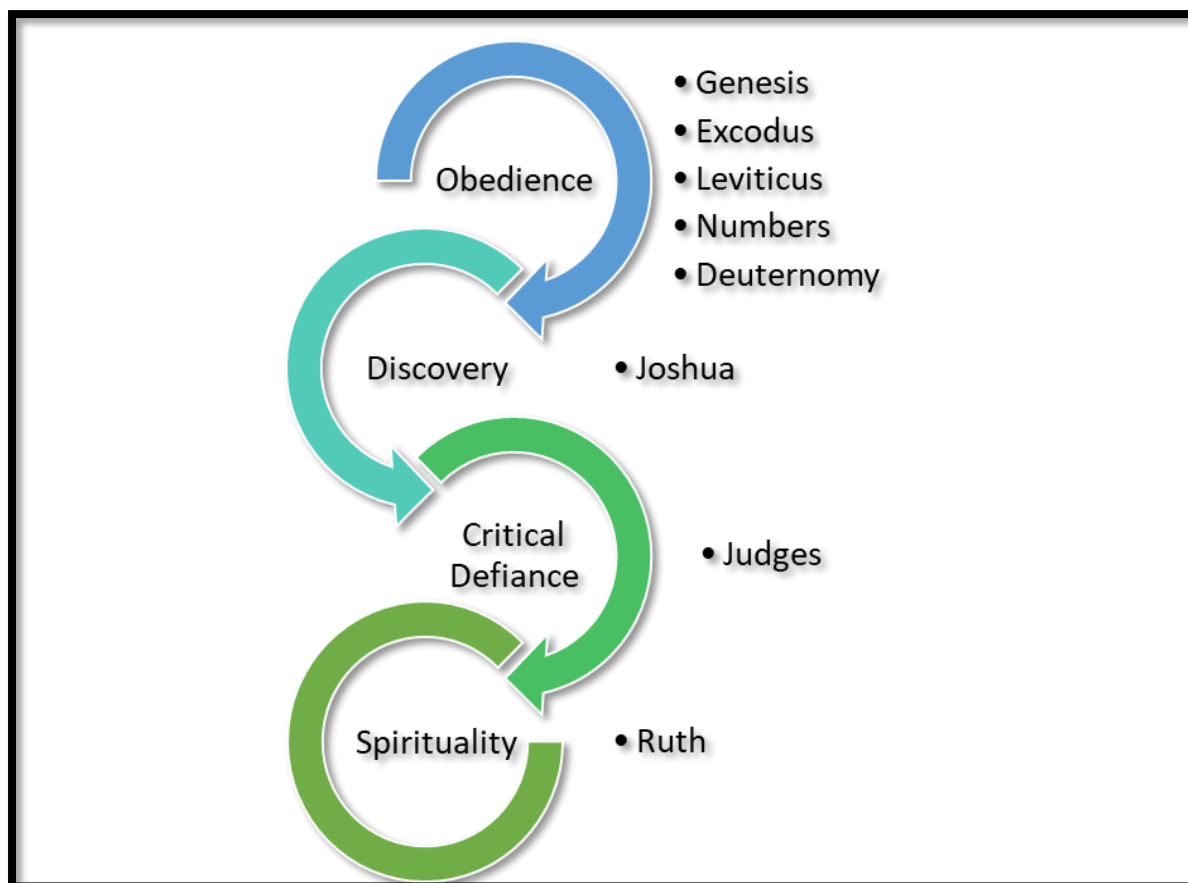


Figure 6-1: Jeanette's evolution with respect to religion (Çeker, 2016).

The first five chapters of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* – “Genesis”, “Exodus”, “Leviticus”, “Numbers”, and “Deuteronomy” – tell the story of Jeanette's upbringing as an obedient religious individual who only knows the world and its inhabitants through her mother's religious teachings. Though Jeanette realises that she is developing feelings like love for the same sex, she remains obedient (Çeker, 2016:57). The sixth chapter, “Joshua”, narrates Jeanette's full discovery and realisation of her homosexuality and how this discovery affects her view of the world (Çeker, 2016:57). The seventh chapter, “Judges”, depicts Jeanette's repetition of her accused homosexual sin and her critical defiance of the power of the church (Çeker, 2016:57). The last chapter, “Ruth”, narrates Jeanette's return as a spiritual individual who longs for God: she still believes in Him, but because of the religious views that are forced on her, her relationship with God is negatively affected. She questions the existence of God, but concludes that she believes in pure love. This restores her belief in God as something beyond ordinary human individuals and something holy.

The next section focuses on the theme of religious zealotry in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and the continuous effect it has on Jeanette's development with regard to her religion: obedience, discovery, critical defiance, and spirituality.

6.2.2.1 Obedience

In the Bible (1983), the laws of the Old Testament are given down by the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Chen (2014:16–17) explains that these books detail God's covenant with his people. When this religious covenant is broken, it displays his covenant people's lack of faith in Him. Similarly, in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette's relationship with her authoritative mother, who represents a God-like figure, is broken when Jeanette disobeys the covenant between them by entering into a homosexual relationship with Melanie. In effect, Jeanette's relationship with God also breaks down.

6.2.2.1.1 Genesis

"Genesis" is the first book of the Old Testament of the Bible (1983). The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020c) defines the word "genesis" as "the origin of something, when it is begun or starts to exist". The dictionary also defines the term in the Biblical context: "the first book of the Bible, which describes how God made the world". Not only does "genesis" refer to the origin of something or someone, but it also refers to the origin of the world. Chen (2014:17) explains that "Genesis" contains four sections: the focus on the origin of the world, the Fall and the spread of sin, the flood that almost exterminated human kind, and the focus on God's promise to Abraham that he will be followed by many blessed generations (the start of the covenant). Through Abraham, God promises salvation to the earth and he blesses his people. Humans subsequently begin to trust in God and form a relationship with Him.

In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, the first chapter, "Genesis", establishes the origin of the novel as well: Jeanette is adopted and raised by a religious family, living under the pressure of a zealous mother and "laissez faire" father. Jeanette is home-schooled by her mother, and this mainly involves religious teachings. She is forced by the government to go to a public school. When comparing the progression of the Bible to progression of Jeanette's life, this chapter in the novel not only narrates the origin of Jeanette's world and life, it also tells about the termination of her homeschooling, which corresponds with Noah's flood (Chen, 2014:17). Furthermore, Jeanette's mother symbolises Abraham as Jeanette forms a relationship and a covenant with God through her mother. The word of God is thus spread.

The reader becomes aware that Jeanette has lived for fourteen years as one of God's elect, and that her mother and the church are determined to rid the world of the heathens and demons who populate the world (Freeman, 1989:21). The religious zealotry is evident from the descriptions of the evangelical community that surrounds Jeanette's mother: only their way of thinking, their choices in life (such as literature and music), and their religion are good. Jeanette's mother, especially, views the world in black and white terms; no other colours are allowed (Çeker, 2016:57). Jeanette says, "She was Old Testament through and through" (Winterson, 1985:6). She rejects anything that is modern or different. Bijon (2008:322) agrees that Jeanette's mother denies the possibility of subtleties and shades. Individuals who think and behave differently are considered enemies:

There were friends and there were enemies.
Enemies were: The Devil (in his many forms)
 Next Door
 Sex (in its many forms)
 Slugs
Friends were: God
 Our dog
 Auntie Madge
 The Novels of Charlotte Brontë
 Slug pellets
and me (Winterson, 1985:5).

Jeanette's mother believes in binaries – things are good/right (friends) or bad/wrong (enemies), and since there is no space for nuanced views or feelings, she forces her view upon others, especially Jeanette. Jeanette's mother sees God, their dog, Auntie Madge, Charlotte Brontë's⁴⁴ novels, slug pellets, and to some extent, Jeanette, as fiends. These "good" forces are in a power struggle against the enemies – the Devil, their fornicating next-door neighbours, sex, and slugs (Darwin's Theory of Evolution) (Önal, 2007:20–21; Yakut, 2011:44). Heterosexuality falls under "friends" while queer sexuality falls under "enemies". In the hegemonic heteronormative community, the desire of heterosexuals is more natural and legitimate than the desire of queer individuals (French, 1999:250).

⁴⁴ Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel, *Jane Eyre*, is the story of a young governess who is independent and overcomes hardships while remaining true to her principles (*Britannica*, 2020). Jeanette's mother most probably relates to Jane Eyre as she rejects a former boyfriend, Pierre, to return to her true principles and is exiled from her home for marrying the wrong man. She, too, becomes independent, and faces and overcomes hardships to remain true to her principles.

Nell and Shapiro (2011:12) explain that young individuals have not yet been born into a new age of diversity celebration. Young individuals, both queer and non-queer, are still exposed to a conservative and traditional society. Rejection, begrudging tolerance, and the exclusion of queer individuals contribute to queer-phobia and heteronormativity and has remained part of the broader landscape. "She [Jeanette's mother] was wrong, as far as we [Jeanette and the rest of the world] were concerned, but right as far as she was concerned, and really, that's what mattered" (Winterson, 1985:8). Bijon (2008:323), Wang and Yin (2016:20), and Yakut (2011:iv, 44) explain that Jeanette provides a layout that graphically represents her mother's closed binary system according to which heterosexuals are in a power struggle with queer-sexuals. One can either be a woman or a man, but there is no place for queer-sexuals in Jeanette's mother's world.

During Jeanette's early education that is based on only religious matter, she is made aware that her family and church for instance reject alcohol, barely tolerates married heterosexual sex, and that passion and desire are regarded as sins (Çeker, 2016:57; Yakut, 2011:68). Although Jeanette's mother and her church believe their attitude towards the world is for the greater good, the politics of this evangelical church have negative implications: "It is not possible to change anything until you understand the substance you wish to change ... and to change something you do not understand is the true nature of evil" (Winterson, 1985:182). Jeanette makes it clear that strict and intolerant attitudes towards individuals that are considered different in a hegemonic heteronormative society result in these individuals feeling excluded and abnormal. Jeanette rather sees this intolerance, miscomprehension and judgement as the true evil, instead of queer sexuality. The church and her mother do not understand queer sexuality, but they want to change it (Çeker, 2016:58).

The Other Foundation (2016:29) mentions that factors such as religion, inner conflict, rejection, and violence have a negative influence on queer individuals' self-identity and their efforts to find their place in society. Çeker (2016:58) and Yakut (2011:47) further explain that the church derives absolute power from the success of naming things: "Naming meant power. Adam has named the animals and the animals came at his call" (Winterson, 1985:182). Similarly, the church decides what is good/normal/virtuous and what is evil/abnormal/sin by naming things: for example, heterosexuality, heaven, and flawlessness are good; queer sexuality, hell, and imperfection are evil. So, naming certain things good and others evil gives the name giver power as language has an influence on thought. According to McMillan and O'Neil (2012:33–34), authoritative individuals are those that represent what is accepted as truth – they decide what is good or bad and right or wrong. Consequently, these individuals may benefit at the expense of gullible individuals who believe in them without reflecting and/or

questioning their authority. Young queer individuals can thus be attributed characteristics they do not have, such as living in sin, being immoral, and having a negative influence on others. For example, the church establishes stereotypes in order to exercise authority: heterosexuality is good, normal, and virtuous whereas queer sexuality is evil, abnormal, and a sin. The boundaries of individuals' behaviours, relationships, and preferences are determined by the way we speak of them. In the novel, a binary world of oppositions is imposed on all individuals: some individuals are supposedly respectable and faithful, like the church and Jeanette's mother, and others are supposedly heretic and dishonourable, like Next Door and Jeanette. It is clear that Jeanette's society is foremost a heteronormative society. The Other Foundation (2016:9) mentions that discrimination, violence and abuse, and discouragement occur due to queer individuals being regarded as abnormal and something that a heteronormative society needs protection from.

Jeanette reacts to religious zealotry by attempting to change the narrative. For example, she rewrites the biblical story of Daniel and the lions' den. Reisman (2014:14–15) explains that Jeanette experiments with religious knowledge. Instead of Daniel being safe in the lions' den, she suggests an alternative ending wherein the lions eat him. Jeanette's revision challenges a belief in God and religious narratives since Daniel in the original story is not hurt due to his belief in God. However, Pastor Finch immediately points out to Jeanette that her representation is incorrect; signifiers should be static and any revisions are threatening. Pastor Finch believes there is only one correct version; Jeanette's imagination should not be allowed to run wild. Reisman (2014:14–15) analyses Jeanette's behaviour as consciously subversive: she may not comprehend the full ramifications of her version, a story that shows a different view of power relations, but she is aware that she has pictorial intensions: revision of narratives is possible and the authority lies with the story teller. Pastor Finch finds Jeanette's vivid imagination and its interaction with the Bible problematic as it may be open to different interpretations. He explains to Jeanette that the Bible is not open to her interpretation. He only sees his reading of the Bible as truth and ignores the idea that he, too, may be interpreting the Bible incorrectly. Similar to Jeanette's mother, Pastor Finch also adheres to a binary view of right and wrong, and challenging the Bible is wrong – he may not allow Jeanette's revision to stand (Reisman, 2011:15). With Jeanette's revision of Daniel and the lions' den and Pastor Finch's reaction, Jeanette experiences her first insecurities with regard to religion, history, and narrative. Yet, she remains obedient.

Pastor Finch is one of the main characters that negatively influences Jeanette's relationship with God and her obedience towards the church:

That night at church, we had a visiting speaker, Pastor Finch from Stockport. He was an expert in demons, and delivered a terrifying sermon on how easy it is to become demon-possessed. We were all very uneasy afterwards. Mrs White said she thought her next-door neighbours were probably possessed, they had all the signs. Pastor Finch said that the possessed are given to uncontrollable rages, sudden bursts of wild laughter, and are always, always, very cunning. The Devil himself, he reminded us, can come as an angel of light (Winterson, 1985:15).

Based on the above, it seems Pastor Finch uses fear to get his message across to members of his congregation. Jeanette makes it clear that all of them were uneasy afterwards. Furthermore, Pastor Finch plants irrelevant ideas into some of the churchgoers' heads. One of them, Mrs White, states that her neighbours must be possessed by demons since they have uncontrollable rages and sudden bursts of wild laughter. Other possible reasons, such as experiencing anger or excitement, are excluded.

Pastor Finch continues with his sermon:

"Yes," he went on, "how blessed," then his brow clouded. "But how cursed" [...] "The demon can return SEVENFOLD" [...] "The best can become the worst," – he took me by the hand – "This innocent child, this bloom of the Covenant" [...] "This little lily could herself be a house of demons" [...] "I mean this by way of example only. God has given me an opportunity and what God has given we must not presume to waste" [...] "It has been known for the most holy men to be suddenly filled with evil. And how much more a woman, and how much more a child. Parents, watch your children for the signs. Husbands, watch your wives. Blessed be the name of the Lord." He let go of my hand, which was now crumpled and soggy (Winterson, 1985:16–17).

Here Pastor Finch uses Jeanette, who is only seven years old, as an example of an individual who may be possessed by demons. He states that God has apparently given him the chance to use Jeanette as an example, but he does not consider how this may negatively affect her. The reader learns that she felt uneasy afterwards. Her "crumpled and soggy" hand is proof of her unease after his indirect assumptions. Moreover, he states that parents should watch their children and husbands should watch their wives, as if there is an order of individuals who may be possessed more easily compared to others. Children are the worst, then women, and men remain virtually untouchable. This allows for sexist and ageist views: women and children are more prone to sin than adult men are. Pastor Finch may believe women to be more corrupting than men since Eve, a woman, is believed to have been responsible for corrupting man and

leading him to evil by eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Jeanette, afterwards, begins to realise that the world is not an easy place to understand and that the church may be confused as well: "I discovered that everything in the natural world was a symbol of the Great Struggle between good and evil" (Winterson, 1985:21). At this point of the novel, Jeanette remains obedient to this fundamentalist religious perspective on the word (Reisman, 2011:16). It seems as if this obedience is a result of her tender age, fear and indoctrination.

6.2.2.1.2 Exodus

"Exodus" is the second book of the Old Testament of the Bible (1983). Chen (2014:18) explains that "Exodus" documents Israel's process of gaining independence as the people of Israel are led by Moses away from an abusive Egyptian pharaoh. Similarly, in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette leaves her protected home schooling and enters public school. Therefore, the second chapter, "Exodus", marks Jeanette's development as an independent child. She experiences conflict between secular life and her religious beliefs in the same way the people of Israel experienced conflict with Egypt. The school becomes Jeanette's Egypt as she is treated differently and is misunderstood. However, her home also starts to become her Egypt due to her mother's dominance and religious zealotry (Chen, 2014:18): "Better to hear about Hell now than burn in it later" (Winterson, 1985:56). The religious group to which Jeanette's mother belongs threatens individuals with hell to force them into living the church's definition of a good life. The church members feel that they should warn individuals about hell before it is too late. Should individuals then repent their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour who died on the cross for man's sins, they will go to heaven.

Jeanette's mother's unwillingness to send Jeanette to public school is founded in her religious zealotry. Jeanette's mother believes that if Jeanette goes to public school, she will be exposed to a contrasting worldview with new opinions and beliefs. Since her mother has an absolutist worldview, public school is considered a disease (Reisman, 2011:21; Yakut, 2011:64). However, Elsie, who is also a religious character, exposes Jeanette to a different point of view:

"What looks like one thing," she told me, "may well be another" [...] "Some folk say I'm a fool, but there's more to this world than meets the eye." I waited quietly. "There's this world," she banged the wall graphically, "and there's this world," she thumped her chest. "If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both" (Winterson, 1985:40, 42–43).

Elsie feels that she is considered a fool since she believes the world is not only black and white; there is more than one truth, one perception, and one world (Yakut, 2011:51). She acknowledges that there are binaries, but she makes it clear that one should take note of both in order to understand the world one lives in. There is a difference between what happens out in the world and what happens within an individual, and one cannot understand both by excluding the one or the other. There is always the possibility that there is more than one interpretation of something or someone (Yakut, 2011:49). Nell and Shapiro (2011:21) mention that a representative of the Roman Catholics that partook in their study stated that biblical texts are often seen to be against queer sexuality, but these texts can also be interpreted in other ways. All interpretations do not necessarily have to be negative; there can be positive interpretations as well.

In this chapter of the novel, Jeanette becomes deaf for three months. Instead of her mother taking her to a doctor for examination, the church and she believe Jeanette to be full of the Holy Spirit. According to them there is no other explanation or cause for Jeanette's condition. Yakut (2011:50) explains that the church and Jeanette's mother are blinded by their doctrines and single-mindedness. They are unable to comprehend that Jeanette cannot hear due to deafness. Instead, they believe her to be filled with the Spirit. Mrs Jewsbury, though, realises that Jeanette's hearing impairment is not because she is full of the Holy Spirit, but because she has a medical condition that causes this impairment. After surgery, Jeanette can hear again. This results in Jeanette questioning the absolute power of both the church and her mother: "Since I was born, I had assumed that the world ran on very simple lines, like a larger version of our church. Now I was finding that the church was sometimes confused" (Winterson, 1985:36). Önal (2007:25) explains that Jeanette experiences contradictions as she is left alone in the hospital – the wilderness. She realises that the church is incorrect about the reason for her plight. Yakut (2011:50–51) also mentions that Jeanette metaphorically becomes deaf to the Bible and its clichés. She starts to question the church and her mother as she now comes to believe that they can be wrong.

6.2.2.1.3 Leviticus

"Leviticus" is the third book of the Old Testament of the Bible (Bible, 1983). Chen (2014:18) explains that "Leviticus" documents the guidelines God gives His people to praise, worship and obey Him. This Bible book records the laws for the Levite priests and some of the laws Moses gave to the people of Israel. Similarly, in this chapter of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette accepts the religious rules her mother has given her. When her mother, Mrs White, and Jeanette overhear their neighbours fornicating, Jeanette automatically assumes it

to be a sin, even though she does not know what fornication is. The Other Foundation (2016:23) explains that religions have strict moral guidelines on gender roles, individual sexual activity and issues such as abortion, pornography and marriage. Since their next-door neighbours are loud when they have sex, it is considered a sin. Furthermore, Jeanette comes to question the honesty and sincerity of the evangelical church to which they belong. Çeker (2016:58) and Reisman (2011:23) explain that Jeanette's mother represents a devoted member of the church, but she, too, is dishonest and insincere most of the time. For example, she does not allow Jeanette to meet her biological mother; Mrs White and she eavesdrop on the fornication Next Door; she has a wine glass in her house despite her strong rejection of alcohol, and she is uninvolved and uncaring when Jeanette temporarily becomes deaf since she is too busy with church matters. Furthermore, Jeanette's mother lies about the ending of *Jane Eyre*, about the fact that she had a pre-marital sexual relationship with one of her old flames, Pierre, and about the possibility that she had a lesbian relationship as well. Jeanette sees a picture of a woman in her mother's Old Flames album that soon disappears when Jeanette asks her mother about it. From this we deduce that despite her religious inclinations, Jeanette's mother embodies hypocrisy.

Çeker (2016:58) further explains that Jeanette does not blame the church *per se* as it is a place of worship, but she does disapprove of the way in which the church's followers, such as Pastor Spratt, her mother, and Mrs White understand and practise their beliefs in society: "But are they holy?" insisted Mrs White. 'That's for the Lord to decide,' my mother said" (Winterson, 1985:77). Jeanette's mother's reply is very ironic: she states that it is for God to decide whether an individual is holy or not, but she, the church, and Mrs White constantly judge everyone's holiness. Reisman (2011:19) contributes by explaining that Jeanette's mother and the church may have faulty worldviews. Nonetheless, they still force their worldviews on other individuals since they believe they are correct (Yakut, 2011:51). However, at this point Jeanette remains a devoted and obedient Christian, even though she is quietly questioning the church and her mother more.

6.2.2.1.4 Numbers

"Numbers" is the fourth book of the Old Testament of the Bible (1983). Chen (2014:19) explains that "Numbers" documents the wanderings of the people of Israel in the desert. Similarly, in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette starts to wander through a wilderness in search of the Promised Land. She explores life and evaluates love and marriage. She meets Melanie and develops feelings for her, and this becomes her desert. Jeanette reaches a point where she explores her sexuality and her true self in the world – she is moving towards her

Promised Land (Chen, 2014:19). The wilderness is symbolic of her search for her truth, and not the world's truth.

However, when Jeanette and Melanie are outed in front of the whole church, Jeanette's time in the desert is extended. She hears the term "lesbianism", but does not know what it means – "sex" and "lesbianism" are concepts that are too vague for her to grasp. When she tries to understand the matter of sex and love at the church, she is still left in the dark. The only thing Jeanette learns, is that she is not allowed to love Melanie, because their relationship represents "unnatural passions" (Winterson, 1985:22). The church and her mother do not provide any further explanation (Chen, 2014:19). Wang and Yin (2016:21), though, explain that queer-sexual relationships are here coined as "unnatural passion" as the queer sexual minority is believed to be evil. Yakut (2011:47, 69) points out that "unnatural passions" indicate Jeanette's defiance of the heteronormative sexual paradigm: she rejects heterosexuality – the compulsory sexual orientation – and chooses to accept her own desires instead. The forced heterosexuality, like when Melanie is forced to become heterosexual, leads to hatred and discrimination (i.e. queer-phobia and heterosexism). The Other Foundation (2016) states that many individuals believe that sex between queer individuals is morally wrong. The Other Foundation (2016:43) and Nell and Shapiro (2011:33) further explain that coming out or being outed can lead to rejection by parents, guardians, family, friends, and other possible relationships the queer individual might have. It is interesting to note that Jeanette is unaware of homosexuality, specifically lesbianism. She does not know how to accurately describe her love for Melanie: "'Do you think this is Unnatural Passion?' [Jeanette] asked her once. 'Doesn't feel like it. According to Pastor Finch, that's awful' [said Melanie]. She must be right, I thought" (Winterson, 1985:112–113). Jeanette and Melanie do not experience their feelings of love towards each other as a sin and something unnatural, but as natural and true instead (Reisman, 2011:22–24). Jeanette forms a liberated view on love in the queer-sexual world since heterosexuality is favoured over queer sexuality in a dominant heterosexual world (Wang & Yin, 2016:20; Yakut, 2011:iv, 69). All in all, no name has been assigned to their feelings.

Winterson provides the reader with a glimpse into Jeanette's mother's sexual encounters prior to her decision to remain celibate:

"Lord forgive me, but I did it" [...] A couple of days afterward, my mother had gone to see the doctor in a fit of guilty anxiety. She lay on the couch while the doctor prodded her stomach and chest, asking if she ever felt giddy, or fizzy in the belly. My mother coyly explained that she was in love, and that she often felt strange, but that wasn't the reason

for her visit. "You may well be in love," said the doctor, "but you also have a stomach ulcer." Imagine my mother's horror. She had given away her all for an ailment. She took the tablets, followed the diet, and refused Pierre's entreaties to visit her. Needless to say, the next time they met, and again by chance, she felt nothing, nothing at all, and shortly fled the country to avoid him (Winterson, 1995:110–112).

The "it" refers to pre-marital sex. Reisman (2011:22–24) explains that Jeanette's mother experienced guilt after having sex since the sex with Pierre came from lust instead of love, whereas Jeanette and Melanie experienced love. Jeanette's mother also believes she got the stomach ulcer as a punishment for her sin. She knew that she had committed a sin, and she uses the stomach ulcer as a way to repent.

Jeanette realises on her own that many women seem to marry not for love, but to conform to heterosexual expectations. "That was the worry. There were a lot of women, and most of them got married. If they couldn't marry each other, and I didn't think they could, because of having babies, some of them would inevitably have to marry beasts" (Winterson, 1985:94). Jeanette is worried, because she knows she does not want to marry or be forced to marry a man. She also believes that there are many women who love women instead of men, but due to religious beliefs, they have to marry men to avoid judgement (Reisman, 2011:22–24; Yakut, 2011:42, 67). Jeanette also refers to men as beasts: they are not only seen as animals, but as dangerous too. This may be the result of a one-sided view of men as Jeanette has been exposed to weak and unpleasant male characters in her community. For Pastor Spratt, the church, and Jeanette's mother, Jeanette only has two options when it comes to love: she can either love God or Melanie, but she may not love them both – if she loves Melanie, she does not love God (Yakut, 2011:71). Wang and Yin (2016:21) explain that "the dominant position of heterosexuality denies the rationality and even validity of any other options". The love queer individuals experience is irrational and a sin.

Yakut (2011:43) further explains that Christianity has an immutable and precise theology when it comes to sexual ethics: there is only one kind of sexuality, and that is heterosexuality. Pastor Spratt says: "These children ... have fallen under Satan's spell" (Winterson, 1985:102). Jeanette, though, refuses this limitation: "I love them both" (Winterson, 1985:78). She does not just have lust for Melanie, but love, and she does not understand why loving Melanie is a sin. She does not allow Pastor Spratt's interpretation of the Bible to judge her desires; she rejects his interpretation. Banks (2009:35) mentions that readers are challenged to understand protagonists such as Jeanette as human beings that also have desires, thoughts, and interests that can mirror their own. Furthermore, adolescent fictional queer characters are presented as

individuals who are interesting, smart, complex, and who are in search of their identities. Characters who struggle with mere existence or who attempt to manage their sexualities and the possible conflicts that go along with it, or who fear parents' or friends' reactions, can be explored in this way. In Jeanette's case, the church and her mother reject Melanie and her love. Jeanette questions the monopoly of the orange and considers that oranges (i.e. heterosexuals and oneness) are not the only fruit (i.e. sexual orientation) and in return rejects her church and her mother's law (Chen, 2014:24; Reisman, 2011:22; Merleau, 2003:90; Yakut, 2011:52, 59).

Since the church considers Jeanette and Melanie's love as unnatural, Jeanette accuses the church of hypocrisy since she believes there is nothing unnatural about her feelings (Önal, 2007:35–36). Many devoted queer Christians may feel alienated and develop a reluctance to reveal their sexual orientations since churches and Christian fundamentalists damn them. This may result in a queer individual experiencing "citizen deficit": a feeling that they do not belong in society⁴⁵ (Nell & Shapiro, 2011:15, 21; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Jeanette is still in the obedience stage, but she is developing at a faster pace towards the discovery and critical defiance stages of her journey.

6.2.2.1.5 Deuteronomy

"Deuteronomy" is the fifth book of the Old Testament of the Bible (1983). Chen (2014:19–20) explains that "Deuteronomy" documents the last book of the law given by Moses. This book contains various farewell messages from Moses and addresses the next generation of men in the religious world. It pays attention to the basic laws of God's people. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, on the other hand, reflects on time, history, laws, and the lessons learned about the religious world. The reader becomes aware of Winterson's philosophical scepticism of history and narration (Chen, 2014:19–20). She explains that humankind has constructed history and that humans may have altered it in order to represent something else. Önal (2007:35) explains that everything one accepts as truth is the outcome of different interpretations that are influenced by different circumstances and ideologies. Winterson shares this view:

...but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing

⁴⁵ The queer characters – Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, Ike, and Brain – of *Geography Club* as well as Toby and Bryce of *Openly Straight* also experience "citizen deficit" in their hegemonic heteronormative environments.

it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I [Jeanette] don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end [...] God saw it. God knows. But I am not God. And so when someone tells me what they heard or saw, I believe them, and I believe their friend who also saw, but not in the same way, and I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own [...] Here is some advice. If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches... (Winterson, 1985:119–122).

Lyotard (1984) refers to *petit recits*, which are small narratives or stories. He argues against the “grand narratives”, which in the context of the novel refers to the rigid doctrines of the church. Jeanette refers to the word “stories” and not “truths”: there are a myriad of stories and beliefs out in the world and it can be difficult to determine set truths among these. The church propagated their truths; Foucault has taught us to question “truths”. She starts to feel that one should formulate one’s own opinions instead of depending on others’ dictated ones. Stories can easily be altered, because the storytellers may interpret them differently. Jeanette therefore refers to stories, especially about history, as a string full of knots: it is complicated. God is the only one that knows what truly happened during historical events. People tend to rely on other individuals’ accounts of the occurrence. In order to avoid any sort of influence, one should make one’s own interpretation. Ellam (2006:82, 88) and Yakut (2011:63) explain that Jeanette is starting to question and reject her mother’s and other bigots’ absolutism. She realises that objectivity is impossible to achieve because of her naïve faith in love, her eternal love for God, and the betrayals by the church community.

6.2.2.2 Discovery

The first five books of the Old Testament are about the world and its laws. The first five chapters of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* set up the law of Jeanette’s mother’s religiously zealous community. The novel also expresses that Jeanette lives in a world that is marred by sin. The laws are consequently forced upon her so that she would remain obedient and escape sin (Chen, 2014:4, 21). However, in the sixth chapter, “Joshua”, Jeanette’s development enters the discovery stage as she has realised that she cannot remain obedient due to possible errors and misinterpretations in the church and her mother’s laws.

6.2.2.2.1 Joshua

“Joshua” is the sixth book of the Old Testament of the Bible (1983). Chen (2014:20) explains that “Joshua” documents the story of a leader who leads the people of Israel through three major military campaigns. Victory comes by remaining faithful and obedient to the Holy God instead of having faith in violent wars or numerical advantages. Similarly, in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, the reader is exposed to the method Jeanette’s mother and her church use to deal with Jeanette and Melanie’s homosexuality. Since Jeanette does not repent immediately like Melanie, she has to undergo an exorcism and she is confined for thirty-six hours in a tiny room with no food or light. Wang and Yin (2016:22) and Yakut (2011:72) refer to this incident as an “absurd and cruel method” and a “performative act ... [of] horror”. The church and Jeanette’s mother do not consider it absurd and cruel, or even a sin, to confine a young individual; it is seen as a punishment for the greater good. Chen (2014:20), Freeman (1989:21) and French (1999:233–234) state that Jeanette puts on a false persona to leave the confinement, but soon develops feelings for another girl, Katy. This is the start of Jeanette’s acceptance of her homosexuality.

Jeanette’s mother and her church feel that Jeanette is possessed by a demon as she has romantic and sexual feelings for another girl. French (1999:233–234) explains that Jeanette has an orange demon whose identity is linked to gender identity and sexuality:

“Well, the demon you get depends on the colour of your aura, yours is orange which is why you’ve got me. Your mother’s is brown, which is why she’s so odd, and Mrs White’s is hardly a demon at all. We’re here to keep you in one piece, if you ignore us, you’re quite likely to end up in two pieces, or lots of pieces, it’s all part of the paradox” [explained the demon]. “But in the Bible you keep getting driven out,” [Jeanette said]. “Don’t believe all you read” (Winterson, 1985:138–139).

Odenhal (2019) explains that according to colour symbolism, an orange aura typically surrounds creative individuals. Writers, musicians, and artists commonly have an orange aura. Furthermore, the orange aura represents inner expression and a light-hearted personality. The orange aura therefore fits Jeanette since she writes her own creative stories to make sense of the world around her. She also has a light-hearted personality. She has love for God, Melanie, and Katy, as well as the church and her mother to some extent, and she wants to educate and inform individuals on topics such as God’s love through preaching. Aneja (2016) explains that a brown aura typically surrounds insecure individuals and that it is an uncommon aura. The brown aura therefore fits Jeanette’s mother since she is insecure about different

worldviews. She feels secure when she is the only one that looks at, thinks of, and judges the world. Lastly, Mrs White barely has an aura as she barely has a demon. Nonetheless, she – just like Jeanette and her mother – still has her own demon since she is not a perfect, flawless, well-balanced individual, but someone who is easily influenced by other individuals. What the church and Jeanette's mother see as a demon, is in effect the essence of who the possessor of the demon is. Jeanette says, "If I let them take away my demons, I'll have to give up what I've found" (Winterson, 1985:138).

It is not known what the orange demon's sex is: "Doesn't matter does it? After all, that's your problem" (Winterson, 1985:139). The fact that her demon is neither male nor female, indicates ambiguity (Yakut, 2011:74). This ambiguity signifies that Jeanette does not single out a sexuality in her community's sexual economy: she does not reject heterosexuality or deny queer sexuality. The function of the orange demon is to allow Jeanette to be her true self and to keep her integrity by making the best choice concerning her homosexuality. Jeanette rejects the idea that oranges (i.e. heterosexuality and oneness) are the only fruit (i.e. sexuality) in the world: "What about grapes or bananas [other sexualities]?" (Winterson, 1985:144). She believes that there is more than just one path (Reisman, 2011:25; Yakut, 2011:62). Merleau (2003:92) and Yakut (2011:52) further maintain that oranges appear perfect, circular, and single, whereas bananas are not round and grapes are multiple.

Merleau (2003:90) explains that Melanie, conversely, repents quite quickly and becomes a characterless mother and wife, the result of Pastor Spratt and Jeanette's mother's efforts to force her into an acceptable heterosexual identity. In Jeanette's case, her mother does not even go as far as to "love the sinner" if the sinner would not repent her "sins".

The resistance of queer sexuality contributes to pain and loss in a queer-phobic culture, and this is also true for Jeanette: "...I pulled up my knees under my chin, and begged the Lord to set me free" (Winterson, 1985:153). It is not clear what Jeanette means here: she may be referring to her release from homosexuality or even her life. Jeanette may have considered suicide to be free of her homosexuality.

6.2.2.3 Critical defiance

Jeanette enters the critical defiance stage when she objects to the way in which people separate history and stories in an attempt to organise the world around binary and exclusive concepts of fact versus fiction and true versus false. For Jeanette's mother, the world and its inhabitants are either right or wrong and true or false. She squeezes her understanding of the

world to fit this binary paradigm of history that leaves no room for doubt about its truthfulness. Jeanette's mother reacts strongly and passionately to any ideology that challenges her ideology, indicating a fear of instability (Reisman, 2011:20–21). Jeanette, consequently, becomes critically defiant towards her religion.

6.2.2.3.1 Judges

“Judges” is the seventh book of the Old Testament of the Bible (Bible, 1983). Chen (2014:20–21, 29) explains that “Judges” tells the stories of people who are defeated repetitively for being disobedient. They are rebelling against God through sin. During these years, Israel is governed by various leaders and therefore lacks central leadership. In other words, this book demonstrates how the people of Israel follow their own counsel and set aside God's laws. In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette has a homosexual affair with Katy while she still forms part of the church. As a consequence, she is asked to leave her mother's house. Exiled, she decides to move out and step into a world where she follows her own laws (Freeman, 1989:21). Önal (2007:40) and Reisman (2011:27) mention that as far as Jeanette's mother and the church are concerned, a woman is a woman and a man is a man: gender is a fixed concept. Jeanette's mother and the church justify Jeanette's sexual orientation by stating that she has in effect become a man as she has been given manly responsibilities by the church. Merleau (2003:93) and Wang and Yin (2016:22) elaborate by explaining if an individual desires feminine subjects, this logic assumes that the individual in question must not be feminine, but surely masculine. Jeanette's mother and Pastor Spratt decide, for example, that Jeanette desires preaching, which is associated with a masculine role. Consequently, Jeanette acquires masculine desires, such as developing feelings for a woman due to an unnatural position of power and influence in the church and its followers. Yakut (2011:42) explains that Jeanette is a character that hovers between masculinity and femininity as she struggles to understand and she trespasses the boundaries of sexuality and gender in a heteronormative world. Jeanette, Melanie, and other women in the church are denied loving another woman as their desires are deemed unnatural. They are also disempowered through silencing:

Now it was making no sense at all. My mother droned on about the importance of missionary work for a woman, that I was clearly such a woman, but had spurned my call in order to wield power on the home front, where it was inappropriate. She ended by saying that having taken on a man's world in other ways I had flouted God's law and tried to do it sexually. This was no spontaneous speech. She and the pastor had talked about it already. It was her weakness for the ministry that had done it. No doubt she'd told Pastor Spratt months ago. I looked around me. Good people, simple people, what would happen to them

now? I knew my mother hoped I would blame myself, but I didn't. I knew now where the blame lay. If there's such a thing as spiritual adultery, my mother was a whore (Winterson, 1985:71–172).

Jeanette's confusion concerning her mother is made clear: her mother wanted her to become a missionary, but since she is homosexual, she is no longer suited to be a missionary. She is now seen as just a sinner that negatively influences other religious followers. Jeanette refers to her mother as a spiritual whore (a paradoxical use of words) due to her hypocrisy. Her mother is very proud of Jeanette's religious preaching in the beginning, but her attitude changes drastically when Jeanette accepts her own homosexuality. Religious zealotry can be considered a form of violence as queer individuals experience an invisible pain forced on them by heterosexual religious individuals. Same-sex love is denied since desire is limited to being between masculine and feminine subjects. Since Jeanette is homosexual, her preaching and sexual orientation are rejected as the church and her mother believe she has taken on a masculine role. Yakut (2011:59) also mentions that Jeanette's mother, ironically, represents a manly woman as she is the authoritative figure in the house that endorses the Bible. Jeanette's father is absent most of the time. Jeanette's mother is not a traditional woman, but has masculine characteristics as she is a castrating figure that replaces the father figure.

Çeker (2016:59) explains that Jeanette, as a lesbian, does not fit into her community as she is considered different. Jeanette's mother and the church treat her as the embodiment of an orange demon on earth as Jeanette has idealistic and revolutionary views, emotions and thought, such as her thoughts on freedom of speech. Jeanette's homoerotic tendency results in the vulnerable and the sensitive (Jeanette) and the insensitive and ruthless (Jeanette's mother and the church) to argue. Jeanette's loyalty to her mother and the church does not protect her dignity or spare her feelings once Pastor Spratt reveals her lesbianism. The church views things only in terms of good or evil. According to the church, whether a relationship is good or evil depends on the nature of the sexual desires in contrast with Jeanette who believes that goodness is determined by kindness, decency, modesty, and authentic faith.

Due to the church and Jeanette's mother's criteria for good and evil, Jeanette is labelled evil for being critically defiant. As a result, she is asked to leave her home:

My mother wanted me to move out, and she had the backing of the pastor and most of the congregation, or so she said. I made her ill, made the house ill, brought evil into the church [...] Now, here we were, on a different edge. It all seemed to hinge around the fact that I loved the wrong sort of people. Right sort of people in every respect except this one;

romantic love for another woman was a sin [...] At that point I had no notion of sexual politics, but I knew that a homosexual is further away from a woman than a rhinoceros (Winterson, 1985:163–164).

The Other Foundation (2016:51) provides possible viewpoints individuals can have concerning queer individuals in a hegemonic heteronormative society: it is a “lifestyle choice”, an “illness”, a “sin”, the “result of a person’s upbringing”, or influenced by “ancestral spirits”. Religion has an influence on an individual’s attitude. Again, Jeanette emphasises that the church and her mother focus on her sexual orientation instead of the love she experiences for another woman and the good she wants to do in the church. She uses the metaphor of a woman and a rhinoceros to explain the extent to which the church and her mother will go to reject her: a woman is a human and a rhinoceros an animal, but a lesbian woman is considered inferior to an animal: an abomination. Reisman (2011:11) argues that rigid binaries are constructed through religious fundamentalism and an absolutist worldview since authority is maintained and granted through opposing choices. In other words, the people who have the authority have the power when other individuals oppose them. If one binary is favoured it normalises corresponding political, social, religious, and sexual norms and moral judgements. When this happens, distinguishing between right and wrong and good or evil in a simplistic manner becomes easy. Jeanette attempts to explain her lesbianism from a romantic perspective and not as a sin that should be counteracted. She deconstructs traditional religion and suggests a hypocrisy-less and deception-less religion:

There are shades of meaning, but a man is a man, wherever you find it. My mother [...] believed that you made people and yourself what you wanted. Anyone could be saved and anyone could fall to the Devil, it was their choice. While some of our church forgave me on the admittedly dubious grounds that I couldn't help it [...] my mother saw it as a wilful act on my part to sell my soul. At first, for me, it had been an accident. That accident had forced me to think more carefully about my own instincts and others' attitudes. After the exorcism I had tried to replace my world with another just like it, but I couldn't. I loved God and I loved the church, but I began to see that as more and more complicated (Winterson, 1985:164–165).

Jeanette explains that there are various interpretations of all situations. Her mother though believes there is only one correct interpretation: her own. She further believes that queer sexuality is a choice even though a minority group in the church believes otherwise. The statement that an individual was born queer touches on the binary belief that one is either born queer or is influenced by the environment to embrace queer sexuality (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:17, 134). Jeanette states that some individuals of her church forgave her since they felt

that she was born queer (Yakut, 2011:iv). Jeanette makes it clear that her sexual orientation is not a wilful act to sell her soul to the devil since she still has a relationship with God, but due to individuals such as Pastor Spratt, Mrs White, and her mother, her relationship with God has been jeopardised. She was obedient once, but due to the church and her mother's hypocrisy, she discovers and becomes critically defiant. One could equally say that her absent father and mannish mother made her gay – one of the stereotypes associated with queer.

Jeanette's mother and the congregation, who all claim to be religious, embody hypocrisy and cruelty. They reject Jeanette solely based on her lesbian orientation and does not take her honest and good character into consideration (Al-Shara, 2015:239). They consider lesbianism an unforgiveable sin and ignores Jeanette's celebration of love.

The church in Jeanette's world does not focus on the positive side of queer sexuality: love, self-identity, an improved relationship with God, and happiness. As a result, evil stems from Jeanette's mother and the church, Jeanette's real enemies, and not from Satan (Al-Shara, 2015:241). Önal (2007:39) explains that Jeanette's mother and the church believe Jeanette's sexual orientation to be spiritual treachery and that she is in a league with Satan. They lack flexibility and empathy for their members and engage in harsh judgement and isolation.

6.2.2.4 Spirituality

Jeanette subsequently discovers her proper place in the church results in her becoming autonomous. The church finds it dangerous that she develops feelings for women and refuses to submit to the authority of the church – Jeanette refuses the restrictive indoctrinations of the heteronormative world to shape her sexuality. Her refusal contributes to disruption in the church and her questioning its authority to differentiate between right and wrong (Reisman, 2011:27; Yakut, 2011:46). "At that time I could not imagine what would become of me, and I didn't care. It was not judgement day, but another morning" (Winterson, 1985:175). Jeanette knows that she has been exiled and has to become independent. Her religion moves from critical defiance to spirituality. Spirituality is seen as a personal experience that focuses on introspection (Ferreira, 2010). Through spirituality, religion is established and is portrayed through rituals, beliefs and practices (Ferreira, 2010).

6.2.2.4.1 Ruth

"Ruth" is the eighth book of the Old Testament of the Bible (1983). Chen (2014:21) explains that "Ruth" documents a story of exile, love, and relationship between a daughter (Ruth) and

her mother-in-law (Naomi). After her husband's death, Ruth decides to stay in Israel with Naomi. She abandons her pagan background and comes to believe in the God of Israel. However, in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette does not stay with her mother, but leaves home, works in an ice cream van and wanders around in the world to support herself. When she finally returns home for Christmas, she discovers that her mother, even though she still practises her faith, is no longer obsessed with Jeanette's sexuality. Jeanette may not want to stay with her mother permanently as Ruth does with Naomi, but her return indicates an inseverable bond between Jeanette and her mother. This resembles Jeanette and her mother's individual relationships with God: it cannot be severed.

The fact that Jeanette's mother is no longer obsessed with her daughter's sexuality, comments on the success of the church and its authority. It indicates a potential failure when Jeanette's mother accepts her daughter's sexuality: "After all', said my mother philosophically, 'oranges are not the only fruit'" (Winterson, 1985:219). Jeanette's mother recognises and admits that heterosexuality is not the only sexuality in the world; queer sexuality is a choice for many (Çeker, 2016:58; French, 1999:234; Chen, 2014:21, 24; Bollinger, 1994:374). When Jeanette returns to her mother and the community that condemned her, she cannot speak openly about queer sexuality to her mother yet, but her mother no longer attempts to convert her to heterosexuality either. Çeker (2016:59) points out that they may not be able to discuss queer sexuality in a hegemonic heteronormative Christian world yet, but there is an improvement in their relationship.

Jeanette reflects on various instances where the church and her mother's outrageous and hypocritical attitude toward her homosexuality resulted in her relationship with God being influenced (Al-Shara, 2015:239):

"What are you afraid of?" [Jeanette] suddenly wanted to know.

[Pastor Spratt] smiled. "I am afraid of Hell, of eternal damnation."

"So what's so awful about me?"

Then he lost his temper, as only a soft-voiced man can. "You made an immoral proposition that cannot be countenanced" (Winterson, 1985:193).

Since Pastor Spratt fears hell, he believes that it is his job to warn other individuals about sin and imperfection. He makes it clear to Jeanette that she cannot be saved, even if she remains a Christian. Griffin and Ouellett (2003) and Beagan and Hattie (2015:92, 94) state that Christian fundamentalists such as Pastor Spratt, Jeanette's mother, and Mrs White believe queer individuals such as Jeanette will lose their souls when they partake in deviant and

immoral sexual behaviour with other individuals, such as Melanie and Katy. Thus, instead of going to Heaven, they end up in Hell. In this case, Christian fundamentalists believe that if you do not lose your soul, you will spend eternity in paradise with your Lord and Saviour (God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit). However, if you lose your soul, they believe you will burn eternity in hell with Satan and other demonic spirits and fallen angels. A queer individual almost unavoidably has a relationship that is in conflict with religion and spirituality. Mainstream faith traditions may cause significant damage to queer individuals' emotional and psychological well-being due to conflict between religious teaching and sexual or gender identity.

Barton (2010:471) states that when an individual's eternal soul is threatened, the stakes are high. The fear of hell is a powerful motivator that terrifies young queer individuals who cannot control their sexual attractions. This is the case with Melanie. She immediately repents and accepts heterosexuality. Jeanette, though, disagrees with Pastor Spratt and believes her soul will not be lost: she experiences love with Melanie and Katy. Jeanette transcends the fundamentalist views and grows from adhering to religious doctrines to a spirituality where her relationship with God is not abandoned or ruined.

A second example Jeanette provides is the following:

"Oh she's a demon your daughter," wailed Mrs White, holding on to the pastor's arm.
"She's no daughter of mine," snapped back my mother, head high, leading the way out
(Winterson, 1985:201).

Pastor Spratt, Mrs White, and Jeanette's mother judge Jeanette again solely based on her sexual orientation. Not only is Jeanette referred to as a demon, but her mother also rejects her as her daughter, forgetting that she was the one who adopted Jeanette and forced her religion on her. She was adopted as a project, and not to be loved and cherished. Jeanette did not ask to be in a religiously zealous Christian community or to be homosexual. She had to adapt to her life's circumstances. Beagan and Hattie (2015:95, 98, 111) mention that faith traditions negatively affect queer individuals by causing guilt, shame, disconnection from body, sex negativity, and the undoing of relationships to self and others. This creates conflict between queer individuals' identities and their religious or spiritual beliefs. As is apparent with Jeanette, her relationship with God evolves from being obedient to religious doctrines, to discovery, to being critically defiant, to being spiritual.

A third example of religious zealotry that influences her relationship with God is Mrs White's reaction when Jeanette sells ice cream outside Elsie's house after she has passed away. Jeanette is not primarily there to sell ice cream, but to find out what happened to Elsie and to give her condolences. Elsie had an influence on Jeanette and played a motherly role for many years of Jeanette's life. When the pastor asks Jeanette to leave, she feels unwelcome. She leaves the house, only to find a queue of individuals outside who want to buy ice cream:

"Making money out of the dead," [Mrs White] whimpered through the window. "The pastor can't believe it."

"It's not holy is it?" I said to her.

"No it's not, but you'll pay the price, and it'll be more than a cornet."

"I expect so," I said, hoping she'd go away, but she just leaned on the window shelf, sobbing so much that I had to wipe her up with a dishcloth.

"When's the funeral?" I asked, by way of conversation.

"You can't come, it's for the holy" (Winterson, 1985:194–195).

By now Jeanette is used to the fact that the majority or all of her actions are considered unholy by her mother and most members of the church. Jeanette states sarcastically to Mrs White that selling ice cream to people at a funeral is unholy. Yet again, Mrs White judges Jeanette, stating that she will pay the price in hell. She tells Jeanette that she is not even allowed to come to Elsie's funeral – a woman she has known all her life – since Mrs White, the church, and her mother consider her unholy. Beagan and Hattie (2015:111) argue that queer individuals experience messages that are queer-negative and sex-negative and messages that express guilt, shame, and anxiety about spending eternity in hell. As a result, young adult queer Christians can suffer depression, low self-esteem, and self-loathing, which can lead to self-harming, addictions and suicide.

Based on the above three examples, Freeman (1989:21) explains that Jeanette is emotionally and religiously injured by the fact that the church wants to keep her from loving both God and Melanie, sees her as a demon, and regards her as living in sin:

I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray. I miss God who was my friend. I don't even know if God exists [...] If the servants hadn't rushed in and parted us (Winterson, 1985:216).

Since God's servants hurt her using His name, Jeanette does not remain the obedient religious believer she used to be. She develops true spirituality due to her sexual preference that leads to a crisis in her faith (Al-Shara, 2015:239; Freeman, 1989:21). However, Jeanette's return also indicates the true nature of her feelings: she wants to form part of a society that accepts her sexuality. She leaves her home knowing that she cannot return as the same person, but she leaves with the knowledge that she may return by another path that may lead to peace with her community, her mother, and herself (Reisman, 2011:26). Bollinger (1994:374) explains that relationships can continue after conflict and that maturation may follow: Jeanette chooses to continue her relationship with her mother in person instead of through memories. She returns to her home and her actions emphasise that one does not have to choose between a love for God and a love for another individual: they can co-exist (Reisman, 2011:31):

I could have been a priest instead of a prophet. The priest has a book with the words set out. Old words, known words, words of power. Words that are always on the surface. Words for every occasion. The words work. They do what they're supposed to do; comfort and discipline. The prophet has no book. The prophet is a voice that cries in the wilderness, full of sounds that do not always set into meaning. The prophets cry out because they are troubled by demons (Winterson, 1985:205).

In some way, Jeanette accepts that she is a sinner: as a human, she cannot be a hegemonic heterosexual religious zealot striving for perfection when it does not exist. She will therefore have balance in her life, love other individuals, be kind, and preach where possible. Wang and Yin (2016:2) add that love plays a vital part throughout the whole novel: Jeanette doubts and challenges authority due to the love she experiences for God, Melanie and Katy. Instead of becoming a priest that uses the Bible to create fear in religious individuals, she becomes a prophet that preaches from experience and spirituality. Yakut (2011:59) adds that Jeanette, as a practising Christian, rejects the church and her mother's established assumption that God will condemn and punish queer individuals who do not follow the path of heterosexuality. Jeanette's character and her acceptance of her sexual orientation, despite numerous obstacles, may provide hope to queer individuals in similar circumstances.

Chen (2014:21, 32) concludes that the last three chapters of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* contain conflicts that ultimately resolve into a calmer ending. Jeanette accepts her homosexuality and desires, breaks free of the church and her mother's laws, and sets her own

laws: "There are many forms of love and affection" (Winterson, 1985:216–217)⁴⁶. Wang and Yin (2016:20) agree by explaining that Jeanette remains true to her real self and transforms from a quiet obedient elite child of God to a brave independent and spiritual new woman who challenges authority. Jeanette refuses – just like the three wise men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the Bible – to worship the patriarchal heterosexual authoritative god. The church and Jeanette's mother exile her from the church just like the three wise men are thrown into a burning furnace. Neither Jeanette nor the three wise men die during this exile. Her angel, ironically the orange demon (i.e. her homosexuality), allows her to interpret and worship God in her own way (Yakut, 2011:73).

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego foreshadows a more promising future, implying that her homosexuality and her different approach to interpreting God will prevail. Beagan and Hattie (2015:111, 113–114) and Bittner (2018:3, 5, 15–16) explain that a personal spirituality can be formed in which theology is converted into a belief system that is workable and allows for acceptance and a more liberal understanding of queer sexuality, even if queer individuals still question their sexual identities and carry the pain and fear of coming out. Queer young adults should therefore try to deal with the relationship between their religion and their sexual identity to the best of their abilities. Whether in social, political or religious contexts, elements such as political oppression, school bullying, and religious condemnation may all form part of a queer individual's life.

Many queer individuals have experienced pain and suffering due to the enormous influence of churches. There have been losses, such as individuals leaving the church, being rejected by the church, conversion of one religion to another, and suicide (Beagan & Hattie, 2015:114). Many queer individuals continue to long or yearn for religion or spirituality, as they experience an emptiness, a void, or a search for greater meaning. Some, like Jeanette, find an integrated spirituality. It may be helpful to queer individuals to know that there can be healing, acceptance, celebration and forgiveness after family rifts because of religion. For example, Jeanette's mother accepts her homosexuality and Jeanette forgives her mother for forcing her into a certain way of believing. Furthermore, Beagan and Hattie (2015:114) state that spirituality and focusing on values instead of beliefs can assist, support, and be beneficial to queer individuals as they address their spiritual and religious pain, as well as the collective pain of oppression, losses, violence, and death. Generally, when an individual abandons their religion, it is to live a fulfilled life. Many queer individuals may want to feel part of society and

⁴⁶ Reminding the reader that Opal in *Openly Straight* expresses, "There are so many different kinds of relationships out there, sweetie. The thing that makes one okay and another not is whether it comes from a place of love. Nothing that comes from love could ever be wrong" (Konigsberg, 2013:254).

express queer-sexual love instead of being forced to adhere to the heterosexual norm. This is not the case for Jeanette, though. Instead of abandoning her relationship with God, she reconciles her sexuality and her belief system.

6.2.3 Queer characters

The following queer characters that are present in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* are discussed in this section: Jeanette, Melanie, Katy, and Mrs Jewsbury. All of these characters are homosexual.

6.2.3.1 Jeanette

Jeanette is the main protagonist of the novel and portrays a character that is born queer. She does not know from the start that she is a lesbian, but as she gets older and her character develops, she realises she has an attraction towards women. However, at the time she does not know what homosexuality and “unnatural passions” (Winterson, 1985:22) are. She does not make the choice to become homosexual after she learns what homosexuality is.

Jeanette is open about her homosexuality with her mother, confiding in her that she has developed feelings for Melanie: “Soon afterwards I decided to tell her how I felt. I explained how much I wanted to be with Melanie, that I could talk to her, that I needed that kind of friend” (Winterson, 1985:131). She does not initially share her sexuality with other characters though, as it becomes clear in the quotation that Jeanette is searching for a friend whom she can trust. Jeanette to some extent considers her mother to be such a friend, as she shared her true self with her mother. Jeanette’s mother then betrays Jeanette’s trust and shares her sexuality with Pastor Spratt without Jeanette’s permission⁴⁷. Pastor Spratt, afterwards, outs Jeanette and Melanie in front of all the church members:

“These children of God,” began the pastor, “have fallen under Satan’s spell.” His hand was hot and heavy on my neck. Everyone in the congregation looked like a waxwork. “These children of God have fallen foul of their lusts” [...] “These children are full of demons.” A cry of horror ran through the church [...] “Listen to Satan’s voice,” said the

⁴⁷ Reminding the reader that Rafe’s mother, Opal, in *Openly Straight* also – without permission – shares Rafe’s sexuality with Mr Scarborough. The difference between the two mothers is that Opal’s intentions are noble as she is afraid Rafe may be abused in a hegemonic heteronormative environment, while Jeanette’s mother’s intentions are dishonourable as Jeanette is outed, humiliated, has to undergo an exorcism, and is confined in a hegemonic heteronormative environment.

pastor to the church, pointing at me. "How the best become the worst" (Winterson, 1985:134).

Words such as "Satan", "fallen foul", "lusts", "demons", and "the worst", which all reflect negative connotations, are used to describe two teenage girls that experience love, not lust, for each other while they still love God as well: "I [Jeanette] love you [Melanie] almost as much as I love the Lord" (Winterson, 1985:133). Jeanette even expresses that she loves God more than Melanie, but the church does not allow it. Jeanette is not only a character possibly born queer or aware that she is queer from a very young age, she is also a character that is outed as queer.

Following her exposure, Jeanette portrays a character that does not succumb to the hegemonic heterosexual norm in her religiously zealous community. She does not repent her homosexual relationship with Melanie at first, but she fakes repentance afterwards to be released from her confinement; she also does not repent when her relationship with Katy becomes known. Consequently, Jeanette portrays a headstrong character who knows she is queer and refuses to "become" heterosexual. Even though the church and her mother state that she may not love both God and Melanie or Katy or any other woman at the same time, Jeanette refuses to listen to these hypocritical servants and remains a believer: "[I] did have a genuinely spiritual dimension" (Winterson, 1985:156). She may not be obedient to the church in which she grew up anymore, but she is spiritual.

6.2.3.2 Melanie

Melanie is a secondary character in the novel. Similar to Jeanette, she is aware that she is queer. Whether she is born queer or realises at a later stage of her character development that she is queer, is unknown. She, too, is unaware of queer sexuality and that it represents "unnatural passions" (Winterson, 1985:22) in the fundamentalist worldview.

Melanie is not open about her sexuality. The only other character, who knows about her sexual orientation, is Jeanette. Consequently, Melanie is also exposed to the church's rigid rules. Accordingly, Melanie becomes a character that is outed for being queer. Following her exposure, Melanie succumbs to the hegemonic heterosexual norm in her religiously zealous community. She repents immediately, rejects her homosexuality, and accepts heterosexuality:

He [Pastor Spratt] turned to Melanie. "Do you promise to give up this sin and beg the Lord to forgive you?" "Yes." She was trembling uncontrollably. I hardly heard what she said.

"Then go into the vestry with Mrs White and the elders will come and pray for you. It's not too late for those who truly repent" (Winterson, 1985:134).

The "sin" Pastor Spratt refers to is queer sexuality. He also refers to hell when he states it is not too late for Melanie to repent – she can still be saved. It also comes as no surprise to the reader that Mrs White – who judges every individual – is one of the elders to pray for Melanie. Al-Shara (2015:241) mentions that Jeanette, afterwards, refers to Melanie as a vegetable, since eating a vegetable instead of a fruit, according to the Original Sin in the Garden of Eden, is not forbidden.

Consequently, Melanie portrays a character that is forced to become heterosexual, marry a man, and bare his children: "So I [Jeanette] didn't object to Melanie getting married, I objected to her getting married to *him*. And she was serene, serene to the point of being bovine" (Winterson, 1985:157). Jeanette is referred to as unintelligent and is compared to cattle; like cattle, she follows the cowherd – the church – and falls in line without questioning their authority. Wang and Yin (2016:22) explain that Melanie actually loses her gender identity when she accepts the heterosexual norm. She is an example of a character who is unable to resist the hegemonic demands of a heteronormative society. Wang and Yin (2016:3) observe that Melanie is also "tragically suppressed by male discourse". She suffers a double oppression from the patriarchal society and from the church and their views on marriage. Jeanette believes Melanie to be at peace because her spirit had been extinguished. However, Jeanette finds it difficult to understand Melanie's choice: "[Melanie] made me want to shake her, to pull off all my clothes in the middle of the street and yell, remember this body" (Winterson, 1985:217). Wang and Yin (2016:3) argue that Winterson through Jeanette's reaction, calls on "those marginalized 'other' to break through heterosexism and all kinds of male oppression, to relocate their gender identity and to be the real self". It is unknown whether Melanie remains religious or not. The reader does not know how the church has influenced her relationship with God. The reader only knows that Melanie loved God before her exposure.

6.2.3.3 Katy

Katy is a secondary character in the novel. The reader does not get to know Katy in the same way as Jeanette and Melanie. She is introduced in the novel as a character who is religious, but homosexual as well. She has a sexual relationship with Jeanette for a number of years: "We weren't cold, not that night nor any of the others we spent together over the years that followed" (Winterson, 1985:156).

Katy is not open about her sexuality with any other character except Jeanette. When Katy and Jeanette are caught having sex, Jeanette takes full responsibility for the event by making up a false story in order for Katy not to be exposed as homosexual: “I told her that my affair with Melanie had never really ended. That Melanie had written to me for months and that finally, torn with love myself, I had begged Katy to help me arrange a meeting” (Winterson, 1985:167). Katy receives a second chance to remain an unknown homosexual in her religious community.

6.2.3.4 Mrs Jewsbury

Mrs Jewsbury is another secondary character in the novel. At first the reader believes her to form part of the hegemonic heterosexual society, but she is in fact a homosexual character in disguise, denying her sexual orientation and pretending to have heterosexual desires (Çeker, 2016:58). The church is not aware of her sexuality as she forms part of the church: she plays the oboe and conducts the Sisterhood choir. Mrs White is the one who states Mrs Jewsbury is “not holy” (Winterson, 1985:34), as if she suspects Mrs Jewsbury of hiding something, such as her sexuality.

Mrs Jewsbury, though religious, is the character that notices that Jeanette’s deafness is not a sign from God that Jeanette is full of the Holy Spirit: “‘This child’s not full of the Spirit,’ she screamed, ‘she’s deaf’” (Winterson, 2011:35). She realises that Jeanette is deaf due to a medical condition. Mrs Jewsbury is religious, but not a religious zealot.

The reader learns of Mrs Jewsbury’s homosexuality when she has intercourse with Jeanette when Jeanette is exiled from her home after being outed by Pastor Spratt:

And she began to stroke my head and shoulders. I turned over so that she could reach my back. Her hand crept lower and lower. She bent over me; I could feel her breath on my neck. Quite suddenly I turned and kissed her. We made love and I hated it and hated it, but would not stop (Winterson, 1985:136).

There may be a measure of exploitation as Mrs Jewsbury, who is much older than Jeanette, follows her own sexual desires. It could be interpreted as mentorship and initiation or it could be read as lesbian vampirism (as in *The Bostonians* by Lilian Faderman) – preying on the weak. Jeanette is confused during this event. She hated sleeping with Mrs Jewsbury, but she also did not stop it. Mrs Jewsbury is also the character that supports Jeanette at the moment she is outed. She shares the same fear of being exposed. Therefore, she soon leaves the church to live in Leeds: “‘She’s living in Leeds,’ Elsie told [Jeanette], ‘teaching music in one of

them special schools. She's not living alone” (Winterson, 1985:170). Elsie, the only tolerant heterosexual character in their religiously zealous society, mentions to Jeanette that Mrs Jewsbury is not living alone. It is implied that Mrs Jewsbury had accepted her homosexuality once she left the community that judges, exiles, and isolates her like they do with Jeanette.

6.2.4 The social messaging that emerges from the text

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit contains mythical stories that intertwine with Jeanette’s life (Çeker, 2016:56). Reality has an impact on the stories Jeanette chooses to tell and *vice versa*. Constructing and reconstructing reality and stories reveal the power of storytelling. Jeanette actively shapes and reshapes her world by strengthening the main plot with sub-plots, dreaming and imagining a better acceptance of queer sexuality in a heteronormative heterosexual world: “...stories helped you to understand the world” (Winterson, 1985:39). Since the church and her mother suppress her homosexuality, Jeanette creates a space where she reconciles her innermost desires with her experiences in real life through mythical stories (Reisman, 2011:30; Yakut, 2011:77, 79). In other words, Jeanette surpasses her religious family’s endorsement – that is generated through patriarchy – and rewrites herself in stories in which she evades and defies all grand narratives (such as patriarchy and the myth of origin) and includes a binary frame (Yakut, 2011:42, 68, 75). Reminding the reader here of Lyotard’s reference to the grand narratives which imply that there is only one truth. She wants to reveal the “underpinnings of the dominant discourse, to disclose its working mechanisms and to uncover the artificiality of its categories such as gender and sex” (Yakut, 2011:76). The stories Jeanette makes up of a Princess and Responsibility, Emperor Tetrahedron, a Prince and Perfection, the Forbidden City, the Garden, Sir Perceval, and Winnet are subsequently analysed to problematise time as a continuum and disrupt the linear time trajectory – she juxtaposes biblical allusions and mythical stories within the narrative (Yakut, 2011:75, 77).

6.2.4.1 The story of the Princess and Responsibility

In the story of the Princess and Responsibility, the princess is very sensitive and can be distressed for weeks on end because of something small like the death of a moth. No one – expert or amateur – could help her with her problems. Therefore, the princess accepts a hunchbacked woman’s responsibilities (in a small village) in an effort to forget about the palace and the moths and to become independent. This story reflects Jeanette’s early acceptance of the church and her mother’s doctrines. By fulfilling in the social, family, and religious duties given to her, Jeanette becomes an asset to the fundamentalist religious society: “She [Jeanette’s mother] would get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord: a missionary child,

a servant of God, a blessing” (Winterson, 1985:13–14). One of the princess’s responsibilities is to feed and educate people. Similarly, Jeanette is being groomed for missionary work to feed and educate the bodies and souls of other individuals by preaching. As the princess accepts her responsibilities in the small village, Jeanette accepts – at the age of seven – her productive and proper place in her community (Reisman, 2011:13–14; Önal, 2007:23–24). Jeanette’s mythical story deals with responsibility. Jeanette, at the age of seven, accepts her fate of becoming a missionary to educate religious and non-religious individuals. Even when she defies the church and her mother, she still embraces her responsibility to educate both queer and non-queer individuals about social justice and love: “Yes, I love both of them” (Winterson, 1985:134). She believes all individuals, no matter what their sexual orientation, may love both God and another individual at the same time.

6.2.4.2 The story of Emperor Tetrahedron

In the story of Emperor Tetrahedron, the emperor resides in a palace that is constructed out of elastic bands. The emperor has a revolving and unending circus where tragedies and comedies are performed by midgets. The only way he manages to overcome death, which is caused by the performances of the midgets, is by having many faces. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020f) explains that a “tetrahedron” refers to a polyhedron that has four faces: in Greek, “tetra” refers to “four” whereas “hedron” refers to “faces”. This may point to the fact that sexuality is complex and does not have one face. However, the four faces remain baffling, as one is unsure what these faces represent. Jeanette, similarly, needs various faces to survive her society’s religious zealotry, because her homosexuality is seen as a severe threat: “Yield not to Temptation, for yielding is sin” (Winterson, 1985:71). Jeanette, just like elastic bands, is flexible and elastic. She has to hide her sexual orientation from the church and her mother until she can become independent (Al-Shara, 2015:242; Xhonneux, 2012:104). The possible message of this mythical story is “flexibility”. An individual may need more than one face (i.e. multiple viewpoints) to survive in the world: “no emotion is the final one [...] The lens can be tinted, tilted, smashed” (Winterson, 1985:63, 121). Even though Jeanette does not agree with the church and her mother’s laws, she becomes flexible by viewing the world in more than one way (such as a homosexual as well as a spiritual viewpoint⁴⁸): “There is an order and a balance to be found in stories” (Winterson, 1985:122). Through these viewpoints she becomes more flexible with regard to the world and its inhabitants.

⁴⁸ Reminding the reader that Bryce, in *Openly Straight*, also mentions that individuals view the world with or without lenses. The more lenses an individual have, the better they may interpret and understand their world.

6.2.4.3 The story of the Forbidden City

In the story of the Forbidden City, there are stones that have great power in all four directions. “Do not be afraid. These are the ancients. Weathered and wise as they are, respect them, but they are not the everlasting substance. The body that contains a spirit is the one true god” (Winterson, 1985:143–144). In this Forbidden City, one generally has an inner struggle and discovers one’s demon(s). Furthermore, the stones represent obstacles one has to face in reality. These obstacles can change one in the end. In the Biblical story of David and Goliath, David kills the giant Goliath by firing a stone from his sling. In other words, a stone may also be used as a weapon to defend oneself from one’s enemies. “Hands in my pockets, I played with a rough brown pebble [...] ‘I’m leaving the church, so you can forget the rest.’ They were dumbfounded. I held on tight to the little brown pebble and hoped they’d go away” (Winterson, 1985:167). Jeanette has a brown pebble, a small stone, to defend herself and her sexuality against the church and her mother’s social and religious obstacles (Chen, 2014:27; 174). She respects them for they are wise, but she knows the church and her mother have their own errors. The message of this mythical story relates to “respect and protection”. We have to respect our elders, since they may have more (religious) knowledge and experience of the world, but it does not mean they necessarily know and comprehend everything: “And so I learned to interpret the signs and wonders that the unbeliever might never understand” (Winterson, 1985:22). Furthermore, an individual may need self-protection when in danger or feeling threatened due to individuals that may interpret the world differently – “...even the church was sometimes confused” (Winterson, 1985:36). So, even though Jeanette shows respect towards the elders, she knows they are not of everlasting substance.

6.2.4.4 The story of the Prince and Perfection

In the story of the Prince and Perfection, a prince is searching for the perfect woman to be his bride. After years of searching and writing a book on perfection, the prince finally finds the perfect woman, but she refuses his hand in marriage and teaches him that flawlessness does not mean perfection. Perfection comes from having balance between one’s qualities and strength so that they are in harmony. The prince beheads the princess for defying him, proving him wrong, refusing to acknowledge her role in the heterosexual world, and challenging his authority. He silences her. Afterwards, he realises that perfection is only an illusion. Should there be perfection in the world, it will be determined by temporary personal interests and circumstances. Jeanette’s homosexuality, therefore, challenges the church’s traditional authority. The church and her mother reject her sexuality since it upsets their known order: “‘The work of the Devil, if ever I saw it,’ said my mother, who always believed these things are

sent to try us" (Winterson, 1985:18). If they accept it, they will have to redefine and rewrite their beliefs; something they believe is Satan's doing. Jeanette therefore feels that she needs to speak out and speak the truth, because what the church wants – heterosexuality in a flawless world – does not exist. Jeanette's worldview is shaped by the church and her mother, and she is punished when she does not conform to their authority. The only moral positions that are possible, is good or evil and right or wrong: "I discovered that everything in the natural world was a symbol of the Great Struggle between good and evil" (Winterson, 1985:21). Jeanette reveals that she doubts that the church and her mother's fundamentalist religious paradigm can accurately explain her world. As a result, Jeanette develops independent thinking as she rebels against a heterosexual world that is intolerant towards queer sexuality (Çeker, 2016:58; Al-Shara, 2015:243; French, 1999:233; Reisman, 2011:17–18; Chen, 2014:18, 26; Yakut, 2011:79–80). Wang and Yin (2016:21) state that Jeanette rebels against compulsory heterosexuality to oppose heterosexism and the patriarchal institutions it brings; she aims to bring independence and freedom for queer-sexuals in a heteronormative environment. Consequently, the message of this mythical story is "perfection and independence". An individual may strive to be perfect, but since all individuals – queer or non-queer – are sinners, no-one is perfect or flawless: "What you want does not exist" (Winterson, 1985:85). Furthermore, critical thinking may lead an individual to becoming independent as they start questioning authority.

6.2.4.5 The story of the Garden

In the story of the Garden, there is a walled garden on the banks of the Euphrates, a river, where the Garden of Eden was allegedly situated. Furthermore, there is an orange tree in the heart of the garden. If one eats from the orange tree, one has to leave the garden. This story resembles the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the original sin in the Garden of Eden, the Lost Paradise. In popular culture, the forbidden fruit has become an apple. Jeanette uses the opportunity to make the fruit an orange. The orange, which is the colour of Jeanette's "demon", does not symbolise heterosexuality here specifically, but queer sexuality. It also symbolises the understanding of knowledge – the complex nature of desire. "To eat of the fruit means to leave the garden because the fruit speaks of other things, other longings" (Winterson, 1985:156). Eating from this tree allows one to have the courage to admit one's true desires, because one will have to leave the protected garden afterwards. As Jeanette makes the decision to fulfil her own personal desires and follow her own heart, she has to leave her home (her protective garden) due to religious and social strictures. However, leaving does not refer to exile, but a new quest: a time and place where one's choices are less dichotomous (Chen, 2014:27; Al-Shara, 2015:241; Önal, 2007:37–38; Reisman, 2011:25–26). The message of

this mythical story is “choices and sin”. Our actions are affected by the choices we make. Moreover, some of these choices made may be seen as sin, as is the case of Jeanette. However, it may depend on the action or the viewpoint of the beholder: “At first, for me, it had been an accident. That accident had forced me to think more carefully about my own instincts and others' attitudes. After the exorcism I had tried to replace my world with another just like it, but I couldn't” (Winterson, 1985:164). Jeanette, thus, chooses to interpret her homosexuality differently: instead of seeing it as a sin, she interprets it as an opportunity to find her true self.

6.2.4.6 The story of Sir Percival

Sir Percival leaves King Arthur's secured court in search for the Holy Grail. The reason behind his search is to regain balance in his life. He believes the Holy Grail will help him find the missing part of himself that will combine his opposing desires – peace and heroism – and help him realise his dreams. Soon after starting on the journey, he starts missing his previous comforts; he also starts to see King Arthur as an individual who has his own positive and negative attributes, knowledge that is necessary to accept the past for what it is. Similarly, Jeanette seeks balance in her own life with respect to her desires: through this, her love for women and her place in the church can reconcile. This story also reflects nostalgia for the past; Jeanette has left her home and the church – her comforts.

This story further resonates with Jeanette's return to her home for Christmas. Jeanette, too, sees her mother as an individual and accepts the past. As a result, conflicting longings in terms of comfort and new options (heroism and peace, lesbian desire and church) balance each other in Jeanette's reality and contributes to the search for inner identity (Reisman, 2011:27–28; Önal, 2007:40; Chen, 2014:28–29. 31; Yakut, 2011:80–81). It may become clear to the reader that the image and message of this mythical story is “balance”. An individual may need to embrace balance to understand the world they live in instead of striving for perfection: “that glimpse has set me wandering, trying to find ... balance” (Winterson, 1985:216). Through balance, one may find tolerance, acceptance, or even celebration when it comes to differences.

6.2.4.7 The story of Winnet

In the story of Winnet, Winnet falls under a sorcerer's spell and struggles to escape. Furthermore, she is forced to learn sorcery in order for wizardry not to become extinct, as it is already a vulnerable skill. When she defies the norms of society by showing a sexual attraction towards the wrong boy, she is rejected by the community and the sorcerer and has to leave

her permanent haven, the castle. She believes that she has done nothing wrong by loving the boy, but she still has to leave, even if she is innocent. Afterwards, Winnet goes to a secure ancient city to live in secret. Since she can do magic, she will be considered as different and become an outcast. Jeanette, similarly, tries to escape the church, her mother, and the religion that is forced on her, which judges her sexuality. Her community rejects her for showing an interest in another woman; she knows she is not welcome in the society anymore: “At that time I could not imagine what would become of me, and I didn't care” (Winterson, 1985:175). She does not know how she will survive or where she will live, but she knows she has to leave. Jeanette also feels different in her society and has to live in secret when she leaves her home and her church. Nonetheless, she accepts her true desires – her homosexuality (Al-Shara, 2015:239, 243; Önal, 2007:42; Chen, 2014:30–31; Ellam, 2006:81; Yakut, 2011:81–82). Jeanette promotes love instead of blood or lust – love can strengthen the bond between family members, friends, and individuals in societies. However, love can also be used as a weapon to emotionally blackmail an individual. The message of this mythical story is “differences”. There may be similarities between queer and non-queer individuals, but there most probably are differences. The tolerance, acceptance, and celebration of differences may lead to a peaceful environment, whereas the rejection of differences and the forcing of similarities may lead to conflict and confusion instead.

Yakut (2011:78, 95, 106) concludes that Winterson makes it clear that there are multiple stories/histories/realities and not one story/history/reality. Individuals are the historians of their own worlds as they produce their own mythical stories. Thereby, one cannot accept singularity (i.e. heterosexuality) as the one and only truth, but one should rather cherish multiplicity (i.e. heterosexuality and queer sexuality).

6.3 Summary

Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* introduces four possible evolutionary stages a queer character can experience when they are influenced by religious zealotry: obedience, discovery, critical defiance, and spirituality. At first Jeanette is obedient when she is adopted by her mother, who wants to raise her to become a missionary. Once she attends public school, she is exposed to various worldviews. She develops romantic feelings for another girl and enters a discovery stage. Even though she is in a discovery stage and questions some interpretations of the church and her mother, she remains obedient. When Jeanette is outed and judged by Pastor Spratt, has to undergo an exorcism, and is told that she may not love Melanie, she becomes critically defiant. When she is exiled from her house and the church and becomes an independent individual and identifies the church and her mother's hypocrisy,

she enters a spiritual stage as she still wants a relationship with God while accepting and exploring her homosexuality, her true self.

The queer characters – Jeanette, Melanie, Katie, and Mrs Jewsbury – were also critically analysed and discussed. The chapter explored their portrayal in the queer text and how a religiously zealous environment influences their religion. It becomes clear that each queer character is influenced, mostly negatively, by the hegemonic heterosexual religiously zealous setting of the text. Some characters become dynamic and develop throughout the text (such as Jeanette and to some extent Mrs Jewsbury), while others remain static and little or no development occurs (such as Melanie and Katy).

The social messages that emerge from *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* – responsibility, flexibility, respect and protection, perfection and independence, choices and sin, balance, and differences – were also discussed by commenting on how the mythical stories in the novel are either juxtaposed with or correspond with Jeanette's life.

CHAPTER 7: CAPS FOR ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE (SENIOR AND FET PHASES)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the South African Department of Basic Education's (DBE) EHL and EFAL CAPS documents for the Senior and FET phases to measure the degree of inclusiveness and to gauge the possibilities for the inclusion of queer literature.

A study conducted in the USA about LGBTQ+ visibility in the K-12 curriculum (USA) mentions that places such as the workplace, places of worship, some homes, and even some offices of doctors may be unaccepting of queer sexualities (Moorhead, 2018:22). This study, though, poses the following question: "But what about the classroom?" Should queer social issues be excluded in the classroom environment, the curriculum not only disregards this reality, but also denies young individuals a view into themselves and their world (Moorhead, 2018:22). Lyndsey Schlax, a lecturer who teaches a queer study course at the Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts (SOTA), mentions the following in the study of Moorhead (2018:23–24):

It's really important for kids to see themselves in their education [...] There has to be some point in everybody's education where they know that a gay person grows up to be an adult and can do important historical and science-related work. Or that kid who is trans can know that there is a future – that it's real. If students aren't seeing that in school, then I'm not sure where they do.

So, even though there are places where young individuals are denied queer education, the classroom environment can be used as a contrasting effect to introduce all individuals to possibilities and various sexual orientations.

7.2 Literature included in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Documents for English Home Language and English First Additional Language (Senior and FET phases)

The fourth research question of this study is: What do the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to

what extent is queer literature included as suggested and compulsory set works?⁴⁹ Questions that arise from the main question above is: May queer-themed literature be included in the English curriculum? What are the current prescribed set works for EHL and EFAL Grade 12 learners? What are the approaches to teaching literature in the English language classroom? Why should queer-themed literature also be selected for the English language classroom?

7.2.1 May queer-themed literature be included in the English curriculum?

One of the principles that the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12 is based on, is formulated as follows:

Human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice: infusing the principles and practices of social and environmental justice and human rights as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 is sensitive to issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors (DBE, 2011a:5; DBE, 2011b:5; DBE, 2011c:5; DBE, 2011d:5).

This principle explains that sensitive issues of diversity should be included in the South African curriculum in order to reach social and environmental justice. This includes sexual orientation, since it is listed in Section 9(3) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996). However, nowhere in the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) is queer-themed literature expressly mentioned. However, the same argument may be made for non-queer-themed literature. The English curriculum for the Senior and FET phases does not place any emphasis on a single theme; it rather focuses on “approaches to teaching literature” (DBE, 2011a:10-11; DBE, 2011c:10-11).

Sections 9(3), 29(1a), and 29(1b) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) stipulate that all South Africans have the fundamental right to choose their sexual orientation and to receive education on various sexualities. There may be teachers who use the opportunity of the hidden curriculum to teach queer topics and introduce their learners to queer sexuality. However, this is not enough. Teachers generally avoid teaching queer topics for various reasons discussed in Chapter 2 (Batchelor *et al.*, 2018:29; Wright & Smith, 2013:9; Samelius & Wågberg, 2015:64). Learners should receive education on queer topics and have access to queer sources and resources as part of their schooling. This may introduce various

⁴⁹ I will not be discussing the EHL and EFAL CAPS documents comprehensively. The focus of this study is on literature teaching and not the entire English curriculum.

viewpoints on queer South Africans in a pre-dominantly heteronormative society. One of the ways in which to achieve this is to use the English literature classroom by introducing queer-themed literature as part of the literature offering.

The DBE (2011a:10; 2011b:10; 2011c:16; 2011d:12) states that the main goal when teaching literature in the language classroom is to focus on the comprehension of a text. In the Department's view, the ability to understand texts may develop in learners a sensitivity towards issues of diversity, which may include queer sexuality. Queer literature that is suitable for youth and that is of a good literary standard is widely available. Writers such as Bill Konigsberg, Brent Hartinger, and Jeanette Winterson who are well-known, acclaimed, and popular have expressed their thoughts, ideas, issues, ideologies, beliefs, and principles in their novels. Two readers of *Openly Straight* reacted as follows:

- “As someone who came out early, and back in the 90s, I can say that I completely understood where Rafe was coming from. Being openly gay or, really, even just perceived as gay, when you are in high school ends up being 90% of your identity whether you want it to be or not” (Goodreads, 2020k).
- “No, it is not bad at all to 'just be yourself'. I believe that is the overall message that this book is trying to tell us. We see Rafe go through a confusing state when it comes to his identity and giving up labels, but in the progress he [loses] sight of who he really is. Him coming to grips with that toward the end of the reading really allows the reader to see how being true to yourself and allowing these different aspects make up who you are instead of defining you results in being happy with who you are” (Goodreads, 2020k).

Two readers of *Geography Club* reacted as follows:

- “5 STARS!! I don't read a lot of Young Adult, but something about the description and the book cover intrigued me. It reminded me of some of the TV shows I used to watch in my younger years... Freaks and Geeks, My So Called Life, etc. And I was not disappointed, I love love loved this book! Told entirely from Russel Middlebrook's POV, this story is full of humor, wit and important life lessons. I can't wait to read the rest of this series!!” (Goodreads, 2020l).
- “I enjoyed this book quite a lot, made me rethink some of high school and what mindset a lot of the kids had. Kind of sad really how [strongly] we want to be popular then and how little it really matters in the now. Seems like too much work for me now!” (Goodreads, 2020l).

Two readers of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* reacted as follows:

- “A delicious fruit bowl.... Funny, clever, poetic, quirky, creative well written bittersweet story. Jeannette's innocence was so real.....her heart pure. A terrific inspiring small book! Amazing how humor- and 'witty-charm' can transform sensitive situations” (Goodreads, 2020m).
- “Oranges is short and sweet; really, short and bittersweet. It was drop dead fabulous from page one. Here is how to write a) an autobiographical novel; b) an autobiographical comic novel; c) an autobiographical lesbian comic novel; d) an autobiographical lesbian religious comic novel. Here is rueful sweet-natured working-class English life without the usual accompanying hauteur” (Goodreads, 2020m).

As a result, queer-themed literature can realistically be included in the English curriculum to give effect to the aim of the NCS quoted above.

In the next section, I discuss the current prescribed set works for EHL and EFAL Grade 12 learners.

7.2.2 What are the current prescribed set works for English Home Language and English First Additional Language, Grade 12 learners?

The Department of Basic Education (2016) published Circular E39 of 2016 with respect to the *Implementation of Grade 12 National Senior Certificate (NSC) Literature Set Works for All Official Languages*. The circular includes various annexures, of which Annexure A comprises a list of titles for novels that may be studied for each official language.⁵⁰

According to Circular E39 of 2016, the literature set works for Grade 12 English Home Language are: *Life of Pi* (written by Yann Martel in 2011) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (written by Oscar Wilde in 1890). The literature set works for Grade 12 English First Additional Language are: *Cry, the Beloved Country* (written by Alan Paton in 1948) and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (written by Robert Louis Stevenson in 1886). Below follows a

⁵⁰ Annexures B–F comprise of lists of the titles for drama, poems, short stories, folklore, and official Second Additional Languages to be studied. Since this study focuses on queer novels, I do not discuss the current set works for drama, poems, short stories and folklore for English or the official Second Additional Languages for English as the scope of my study does not allow it.

brief description of each novel and the themes on which the Department focused in the last three years' Grade 12 NSC examination papers⁵¹.

Life of Pi is a fantasy adventure in which a Tamil boy from Pondicherry, Piscine Molitor 'Pi' Patel, explores "issues of spirituality and practicality from an early age". After he is shipwrecked, he survives 227 days in the Pacific Ocean on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger, named Richard Parker (Goodreads, 2020a). The DBE annual NSC literature examination papers (2019c:15; 2019d:14; 2018d:14; 2018e:13; 2017b:14) focused on the following themes in 2017, 2018, and 2019 in their sections on *Life of Pi*: the heroic and gruesome deeds human and animal characters commit to survive; the co-existence of reasoning and faith in approaches to life; the manner in which Pi's humanity diminishes while fighting to survive; the influences other characters may have on one's life, and the strengthening of one's character through traumatic experiences.

The Picture of Dorian Gray focuses on moral integration and corruptive influences as a fashionable young man sells his soul for eternal youth and beauty (Goodreads, 2020b). The DBE annual NSC literature examination papers (2019c:12; 2019d:11; 2018d:11; 2018e:11; 2017b:12) focused on the following themes in 2017, 2018, and 2019 in the section on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: a society that values beauty and individualism above all else; the reprehensible qualities of human beings that can destroy people; the tragic consequences of the inability to distinguish between art and reality; the loss of an individual's innocence; and the influence other individuals may have on one's life.

Cry, the Beloved Country tells the story of the Zulu pastor, Stephen Kumalo, and his son, Absalom, as well as James Jarvis and the murder of his son, Arthur, who live in a land that is marred by racial injustices (Goodreads, 2020c). The annual NSC literature examination papers of the DBE (2019a:6, 8; 2019b:6; 2018b:6-7; 2018c:6; 2017:7a) focused on the following themes in 2017, 2018, and 2019 in their questions on *Cry, the Beloved Country*: social constructivism, religion and faith, attitude, power, migration, aspects of human nature, survival, punishment, forgiveness, and fear.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde follows scientist, Dr Henry Jekyll, who believes that every human being has two minds: one good and one evil. He develops a potion to separate the two minds to explore the idea further. Soon, however, his evil personality takes

⁵¹ I refer to the examination papers in order to deduce the themes that are mainly discussed around the prescribed set works. However, there may be teachers that discuss other themes in their classrooms and not just what is in the NSC examination papers.

complete control of his body, leaving Dr Jekyll to become known as Mr Hyde (Goodreads, 2020d). The annual NSC literature examination papers of the DBE (2019a:11; 2019b:9, 11; 2018b:10; 2018c:9-10; 2017a:10) focused on the following themes in 2017, 2018, and 2019: murder and death (violence); attitude to science (scientific experimentation); the existence of good and evil in all human beings; friendship and loyalty, and logic versus the supernatural.

Even though I have not provided detailed synopses of these set works it is clear that these texts are not queer-themed literature. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* does have overtures of homosexuality, but it is a marginal theme that is not fully developed in the novel. *The Advocate* (2018) mentions that Oscar Wilde's novel may not be overtly gay, but there are plenty of subtexts that may be seen as homosexual. Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton, friends of Dorian, openly express intense admiration for his beauty. There are also passages that express homoerotic feelings on the side of Basil for Dorian. Nevertheless, men admiring Dorian's beauty and the possible homosexual subtexts and homoerotic feelings are not the focus of this novel. Queer issues in heteronormative environments based on the experiences of queer characters are not addressed in these set works (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:xx, 17, 134; Blackburn *et al.*, 2015). Nonetheless, it is inevitable that learners would pick up on these issues and the text can surely be used to discuss queer issues.

Many of the above-mentioned themes on which the DBE focused in the NSC examination papers of 2017, 2018, and 2019 can be taught from the queer texts analysed in Chapters 4–6. However, South African learners are only exposed to non-queer literature that address non-queer characters' experiences in a pre-dominantly heteronormative environment. They are not yet exposed to queer literature where queer characters go through similar experiences.

In the next section, I discuss the previous prescribed set works for EHL and EFAL Grade 12 learners.

7.2.3 What were the previous prescribed set works for English Home Language and English First Additional Language, Grade 12 learners?

The Department of Basic Education (2008) published Circular S4 of 2008 with respect to the *Implementation of Grade 12 National Senior Certificate (NSC) Literature Set Works for All Official Languages* from 2008-2016. Like the 2016 circular, the circular lists titles for novels that had to be studied for each official Home and First Additional Language in its appendices. According to Circular S4 of 2008, the literature set works for Grade 12 English Home Language were: *The Great Gatsby* (written by Francis Scott Fitzgerald in 1925), *Animal Farm*

(written by George Orwell in 1945), and *Pride and Prejudice* (written by Jane Austin in 1813). The literature set works for Grade 12 English First Additional Language were: *Lord of the Flies* (written by William Golding in 1954), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (written by Harper Lee in 1960), and *A Grain of Wheat* (written by Ngugi wa Thiongo in 1967).

The Great Gatsby tells the story of Jay Gatsby who is fabulously wealthy and who has a new love, Daisy Buchanan, a beautiful woman during the 1920s in America. Jay enjoys lavish parties, gin, and sex on Long Island (Goodreads, 2020e). The story addresses poverty and money, decadence and American dream.

Animal Farm is an allegorical novel about a downtrodden society's blind march towards totalitarianism. The story is about a farm that is overtaken by its animals when the farmer mistreats and overworks them. When the animals had chased all humans from the farm, they set out to create a paradise of justice, progress, and equality. However, soon the pigs, the most intelligent of all the animals on the farm, use idealism and stirring slogans to create a totalitarianism that is just as terrible as the system they had before (Goodreads, 2020f). The book essentially deals with the nature of power.

Pride and Prejudice follows the romantic clash between Elizabeth, who is an opinionated woman, and Mr Darcy, who is a proud man. The novel includes a delicate quadrille of intrigue and flirtation of manners of Regency England (Goodreads, 2020g).

Lord of the Flies is the story of a plane crashing on an uncharted island at the dawn of World War II. In this plane is a group of schoolboys. After the death of the adults in the crash, they are left with no supervision. At first their freedom to do anything they want is something to celebrate, but sin, terror, and evil soon follow as they have to organise into their own society. When order collapses, the boys descend into social chaos that essentially pivots on a fight between good and evil (Goodreads, 2020h).

To Kill a Mockingbird is told by a child, Scout Finch, and spans the time during the time of the Great Depression in the Deep South of the United States. When a hideous crime is committed, the children try to solve the mystery of Boo Radley, while the adults attempt to negotiate the faulty justice system after a black man, Tom Robinson, is wrongfully convicted (Goodreads, 2020i).

A Grain of Wheat deals with a group of villagers and Mugo, a hero with a terrible secret, during the Mau rebellion of 1952–1960. During this time Kenya fought for independence from Britain,

which they attained in 1962. The characters' lives are transformed by forced compromises, friendships, betrayal, and love (Goodreads, 2020j).

It is clear that the lack of inclusion of queer literature goes back a long way. The CAPS advocates social justice and transformation (which includes various sexual orientations), but queer texts have never formed part of the set work lists, which may point to lip service being paid to social justice and transformation from the DBEs side. In theory, various sexual orientations may be included in the curriculum. In practice, the matter of sexual identity is not addressed at all. However, the DBE does not prevent individual teachers from reading queer-themed texts for enrichment or entertainment in the English language classroom. However, one of the problems is that once one has done the set works, there is no space left in the curriculum for additional texts. It seems that the emphasis in the curriculum is on political issues (such as racism, prejudice and colonial exploitation).

Since all Grade 12 learners partake in the NSC, the DBE (2016) has to prescribe certain set works for consistency and transparency with a view to the countrywide senior certificate examinations. With an already full curriculum, teachers rarely have time left to select additional works. The DBE would have to include queer-themed texts in the list of prescribed set works for the Grade 12 NSC examination papers for such texts to realistically make it into the classroom.

The following section examines the approaches to teaching literature in the English language classroom and how these approaches may be linked to queer-themed literature.

7.2.4 What are the approaches advocated in the CAPS for the English language classroom to teaching literature?

The text-based approach, which is one of the four approaches the CAPS documents advocate when teaching a language, is discussed below. The other three approaches are the communicative, process and integrated approaches⁵².

The text-based approach is dependent on texts and how these are utilised. It provides the opportunity for teachers and learners to explore texts. The purpose of this approach is to “enable learners to become competent, confident and critical readers, writers, viewers and

⁵² The communicative, process and integrated approaches are not discussed in this dissertation since their main focus are on the productive skills, speaking and writing, whereas the text-based approach focuses on the receptive skills, reading and listening.

designers of texts". In order to achieve this aim, learners should use their language skills – speaking, writing, reading, and listening – to analyse texts. The aim is to help learners to comprehend how texts are produced and what the messages are (DBE, 2011a:9; DBE, 2011b:16; DBE, 2011c:9; DBE, 2011d:11). As a result, learners' higher cognitive thinking skills are enhanced by analysing and evaluating texts. The text-based approach also includes the production of various texts for particular purposes and audiences. For example, queer-themed literature that explores the experiences of queer characters in a heteronormative society may be used to create awareness and understanding (Beck, 2005:392, 397–398).

The DBE (2011a:10; 2011b:12; 2011c:10; 2011d:16-17) states that the teaching of literature should "focus on teaching for comprehension". Through understanding, learners may develop a sensitivity towards literature and the knowledge, skills, and values contained within texts. Literary texts are used for amusement, entertainment, or revelation, but they may also be used to express "ideas, thoughts and issues; principles, ideologies and beliefs". Authors use their imaginations to reveal, reinforce, and highlight their ideas. For example, Bill Konigsberg (2013) highlights a queer individual's search for identity in a heteronormative school environment; Brent Hartinger (2004) highlights queer individuals' positive and negative experiences in a heteronormative school environment; Jeanette Winterson (1985) highlights religious zealotry in a heteronormative environment and the influence it has on queer individuals. Based on the literary analysis of queer literature in Chapters 4–6, *Openly Straight*, *Geography Club*, and *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* are suitable and appropriate queer texts that may form part of the Senior and FET English language curriculum.

Moving away from the text-based approach and the main purpose for reading literature, the DBE provides the following approaches to teaching literature in the language classroom:

Firstly, literature should mainly be read in the classroom without any interferences to allow learners to have a basic and clear understanding of the text's plot. The teacher should also not spend too much time on reading a text since this may become deleterious to a clear understanding of the text (DBE, 2011a:10; DBE, 2011b:12; DBE, 2011c:10; DBE, 2011d:16-17).

Secondly, literature should show learners how their home or first additional language can be used to interpret a text at school level. Teaching centres on a close look at the origin of the text and what is expressed (through choice of words and imagery, paragraphing and sentence structures, layout, motifs, etc.). Learners also learn that a text may be re-arranged, clarified, and emphasised with imagination, intelligence, subtlety, and flair. It is pivotal that a line by line

analysis of the text should not be followed. Teachers should also not expect their learners to interpret a text at university level (DBD, 2011a:10; DBE, 2011b:12; DBE, 2011c:10; DBE, 2011d:16-17).

Thirdly, a literary text can be linked to creative writing. Creative levels of appreciation may be reached by providing learners with writing opportunities concerning the text. Additionally, teachers can use classroom discussions to guide learners before they do written work or they could discuss completed written activities (DBE, 2011a:10; DBE, 2011b:12; DBE, 2011c:10; DBE, 2011d:16-17).

Fourthly, teachers should point out to their learners that literature is not about right or wrong answers. Learners should grasp the text as a whole within their personal creativity, interpretation, and exploration (DBE, 2011a:10; DBE, 2011b:12; DBE, 2011c:10; DBE, 2011d:16-17).

The DBE (2011a:11; 2011c:11) also lists other focuses that may be applied when teaching literature in the language classroom: the chronological, the author, the theme, and the genre. These approaches may be combined and can lead a teacher in their selection of additional literature that can be taught as part of the English curriculum for Senior and FET phases:

In the chronological approach learners can research and combine the literature period with the historical events for the same timeframe [...] In the author approach, learners can participate in a broad and deep study of an author... [...] In the theme approach learners can look at themes such as justice, success, love, etc. across a number of [novels] ... across different genres and relate them to events in real life situations. They can make judgments about the character's actions and comment on the theme [...] Regarding the genre approach, learners can classify, compare and contrast different types of literary genre, e.g., the difference between the plots in ... novel[s].

Consequently, there is room for teachers and the DBE to introduce queer-themed literature into the language classroom while using a single or combined approach from among those suggested when teaching literature. For example, a teacher may combine the author and theme approach to select a queer-themed text. Teachers may for example select an author that writes queer literature, such as Bill Konigsberg, who addresses a theme, such as the search for identity in a hegemonic heteronormative environment. Again, queer-themed literature, according to the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) (DBE, 2011a:10-11; DBE, 2011c:10-11), may be included in the language classroom.

James Banks (2010), as cited by Moorhead (2018:24), additionally proposes a flexible approach that entails four levels – which can be implemented either in order or through a concurrent mix – to integrate multicultural content into a school’s curriculum: Contribution, Additive, Transformation, and Social Action. The first level, Contribution, focuses on “heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements”. Additive, the second level, adds “content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its structure”. The third level, Transformation, alters the “structure of the curriculum to encourage students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from multiple perspectives”. Social Action, the fourth level, encourages students to “make decisions about important social issues and take actions to help address them” (Moorhead, 2018:24). Implementing one or more of these four levels into the curriculum may assist teachers to introduce queer content to their learners.

Referring specifically to the second level of Banks, the Additive level approach is relevant to this study as it may allow teachers to introduce novels, texts, movies, multimedia elements, etc., without altering the curriculum’s basic structure, purposes, and characteristics (Moorhead, 2018:25). The third level, Transformation, is also relevant to this study as students can study the social construction of queer individuals and cultures across place and time regarding sexual orientation, identity formation (Konigsberg’s *Openly Straight*), intersecting oppressions, homophobia (Hartinger’s *Geography Club*), HIV/AIDS, and gender roles and religion (Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*). The reader is reminded of the hidden curriculum in which planned or unplanned activities of teachers and learners occur at schools (Jacobs, 2011:44). Teachers can implement queer literature or themes in the English language classroom by using the hidden curriculum.

The following section discusses the general aims for the South African curriculum and how they may be linked to queer-themed literature for the English language classroom.

7.2.5 Why should queer-themed literature also be selected for the English language classroom?

The DBE (2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d) provides general aims for the South African curriculum. The first aim declares that the knowledge, skills, and values taught in South African schools should be worth learning because these attributes will contribute to making learners’ lives more meaningful. Consequently, the curriculum promotes “knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives” (DBE, 2011a:4; DBE, 2011b:4; DBE, 2011c:4; DBE, 2011d:4). With relevance to queer-themed literature, these contexts may include queer individuals in pre-dominantly heteronormative environments.

The second aim states the goals the NCS should reach: one of the goals that can be related to queer-themed literature is to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary not only for self-fulfilment, but to participate meaningfully in society as citizens of a free South Africa. This goal also includes that the knowledge, skills, and values the learners are equipped with, should be “irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability” (DBE, 2011a:4; DBE, 2011b:4; DBE, 2011c:4; DBE, 2011d:4). Therefore, South African learners should be exposed to queer individuals, and queer individuals should receive support in a heteronormative South Africa.

The third aim explains the principles on which the NCS is based. Three of the principles that also touch on queer-themed literature are social transformation, active and critical learning, and credibility, quality and efficiency. Firstly, social transformation entails equality, something that can be developed by means of education: “equal educational opportunities are provided for all sections of the population”. Secondly, active and critical learning discourages “rote and uncritical learning of given truths”. Thirdly, credibility, quality and efficiency imply an education that is “comparable in quality, breadth and depth to those of other countries” (DBE, 2011a:4; DBE, 2011b:4; DBE, 2011c:4; DBE, 2011d:4). Social transformation may be promoted by introducing heteronormative environments to queer individuals. If more South Africans are exposed to a queer individual in one way or another, it can have a positive influence on individuals’ perceptions of queer South Africans (The Other Foundation, 2016:41). Active and critical learning may be developed in learners, providing opportunities for South African learners to question given truths. McMillan and O’Neil (2012:33-24) explain that should learners read queer literature critically in the language classroom, they can reflect and question the facts presented by those who are in authority. Credibility, quality and efficiency may be promoted by ensuring that the South African curriculum is comparable with other countries. For example, South Africa may be compared to the USA and specifically states such as California, Colorado, New Jersey and Illinois, which became the first states of America to legalise the teaching of queer-themed topics in schools (Leins, 2019). Additionally, in Europe, Stonewall (a charity), together with Pearson (a multinational publishing and education company), published *Creating an LGBT-inclusive curriculum: a guide for secondary schools* in 2017. So, there may also be secondary schools in Europe that teach queer texts or queer education (Stonewall, 2017).

The fourth aim delineates the skills learners should have reached when they complete their schooling careers, and specifically the NCS. Four of the attributes can be developed by including queer-themed literature. These skills are that they should be able to “collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information”. Learners should become critical and creative

thinkers that can solve problems and work cooperatively with other individuals. They should avoid isolation in order to “demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems” (DBE, 2011a:5; DBE, 2011b:5; DBE, 2011c:5; DBE, 2011d:5). This means that queer and non-queer learners should be able to work together to solve problems and comprehend that South Africa and the rest of the world have citizens with diverse sexual orientations (The Other Foundation, 2016; Nell & Shapiro, 2011; Love Not Hate, 2016; Berry, 2018:510).

The fifth aim is that South African schools should be inclusive in their organisation, planning, and teaching: “This can only happen if all teachers have a sound understanding of how to recognise and address barriers to learning, and how to plan for diversity” (DBE, 2011a:5; DBE, 2011b:5; DBE, 2011c:5; DBE, 2011d:5). As mentioned earlier, sexual orientation is included in diversity. Thus, heteronormative South African school environments should be inclusive of queer individuals by including queer-themed topics in classrooms (Batchelor *et al.*, 2018:29).

7.3 Summary

This chapter aimed to determine what the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state with respect to including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent queer literature is included in suggested and compulsory set works. In order to answer this question, the following questions were addressed: May queer-themed literature be included in the English curriculum? What are the current prescribed set works for EHL and EFAL Grade 12 learners? What were the previous prescribed set works for EHL and EFAL Grade 12 learners? What are the approaches to teaching literature in the English language classroom? Why should queer-themed literature also be selected for the English language classroom?

It was determined that the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) do not explicitly exclude or limit the inclusion of queer-themed literature in the English language curriculum by following a specific literature teaching approach. However, the current and previous prescribed set works for Grade 12 do not include queer texts either. There is a discrepancy between what is advocated and what is taught in classrooms in terms of queer-themed literature.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION, GUIDELINES FOR SENIOR PHASE AND FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 suggested a number of preliminary findings after having analysed the South African Department of Basic Education's (DBE) EHL and EFAL CAPS documents for the Senior and FET phases. Chapter 8 reflects further on the findings of this study. This is followed by the guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers, consideration of the limitations and contribution of this study, as well as recommendations for future research. Finally, I conclude this study with a final reflection.

8.2 Reflection on findings

8.2.1 A literary analysis of queer texts

The three studies discussed in Chapter 2, *Progressive Prudes* (The Other Foundation, 2016), *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today* (Nell & Shapiro, 2011), and *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016* (Love Not Hate, 2016) highlight that queer individuals are significant in number in South Africa and improving the quality of their lives should remain an area of research. Furthermore, research shows that South Africans are in general a queer-phobic nation.

Progressive Prudes (The Other Foundation, 2016) brings forward morality; self-identity; prejudice; abuse and violence; attitudes; the role of contact; constitutional protections; and the role of education. *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today* (Nell & Shapiro, 2011) emphasises sexual orientations; coming out; love, marriage, and children; parents at home; the education system; the school environment; and the role of religion. *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016* (Love Not Hate, 2016) provides statistics on queer South Africans' experiences in a predominantly heteronormative society with respect to the fear of coming out; discrimination and abuse; and the knowledge of murdered queer victims. All of these factors have a positive or negative effect on queer South Africans in a heteronormative society.

The factors mentioned above developed this study's problem statement and therefore led me to explore and critically analyse different themes (the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry) as they manifested in selected queer texts [*Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg (2013), *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (2004), and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (1985)], to critically analyse the portrayal of queer characters in the selected texts and to determine what social messaging is prevalent.

The aim of the literary analysis of queer literature was to demonstrate ways to introduce South African learners to the positive and negative realities of the queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society, as the hope is that positive exposure to queer individuals would be instrumental in changing prejudices. This was followed by analysing what is stated in the South African Department of Education's CAPS for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) with respect to including queer literature in the syllabus to determine to what extent queer literature is included as suggested and compulsory set works. Finally, the study provides guidelines that may be used by Senior phase and FET English language teachers as criteria for selecting queer texts, together with strategies to use when teaching these texts.

8.2.2 Themes and queer literature

The first research question of this study was: How do the identified themes manifest in the chosen literary texts?

Openly Straight by Bill Konigsberg (2013) is about a homosexual boy, Rafe, who feels overwhelmed with being openly gay as he is defined by his sexuality. Following, he transfers to an all boys' boarding school that is on the opposite side of the country in order to transform from openly gay to openly straight. At his new school he is free from the label that defined him, but he falls in love with a heterosexual boy. *Openly Straight* is thus a novel about being out, being real, and all the things being oneself can mean. Accordingly, the theme, the search for identity, manifested from the queer text as Rafe undergoes four stages during his search for identity – rejection, tolerance, acceptance, and celebration.

Geography Club by Brent Hartinger (2004) is about a group of queer high school learners that secretly form a support group to share their daily experiences, as being queer has been very lonesome for them. These learners specifically name it the *Geography Club* as a geography club would supposedly be boring and this would avoid the attention of bullies and discourage any other academic individuals who might want to join. However, the secret club does not remain a secret for long. *Geography Club* is a novel about being secretly queer in a high

school environment and the challenges queer learners face with regard to bullying. The theme of prejudice and abuse manifests from the queer text as popularity levels – Land of the Popular, Borderlands of Respectability, and Outcast Island – determine the treatment of a student at Goodkind High School.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson (1985) is about the adopted Jeanette who is raised by her strongly religious mother as one of God's elect. However, after Jeanette is condemned by her mother and the church for being homosexual and questioning the church, she leaves to be her true self. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a novel that focuses on the role religion plays in a homosexual woman's life. The theme of religious zealotry manifests in the queer text as Jeanette goes through four stages – obedience, discovery, critical defiance, and spirituality – in her efforts to deal with her community's fundamentalist point of view of the world.

The three themes of searching for identity, prejudice and abuse, and religious zealotry that manifest from Konigsberg's *Openly Straight* (2013), Hartinger's *Geography Club* (2004), and Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985) respectively, can inspire learners to identify with these themes and to think independently and critically about the authors' motives for sharing stories of queer characters in heteronormative environments. Literature containing such themes can expose heterosexual and queer learners to the experiences of fictional queer characters in heteronormative societies and provide them with a different point-of-view. It can serve as a reflective mirror that could assist them with identity formation and confirmation, and it can empower them to challenge received views on controversial issues (Lord, 2014:181, 184; Bacon, 2016:30; Batchelor *et al.*, 2018:29). So, the focus is not so much on authorial agency as much as it is on the reader's interpretation of a given text.

8.2.3 The portrayal of queer characters and their experiences

The second research question was: How are queer characters portrayed in the selected texts? Konigsberg, Hartinger, and Winterson portray their characters either as individuals who come out or are outed as queer, who are born queer, or who experiment in queer and non-queer contexts to find their own sexual orientation. The male characters are also portrayed either as "hyper masculine", "effeminate nelly stereotype/flamboyant", or "in-between".

The fictional queer characters from the selected queer literature texts for this study – Rafe, Ben, Toby, Robinson, Ben's uncle, Jeff, Caleb, and Albie from *Openly Straight* (Konigsberg, 2013); Russel, Kevin, Min, Terese, Ike, and Brian from *Geography Club* (Hartinger, 2004); and

Jeanette, Melanie, Katy, and Mrs Jewsbury from *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (Winterson, 1985) – can also be analysed as a way to address the social issues evident from *Progressive Prudes* (The Other Foundation, 2016), *Out of the Box: Queer Youth in South Africa Today* (Nell & Shapiro, 2011), and *Hate Crimes against LGBT People in South Africa, 2016* (Love Not Hate, 2016). The point-of-view of these fictional queer characters with their unique values and beliefs can describe, interpret, and represent a character, scene, or event. Thus, by means of queer literature and the experiences of fictional queer characters, readers can become more aware or their awareness can become heightened (Cart & Jenkins, 2006:xx, 17, 134; McCallum, 1999, cited by Blackburn *et al.*, 2015; Blackburn *et al.*, 2015).

8.2.4 Social messaging and the introduction to queer characters' realities

The third research question was: What social messaging is prevalent in queer texts that introduce learners to the positive and negative realities of fictional queer characters' experiences in a heteronormative society?

Openly Straight (Konigsberg, 2013) contains social messages of acceptance, GSA, coming out, labels and stereotypes, queer knowledge and assumptions, queer-phobia, bromance, love and perspectives on life. *Geography Club* (Hartinger, 2004) focuses on queer support and education, and peer pressure. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (Winterson, 1985) addresses religious zealotry, responsibility, flexibility, respect and protection, perfection and independence, choices and sin, balance, and differences.

Social messaging as a queer literary element may be used to combat queer-phobia and hegemonic heterosexism. Homes, parents, televisions, schools, educators, literature, etc., are sources that can expose individuals to positive or negative messages on various sexual orientations. Cultural and societal messages may be constructed through these sources, especially literature. Literature and the messages contained within it can therefore challenge discrimination and inequities (Rosenblatt, 1978; Zitlow, 2000; Eisner, 1998:149; Jackson & Boutte, 2009:108, 112).

8.2.5 The CAPS documents for English Home Language and English First Additional Language (Senior and FET phases)

The last research question was: What do the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases) state in terms of including queer literature in the syllabus, and to what extent is queer literature included as suggested and compulsory set works?

An analysis of the CAPS documents for EHL and EFAL (Senior and FET phases), specifically the lists of current and previous prescribed set works for EHL and EFAL Grade 12 learners and the sections on the recommended approaches to teaching literature in the English language classroom, makes it known that queer-themed literature is not explicitly excluded. However, the prescribed set works for Grade 12 do not include queer texts either. This shows that there is a divergence between what is taught in classrooms and what is advocated in terms of queer-themed literature. Nevertheless, the use of queer literature in the language classroom can help to address queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity in the heteronormative South African context. School policies should consider including queer topics by means of critical literacy.

Critical literacy allows the reader to collect, reflect, and interpret information in various formats with a critical lens and additional multiple viewpoints (Freire, 1970; Lewison *et al.*, 2002:385, 387; McMillan & O'Neil, 2012:33–34). Should learners read queer literature critically in the language classroom, this would allow learners (queer and non-queer) to be themselves in a safe environment, to share unique stories of their lives as part of the school curricula, to reflect and question the heteronormative position, to enrich sexual diversity, and to normalise and mainstream different sexual orientations that are relevant in the South African context (Berry, 2018:510; Nell & Shapiro, 2011:15, 20).

Critical literacy curricula, though, are overshadowed by the uncertainties and hesitations about critical literacy and what it represents, even though queer texts are available to be read in the language classroom. Many educators may lack the necessary knowledge to implement and read literature critically (Lewison *et al.*, 2002:390). Consequently, educators and learners need guidelines for implementing critical literacy in the language classroom – i.e. understanding how texts work, anticipating the texts' intentions, and evaluating and recreating social relations (Behrman, 2006:491–492) – to avoid the opportunity for queer-phobic educators to use the texts to promote their heterosexist agenda. The fifth aim and contribution to this study was to provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers to use as criteria for selecting queer texts and as strategies to use when teaching these texts. The following section discusses this aim.

8.3 Guidelines for Senior phase and Further Education and Training English language teachers

The final research aim of this study was to provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers as criteria for selecting queer texts and strategies to use when

teaching these texts. In the following section, I repeatedly refer to Appendix E (lesson planning template), Appendix F (Senior phase example lesson) and Appendix G (FET phase example lesson⁵³) as I provide possible guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers.

The criteria that Senior phase and FET English language teachers may use for selecting queer texts are as follows: Firstly, is the text queer-themed? Secondly, if the text is queer-themed, what is the queer point-of-view? Thirdly, is the queer character a young adult? Fourthly, does the text seem age appropriate for young adults? Lastly, does the text address or explore prominent issues that are relevant to queer individuals' perspectives in a heteronormative society (e.g. coming of age, psychology – risk decisions; fanaticism, socio-economic issues, etc.)? I mentioned in Chapter 1 that I have read a variety of queer literature: *Openly Straight* and *Honestly Ben* by Bill Konigsberg, *Geography Club* and *The Order of the Poison Oak* by Brent Hartinger, *Two Boys Kissing*, *Boy Meets Boy*, and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* by David Levithan, *Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli, *More Than This* by Patrick Ness, *Something like Summer*, *Something like Autumn* and *Something like Winter* by Jay Bell, *A Boy's Own Story* by Edmund White, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst, *Bullied Boy* by Daring Diane, and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson. In order for the criteria to be applied effectively, the teacher in question should be well-read. For example, the texts I initially selected for this study were: *A Boy's Own Story*, *Fun Home*, *The Line of Beauty*, and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. However, due to inappropriate content for young adults (i.e. paedophilia, nudity, sex scenes, and drug abuse) and themes (i.e. suicide and the AIDS epidemic) I did not want to pursue, three of the texts were replaced with two texts that do not contain inappropriate content or themes that would be difficult to pursue. This is in line with what Wood, Kissel and Miller (2016), as cited by Blackburn and Miller (2017:8), refer to as "safe zones". In such zones, "teachers intentionally position their classroom community as a safe place, or we would argue a safe enough place, in which students are able to discuss [queer]-themed literature, addressing stereotypes and promoting conversations that further social justice aims. Thus, teachers may use the above-mentioned questions to select queer texts for the language classroom. Should teachers be uncertain about or ignorant of the selection of queer texts, I propose they use *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg (2013), *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (2004), and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson as this study provides a literary analysis of each text. I

⁵³ The example lessons for the Senior and FET phases are designed for teachers and learners at schools where resources are available. However, the lessons may be adapted for teachers and learners at schools where there are limited resources. PowerPoint presentations, for example, may be substituted by handouts.

recommend *Openly Straight* for the Senior phase, *Geography Club* for both the Senior and FET phases, and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* for the FET phase.

Should Senior phase and FET English language teachers select queer texts for inclusion in their classrooms, they may use Appendix E to plan a lesson as it includes various strategies. Romylos (2018:106) mentions that lesson plans should not be regarded as “sacrosanct”; teachers do not have to follow a lesson plan strictly. However, a lesson plan may serve as a tool for teachers when they prepare lessons. Appendix E presents a possible lesson plan that has been constructed by considering various lesson planning templates of the North-West University’s School for Language Education, English for Education (2020). The lesson plan is divided into six sections: Context, Topic, SMART Task; Teaching Strategies, Learning Activities, Assessment, and Resources; Introduction, and Pertinent Question. Covey (1989) states that “to begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction”. In other words, teachers may know how to plan an effective lesson should they have the end result in mind. Appendix E is based on Wiggins and McTighe’s (1998) backward design: when teachers plan their lessons, they start with the end in mind and work towards the beginning: after determining their contexts and topics first, they plan their SMART Tasks in order to determine the Teaching Strategies, Learning Activities, Assessment, and Resources that are relevant to the lesson in order for the learners to successfully complete their SMART Tasks. Teachers plan their Introductions and Pertinent Questions last when they are aware of their lessons’ content and processes (see Figure 8-1). However, when the teachers present their lessons, they start with their Pertinent Questions and Introductions first. Teaching Strategies, Learning Activities, Assessment, and Resources follow afterwards, and in the end the learners complete their SMART Tasks (see Figure 8-2) [School for Language Education, English for Education (NWU), 2020; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Reyneke, 2014:36, 40]. Reyneke (2014:36) further explains that the backward design of lesson planning should be approached as an iterative process instead of linear. The sections interconnect and depend on one another, allowing teachers to add or change any ideas or content at any given time.

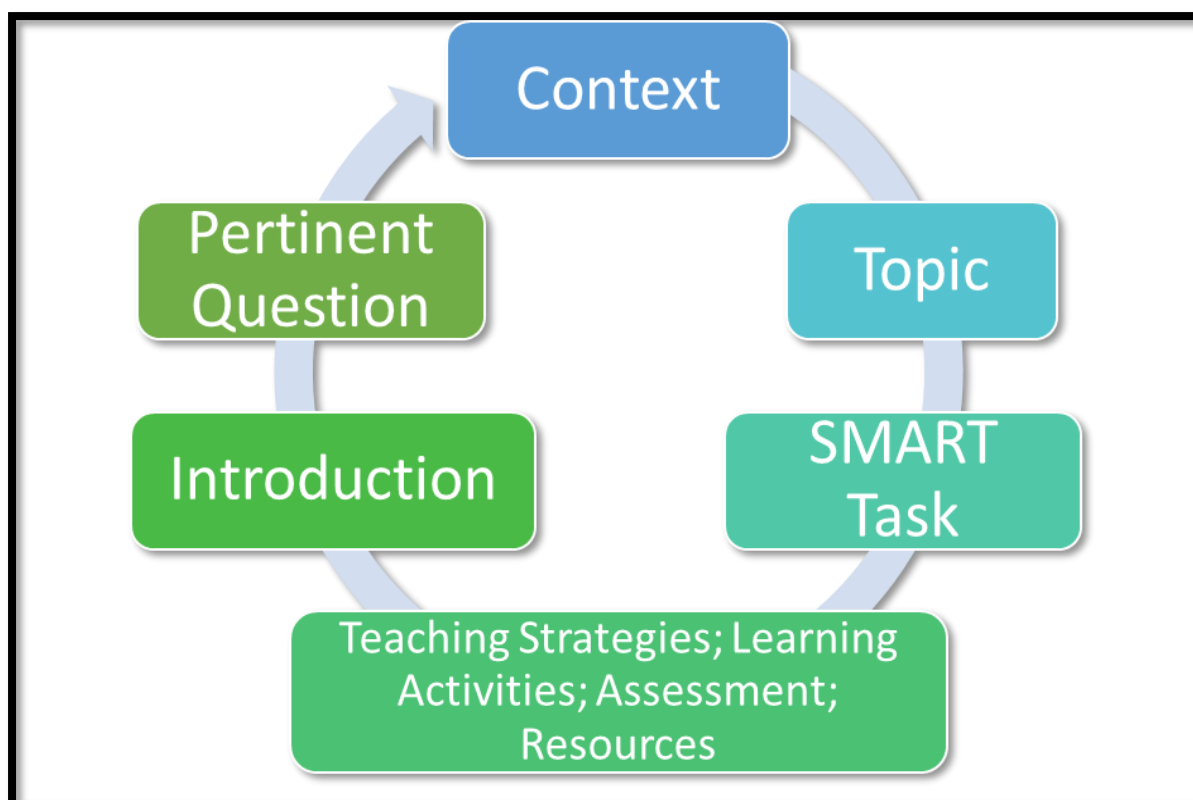


Figure 8-1: The Stages of Lesson Planning [School for Language Education, English for Education (NWU), 2020; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Reyneke, 2014:36, 40]

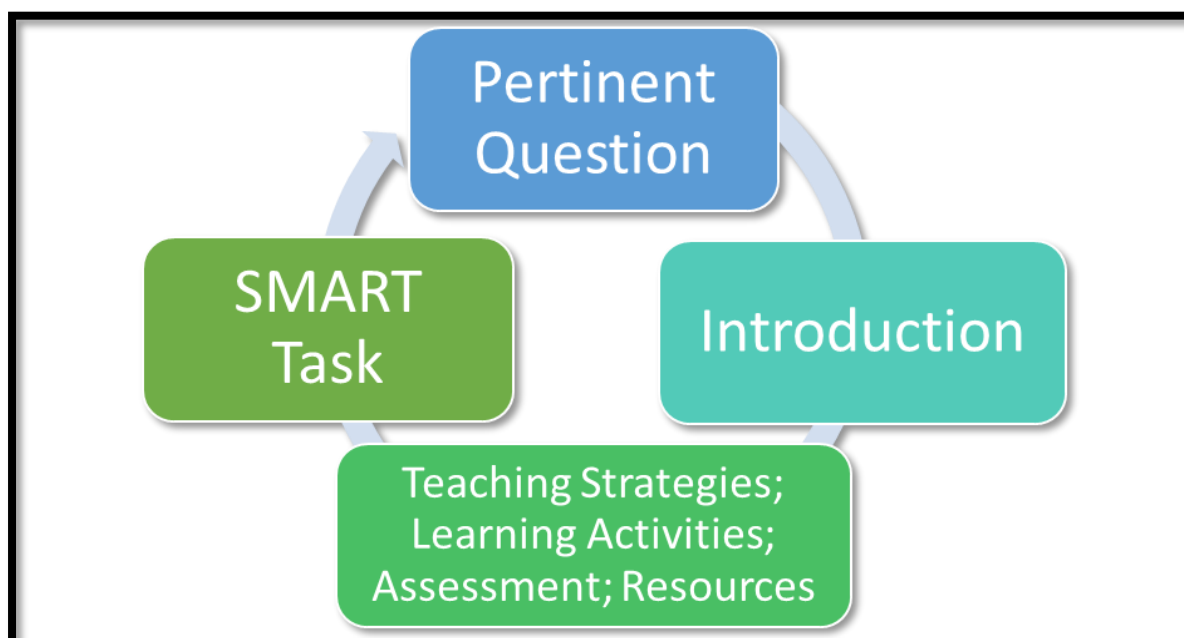


Figure 8-2: The Stages of Lesson Presentation [School for Language Education, English for Education (NWU), 2020; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Reyneke, 2014:36, 40]

The first stage of the lesson plan is the Context. The Context in Appendix E entails the teacher's subject and grade, the duration of one lesson and the number of available lessons to complete the topic, and a description of the teacher's learners. The following questions apply:

- Who are the learners?
- Do they have English as a Home Language or First Additional Language?
- How proficient are they in English?
- What are their particular strengths and weaknesses?
- What prior knowledge do they bring to the classroom?
- What resources are available at the school?

Referring to Appendixes F and G, my Grade 9 learners, for example, are boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 15 years that attend *Academic Central*, a public school. There are white, black, and learners of mixed race, numbering 32 in the language classroom. They speak both Afrikaans and English. The majority of the learners speak Afrikaans as a home language and English as a first additional language. Their proficiency in English is as follows: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are good, but there are grammar, pronunciation, and fluency errors. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is acceptable, but their speaking and writing in English need a great deal of improvement. Their strengths are: they can understand, speak, write, read, and communicate in English – they want to improve their English where necessary. They also enjoy reading English books, and/or watching English films, and/or writing creatively. They are technologically literate, and some learners may also be eager to participate in sports and/or cultural activities. Their weaknesses are: accuracy when speaking and writing in English. The message in their speaking and writing activities is delivered (BICS), but accuracy, fluency, and (academic) vocabulary need improvement. The learners' prior knowledge entails the work completed in Grade 8 and other previous grades – key features of texts and parts of a book, including literary genres (DBE, 2011d:43). For this lesson, they already have knowledge of the queer text, *Openly Straight*, and they previously partook in speaking activities (such as prepared and impromptu speeches). My Grade 11 learners, similarly, are boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 17 years that attend *Academic Central*. They are from different racial groups and there are 18 in the language classroom. They speak both English and Afrikaans. The majority of the learners speak English as a home language and Afrikaans as a first additional language. Their proficiency in English is as follows: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are good; minor grammar and pronunciation errors. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

is good; their speaking and writing in English may improve. Their strengths are: they can understand, speak, write, read, and communicate in English – they want to improve their English where necessary. They also enjoy reading English books, and/or watching English films, and/or writing creatively. They are technologically literate, and some learners may also be eager to participate in sports and/or cultural activities. Their weaknesses are: higher cognitive thinking. The learners' prior knowledge (concerning novels) entails the work completed in Grade 10 and other previous grades on the key features of literature texts, such as characterisation, character, background, setting, plot, conflict, narrator, and theme (DBE, 2011d:78, 84). For this lesson, they do not have any knowledge of Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, as it is introduced for the first time in this lesson. Furthermore, they previously partook in writing activities (such as essays and longer and shorter transactional writing) and should be able to write an argumentative essay. The following resources are available at the school: laptop (with PowerPoint Presentation), a data projector, black and white board, prescribed texts, workbooks, a printer, and internet.

Following, the subject and the grade depend on the teacher. I include two examples of lessons (one for each phase) to which teachers may refer and which they may use as a guideline should they use the given lesson planning template (Appendix E) recommended in this study. The subject and grade for my Senior phase lesson is Grade 9, English First Additional Language, whereas my FET phase lesson is Grade 11, English Home Language. The reasons are as follows: *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg (2013) is suitable for Senior phase EHL or EFAL learners – my Senior phase lesson is based on this particular queer text. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (1985) is suitable for FET phase EHL and EFAL learners – my FET phase lesson is based on this particular queer text. *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (2004) is suitable for both the Senior and FET phases, but I have not included an example of a lesson for this particular queer text. These texts are suitable for the language classroom as they do not contain inappropriate content or vivid scenes (i.e. paedophilia, nudity, sex scenes, and drug abuse) for young adults – the social issues of searching for one's identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry in heteronormative environments are addressed in a learner-friendly manner. The characters of *Openly Straight* (Konigsberg, 2013), *Geography Club* (Hartinger, 2004), and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (Winterson, 1985) are furthermore young adults; the learners of the Senior and FET phases are also young adults and may possibly relate to these fictional characters.

As I have now determined the subject and grade I am teaching, I have to determine the available time for each lesson. I mention that at my pseudonym school, *Academic Central*, the duration of one of my lessons is 45 minutes, and for both lessons I need a double period (90

minutes) to successfully complete the chosen topics, teaching moments, and assignments. The last aspect in this section concerns the teacher's learners.

My learners – whether they are Senior- or FET phase – are very similar (aspects such as gender, race, strengths, weaknesses, etc.), but there are definite differences (aspects such as grade, age, number of learners in the classroom, EHL or EFAL, prior knowledge, etc.). Additionally, since both lessons will be presented at the same school, the resources that are available at the school remain the same. (See Appendixes F and G for a more detailed description of my learners.)

As I move away from the Context of the lesson, I turn my attention to the second stage of the lesson plan, which is the Topic. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) explain that a teacher should identify their desired results first. The Topic, as set out in Appendix E, entails the lesson's topic, subtopic (if relevant), and theme. I elaborate further on these three aspects as they are linked to the learners' prior knowledge. Reyneke (2014:36) mentions that teachers should skim and scan their relevant CAPS documents (such as English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, etc.) to identify topics, subtopics, and themes for lessons. Referring to Appendix F, the topic, subtopic, and theme are: Read a literature text (Novel) – Grade 9, Term 2, Weeks 5 & 6 (DBE, 2011a:105), text features (plot, characters, setting, and theme), and queer sexuality and the search for identity (Bill Konigsberg's 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight*). Furthermore, I mention that my learners have read shorter novels in previous grades and are familiar with the structure of novels and the elements of literature. My learners also know that a novel entails a plot structure, characters, settings and themes. Lastly, my learners may know that there are various sexualities in the world and that heterosexuality is not the only one. However, I cannot be sure of their knowledge. Some may have prior knowledge they received from their homes and parents, media, friends, or the school, while others may have a very basic understanding. Referring to Appendix G – the topic, subtopic, and theme are: Key features of texts and parts of a book, including literary genres; Literature study (Novel) – Grade 11, Term 1, Weeks 1 & 2 (DBE, 2011d:53), an argumentative essay, and queer sexuality and religious zealotry (Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*). Similarly, my learners have read novels in previous grades and are familiar with the key features of texts and parts of a book (such as the novel's title, front cover, and themes), including the literary genre, "novels". My learners also know what an argumentative essay is since they have written argumentative essays in previous grades. Lastly, it is difficult to assume what my learners may know of queer sexuality and religious zealotry. I am making the assumption that my learners are aware that there may be various sexualities in their societies. They may have prior knowledge which they received from their homes, parents, friends, the media, church, schools,

etc. The theme, “religious zealotry”, though, may be unfamiliar to them, but they may also be aware that religion can have an influence on individuals being open or accepting of their sexual orientation.

Still referring to the Topic, the purpose of a lesson and the rationale for its inclusion of the topic should be stated. Teachers then provide a summary of what they are going to teach in the lesson. Referring to Appendix F, the purpose of my Senior phase example lesson is to introduce my learners to the stages queer individuals may undergo when they search for their identities. For some queer individuals it may be easier to become comfortable with their sexual identities, but other individuals may struggle, or this process may be prolonged at first as they endure some challenges, advantages, and then a few opportunities to become comfortable with and accept their identities. As a result, I will teach my learners that the homosexual character, Rafe Goldberg, in the queer text, *Openly Straight*, undergoes four stages as he searches for his sexual identity: rejection, tolerance, acceptance, and celebration. I will achieve this by activating my learners’ prior knowledge by means of an informal baseline test, a formative mind-map activity, and a formative PowerPoint presentation on role-play and oral presentational skills.

Referring to Appendix G, the purpose of my FET phase example lesson is to introduce my learners to Jeanette Winterson’s 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Furthermore, I will explain that the main theme I will focus on during this cycle is religious zealotry and the influence it may have on queer individuals. As a result, I will remind my learners that they will be writing argumentative essays later on in which they argue their point of view on something or someone. In this lesson, the learners will provide their opinions on whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not. I will achieve this by providing the learners with various opportunities to develop their higher cognitive thinking through analysis and inferences. This lesson only entails an introduction to the queer text in question since, theoretically, my learners have not read the novel yet. Therefore, my focus will be on the novel’s title and front cover, the meaning of “religious zealotry”, a brief description of the novel, formative assessment activities, and a formative PowerPoint presentation (which recaps the format and purpose of an argumentative essay). For both Appendixes F and G, I include a queer text in my language classroom in order to introduce queer-themed topics to all my learners. I also mention that no learner will be forced to participate in the activities if they feel uncomfortable about the context. My SMART Tasks for Appendixes F and G, which is stage three of the lesson plan, are discussed next.

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) explain that teachers should determine acceptable activities that deliver evidence of learning. The SMART Task determines what the learners should be able to do at the end of the lesson that will challenge and aid them to successfully achieve the lesson's goal. The SMART acronym stands for: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Traceable (Reyneke, 2014:37). Firstly, "Specific" refers to the product (such as a collage, a presentation, a poster, a personal journal, a book review, an advertisement, etc.) and its specifics. Reyneke (2014:37) also mentions that "Specific" implies an authentic task that is contextualised and goal-oriented. Secondly, "Measurable" refers to the measurability of the task: it should challenge the learners and develop higher cognitive thinking. Bloom's Taxonomy has six cognitive thinking domains: "Remembering", "Understanding", and "Applying" (lower cognitive thinking); "Analysing", "Evaluating", and "Creating" (higher cognitive thinking). In order for a task to be measurable, it is generally based on either analysing, evaluating, or creating (in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy). Reyneke (2014:37) elaborates that teachers should use a verb that describes a specific process that can be measured. For example, the verb, "design", refers to a process (such as remembering, understanding, and/or applying) that should be followed to "create" something. Thirdly, "Attainable" refers to the learners' ability to successfully complete the task: it should not be too easy, but it should also not be too difficult⁵⁴. The learners have to be challenged, but the teacher should scaffold them towards achieving higher cognitive thinking. As Reyneke (2014:37) puts it, the task should be within the grasp of the learners – the necessary knowledge, skills, time, and available resources should be taken into consideration. Fourthly, "Relevant" refers to the relevance of the task to the learners' everyday lives: the task should contribute towards the learners' lives outside the classroom environment. The task should therefore contain "important and contextualised content" (Reyneke, 2014:37). Lastly, "Traceable" refers to assessment: Who will assess the task and with which tool will it be assessed? Reyneke (2014:37) explains that assessment should be considered as both a process and a product – at the end of the lesson the learners should present a final product that acts as evidence of performance. However, the main focus is the process and what learners learn rather than the end product in the form of summative assessment.

Referring to Appendix F, the SMART Task is as follows: at the end of the lesson, my Grade 9 learners should be able to design (Measurable – high cognitive thinking) a role play in which they portray the stages Rafe undergoes when he searches for his identity in *Openly Straight*.

⁵⁴ Vygotsky (1980) explains that teachers should be aware of a learner's *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). The ZPD contains three stages: one, what the learner knows and can do; two, what the learner can achieve by receiving guidance from the teacher – the ZPD; three, what the learners cannot do as it is too challenging or difficult. So, the task should not be too easy or too difficult, but challenging and attainable.

The learners will be divided into four groups (8 learners per group) and be assigned one of Rafe's stages: Group 1 = Acceptance; Group 2 = Rejection; Group 3 = Tolerance; Group 4 = Celebration. The learners should take on the roles of the characters involved in each stage. Since the learners and I (theoretically) read the queer text in Weeks 1 to 4 of Term 2 (DBE, 2011a:103-104) (Attainable), this dramatisation will act as a summary of the stages Rafe undergoes when he searches for his identity. The dramatisation will also introduce the learners to the process queer individuals may experience when they search for their identity. It contains possible challenges, advantages, opportunities, and realisations. The dramatisation will also allow the learners to develop their speaking skills, to perform in front of an audience, to cooperatively work in a group, and to teach their fellow peers their understanding of their assigned stage (Relevance). The following should also be taken into consideration for the task when the learners plan and rehearse their role plays (Specifics): Each group will receive 7 minutes to deliver their dramatisation. Each learner should receive a chance to portray a character – a group mark as well as an individual mark for speaking will be awarded in order to assure individual as well as collective accountability. The learners may use any props that are available in the classroom, or act as props themselves when they are not speaking. Should there be limited characters in one or all of the stages together with one or more dominant characters, the learners are allowed to take turns being a dominant character. Finally, the dramatisation will be assessed by the teacher using a rubric (Senior phase lesson plan Annexure A) – the content, the group dramatisation, and each learner's individual speaking are assessed. This task will act as a summative assessment activity that will provide the learners with an overall understanding and summary of the stages Rafe undergoes as he tries to come to terms with who he is. This activity may also be used as Task 1 (Oral) for Term 2 Weeks 9–10 (DBE, 2011a:106) (Traceable).

Referring to Appendix G, the SMART Task is as follows: at the end of the lesson my Grade 11 learners should be able to provide their opinions on whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not (Measurable – high cognitive thinking). The learners should be able to write an argumentative essay as they have done so before, but I will still recap the format and purpose with them. The word count of the argumentative essay adheres to the requirements of the EHL CAPS (2011d:40) and they will also be given enough time to complete this task (Attainable). The argumentative essay will act as an introduction to the queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (1985) – a foundation for critical thinking with regard to queer literature is developed. The argumentative essay will also allow the learners to develop their higher cognitive thinking skills, their writing skills, to argue a given topic, and to work cooperatively in a group (where relevant in the teaching–learning activities) (Relevance). The learners will also be required to do some research on the

topic. The following should also be taken into consideration for the task when the learners write their argumentative essays: the format should reflect an argumentative essay. The argumentative essay should contain 350–400 words (DBE, 2011d:40). The content of the argumentative essay should have an argument on whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not. Whether learners use the historic present tense, correct spelling and grammar will be taken into consideration as this is a writing activity. The argumentative essay is also an individual assignment. Finally, the argumentative essay will be assessed by the teacher using a rubric (FET phase example lesson Annexure A) – the content, format and language, including the historic present tense, spelling and grammar, of the argumentative essay are assessed. This task will act as a formative assessment activity that introduces the learners to Jeanette Winterson’s 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. This task may also be used as Task 2 (Writing) for Term 1 Weeks 1–2 (DBE, 2011d:55) (Traceable).

I now discuss the Teaching Strategies, Learning Activities, Assessment, and Resources, which are part of stage four of the lesson plan. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) explain that teachers should plan learning exercises and instruction for the lessons. Teaching Strategies, Learning Activities, Assessment, and Resources include a minimum of three (there may be more) scaffolding activities teachers can implement that will assist their learners to complete the SMART Tasks. It is important to note that the four columns should align: what happens in the one column should correlate with the other three columns (Reyneke, 2014:39). In other words, the learners should do three individual, pair and/or group work activities that will eventually aid them to successfully complete the SMART Tasks.

“Teaching Strategies”, the first column, refer to the actions of the teacher: what will the teacher do during the first, second, and third scaffolding activity? Referring to Appendix F, in the first scaffolding activity, the teacher activates the Grade 9 learners’ prior knowledge of the queer text by asking them 10 questions (Senior phase example lesson Annexure B). The teacher displays the informal class test on the white board using a PowerPoint presentation. The rationale for this activity is to activate the learners’ prior knowledge concerning the text. The test also focuses on key aspects that may assist the learners when they complete their SMART Task. In the second scaffolding activity, the teacher divides the learners into four groups and provides them with a mind-map template:

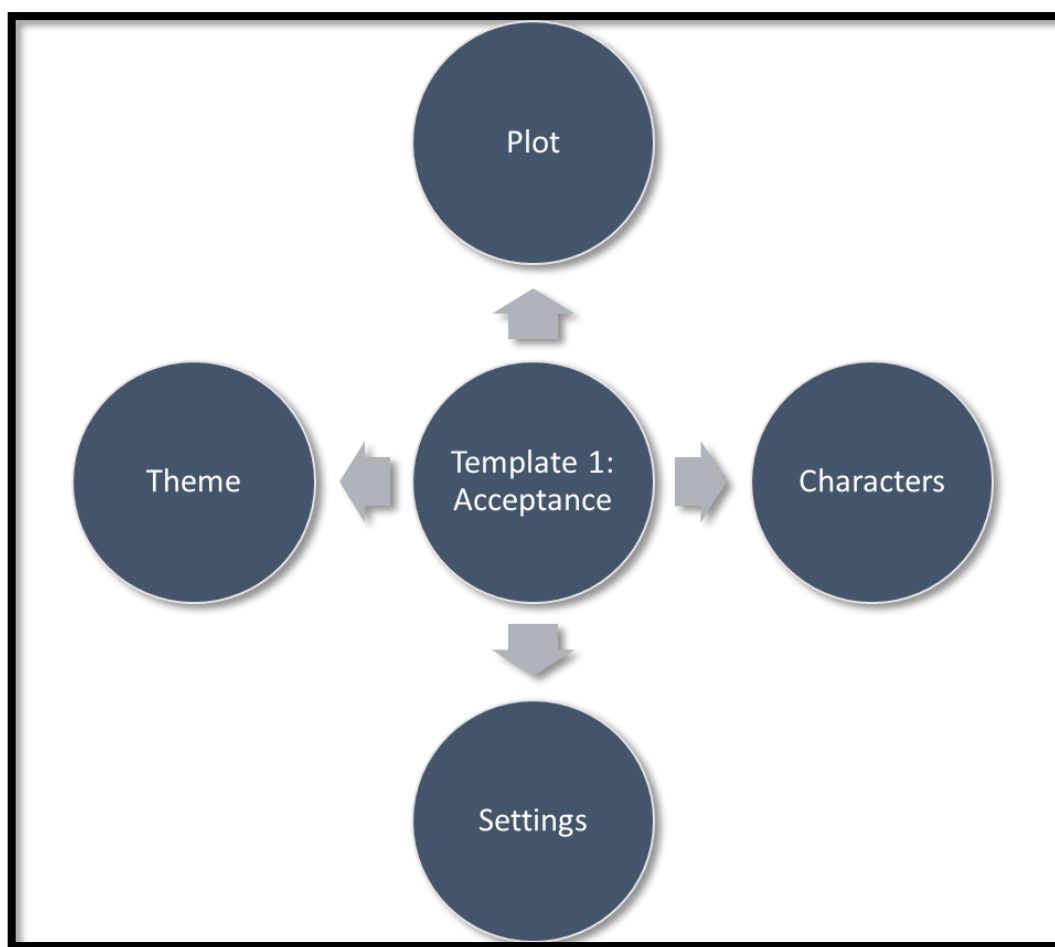


Figure 8–3: Senior phase example lesson Annexure C

As the learners complete the mind-map templates, the teacher observes and acts as a facilitator. The rationale for this activity is to guide the learners to make a summary of the assigned stage of Rafe searching for his identity. When the learners plan their dramatisation, the information in the summary may assist them. In the third scaffolding activity, the teacher presents a PowerPoint presentation (Senior phase example lesson Annexure D) on role play and oral presentational skills – a definition and seven skills are given. Afterwards, the teacher provides the learners with the opportunity to plan and rehearse their dramatisation by using the information on their mind-maps and the feedback they received from the other groups. The rationale for this activity is to provide the learners with the necessary information and time to plan their dramatisation. The learners are familiar with dramatisations.

Referring to Appendix G, in the first scaffolding activity the teacher displays the front cover of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* on the white board using a PowerPoint presentation. The teacher firstly asks the Grade 11 learners, in their groups, to consider the text's title and front cover and to predict what the novel may be about. This is also a very effective reading strategy

that allows teachers to probe into the prior knowledge of their learners. Secondly, the teacher mentions to the learners that the text is queer, entails lesbian characters, and “oranges” refer to “heterosexuality”. The teacher then asks the learners to consider the text again and to predict what the novel may be about. Thirdly, the teacher allows the learners to use their phones or dictionaries (that are available in the classroom) to provide a definition for “religious zealotry”. The teacher asks the learners one last time to predict what the novel may be about by considering the title, the front cover, religious zealotry, and any additional information given. The rationale behind this activity is to include queer literature and allow the learners to predict what the queer text, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, may be about – through self-discovery – by considering its title, front cover, theme, and additional information given. In the second scaffolding activity the teacher reads a brief synopsis of the queer text to the learners. The teacher instructs the learners to listen for specific information: what are the positive and/or negative influences religious zealotry may have on queer individuals in a heteronormative environment? The learners, then, may have a group discussion to get ideas for and against the inclusion of texts with alternative queer characters. The rationale behind this activity is to provide the learners with a brief description of the text. This may be seen as a spoiler for the learners, but since religious zealotry may be considered as a serious and sensitive issue, it will be beneficial for the learners to be aware of the novel’s content beforehand. The learners also receive the opportunity to determine to what extent their prediction of the novel was correct. So, if there were some misconceptions, these will be cleared up. Following, the learners will have been introduced to the queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, and will be able to brainstorm ideas for the inclusion of texts with queer characters in the classroom environment or not. In the third scaffolding activity the teacher recaps the structure and purpose of an argumentative essay by presenting a PowerPoint presentation (FET phase example lesson Annexure B), including an example and a template of an argumentative essay. Afterwards, the teacher provides the learners with the opportunity to plan, draft, and revise their argumentative essays. The rationale for this activity is to provide the learners with the necessary information and time to plan and draft their argumentative essays. The learners will be reminded what argumentative essays entail.

“Learning Activities”, the second column, refer to the actions of the learners: what will the learners do during the activities? Reyneke (2014:38-39) contributes by explaining that learning activities should progress from lower to higher cognitive thinking: once learners can remember and understand the content, they should be able to apply, analyse, evaluate, and or create. Referring to Appendix F, in the first scaffolding activity, the Grade 9 learners individually write the informal class test that activates their prior knowledge of the queer text. This also serves to recap the plot of the novel. Afterwards, the learners switch their tests with one another and

peer-assess them. In the second scaffolding activity, the learners, in their groups, complete the mind-map templates. Group 1 receives Template 1: Acceptance; Group 2: Template 2: Rejection; Group 3: Template 3: Tolerance; and Group 4: Template 4: Celebration. Afterwards, each group gives feedback to receive comments from other groups to improve the content on their mind-map where necessary. In the third scaffolding activity the learners, still in their groups, listen to the PowerPoint presentation on role play and oral presentation skills and make notes in their workbooks. Afterwards, the learners plan and rehearse their dramatisation using the information on their mind-maps and the feedback they received from other groups.

Referring to Appendix G, in the first scaffolding activity, the Grade 11 learners, in their groups, analyse the title and the front cover of the novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and predict what the novel may be about. The learners then become aware that the text is queer, includes lesbian characters, and that “oranges” refer to “heterosexuality”. They again predict what the novel may be about as they have been given more information and may link this knowledge to their introduction. The learners lastly use their phones or dictionaries to provide a definition for “religious zealotry”, and predict what the novel may be about with this last piece of information. Throughout this activity the learners provide feedback in their groups and may make notes in their workbooks. In the second scaffolding activity, the learners, still in their groups, listen for specific information when the teacher provides a brief description of the queer text. In doing so, they are allowed to make notes in their workbooks. The learners also determine to what extent their prediction of the novel was correct. Furthermore, the learners have a group discussion to get ideas for and against the inclusion of texts with queer characters. In the third scaffolding activity, the learners listen to the PowerPoint presentation on the format and purpose of an argumentative essay and make notes in their workbooks. Afterwards, the learners plan and draft their argumentative essays using the notes they made throughout the entire lesson.

“Assessment”, the third column, refers to the form, method, and tool of assessment. A teacher may make use of the following four forms of assessment: baseline assessment, diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment. Following, a teacher may make use of the following five methods of assessment: teacher assessment, self-assessment, peer assessment, group assessment, and portfolio assessment. Lastly, a teacher may make use of the following tools of assessment: rubrics, checklists, memoranda, verbal feedback, observation, facilitation, etc. Additionally, Reyneke (2014:38) states that the purpose of assessment should be more than just establishing whether the learners have successfully completed the SMART Task and reached the lesson’s objectives; it should also enhance learning. Referring to Appendixes F and G, I make use of baseline and formative assessments

as forms, using teacher, peer and group assessments as methods, and memoranda and verbal feedback as tools.

“Resources”, the final column, refer to the resources both the teacher and the learners will need to successfully complete each activity. Referring to Appendixes F and G, the resources I will need to successfully complete my lessons are: a laptop, a PowerPoint presentation, a data projector, a white board, a printer, prescribed queer texts, and the internet. My learners, on the other hand, will need their workbooks, stationary, mind-maps, phones, class dictionaries, and prescribed texts. Reyneke (2014:39-40) explains that teachers have to think about various ways in which new content may be presented to their learners: should teachers be aware of their learners’ strengths, weaknesses, and interests, a variety of resources may be selected to include different learning styles for content to be grasped effectively.

The second-to-last stage of the lesson plan is the Introduction. The Introduction stage entails a creative introduction by the teacher. The introduction should capture the learners’ attention while still being relevant to the topic of the lesson. Reyneke (2014:40) explains that this stage occurs at the end of the planning process, as teachers will now have the needed insight to activate learners’ prior knowledge and schemata in a creative way. Referring to Appendix F, I will show a YouTube video to my Grade 9 learners. The video is about the 1985 *Super Mario Bros.* gameplay. The video is approximately 39 minutes long, but I will only play the first 3 minutes and 10 seconds. During the YouTube video’s 3 minutes and 10 seconds, Mario undergoes three stages that all contain challenges, advantages, and opportunities. There are, for example, mushroom men, eating plants, and tortoise-like ducks that pose threats to Mario as he tries to successfully complete a stage. There are also coins or money that Mario may collect and a vegetable he may eat that allows him to become bigger, stronger, and to have the ability to shoot fire balls. After I have played the YouTube video, I will ask my learners the following questions: What possible threats do Mario face? What advantages may Mario get? What opportunities do Mario receive? What does Mario need to accomplish in the game? What happens when Mario successfully completes a stage? The learners will give verbal feedback and I will act as a facilitator and observer. The purpose of this introduction is to introduce learners to the challenges, advantages, and opportunities Mario may face in order to rescue a princess from a dragon. In order to reach the princess, Mario has to go through various stages that pose more challenges, advantages, and opportunities. I will then make the link to *Openly Straight* that Rafe, just like Mario, goes through various stages with challenges (lying to his fellow peers at Natick), advantages (being included in a pre-dominantly heterosexual environment), and opportunities (a bromance relationship with Ben) as he comes to terms with his sexuality. Referring to Appendix G, I divide my Grade 11 learners into five

groups of 3 or 4 learners each. Each group receives one type of fruit: Group 1 = 1 x orange; Group 2 = 1 x banana; Group 3 = 5 x cherries; Group 4 = 1 x bunch of grapes (there are 17 grapes); Group 5 = 1 x apple. I will ask my learners to consider the form, quantity and colour of the given type of fruit, and to make notes in their workbooks. After approximately one minute and thirty seconds, the learners rotate their fruit with another group and consider the form, quantity, and colour again, and compare it with the previous type of fruit they had. The rotation occurs three more times. In the remaining ten minutes of the introduction, the learners provide feedback on the form, quantity, and colour of the types of fruit they analysed, provide feedback on the comparison (similarities and differences) of the types of fruit, and ultimately make an inference of the five types of fruit as a whole:

Types of Fruit	Form	Quantity	Colour
Orange	Round	1 (Singular)	Orange
Banana	Curved	1 (Singular)	Yellow
Cherries	Heart-shaped	5 (Multiple)	Red
Grapes	Ellipsoid; oval	17 (Multiple)	Purple
Apple	Mostly round	1 (Singular)	Green, red, or yellow

Table 8–1: FET phase example lesson Table 1

Similarities	Differences
Oranges and apples have similar forms.	Bananas, cherries, grapes, and oranges or apples all differ in form.
Oranges, bananas, and apples are singular in quantity.	Cherries and grapes differ in multiple quantities.
Cherries and grapes are multiple in quantity.	Oranges, cherries, grapes, bananas, and green apples all differ in colour.
Bananas and yellow apples are similar in colour.	
Cherries and red apples are similar in colour.	

Table 8–2: FET phase lesson plan Table 2

Inference: There are similarities among the five types of fruit, but they all differ from one another in some way, whether it is form, quantity, or colour. As a result, each type of fruit is unique.

The purpose of the above introduction is to provide my learners with the opportunity to analyse the various forms, quantities, and colours of five types of fruit, and to make an inference that each fruit is unique in its own way, even if there are some similarities. This purpose will become

clearer when the learners have enough information to link “oranges” to “heterosexuality” and “bananas”, “cherries”, “grapes”, and “apples” to various sexual orientations (such as homosexuality, bisexuality, transgenderism, and intersexuality) in the queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*.

The last stage entails the Pertinent Question. This question is sometimes called an essential question (Colombo & Furbush, 2009). A pertinent question is a question teachers ask their learners at the beginning of the lesson that arouses interest in what is to come, elicits individual responses, transports them out of the classroom and into the world, has multiple answers, arouses their curiosity about the topic, and leads to more questions. If a question adheres to these seven criteria, it becomes pertinent. Reyneke (2014:40) adds that pertinent questions place learning material into a specific context and makes it more relevant to the learners’ worlds. Referring to Appendix F, the pertinent questions I plan to pose to my Grade 9 learners are: Why is it important to know who we are in life? Why do certain individuals find the search for identity more challenging than others? Referring to Appendix G, the pertinent questions for my Grade 11 learners are: In which way are individuals similar, but also different? What makes individuals unique? Is it important to tolerate differences? If so, why? Why should one be aware of various sexual orientations? How can religion influence one’s sexual orientation?

In conclusion, the research aim of providing guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers as criteria for selecting queer texts and for strategies to use when teaching these texts has been reached. There are five possible questions teachers may ask to select queer texts for the language classrooms. Should the teachers be uncertain about their selection, they may use Bill Konigsberg’s 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight*, Brent Hartinger’s 2004 queer text, *Geography Club*, and Jeanette Winterson’s 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. Additionally, I provided a lesson planning template (Appendix E), as well as two example lesson plans [Appendix F (Senior phase) and Appendix G (FET phase)] which may guide teachers and act as teaching strategies when they plan their own lessons that are queer-themed.

8.4 Limitations of the study

A study in all probability will have limitations or encounter challenges (such as access to participants, time, ethical considerations, etc.) the researcher has to take into consideration to successfully complete the study (Maree, 2016:44-45). This study had the following limitations:

- Only three social issues – the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry – that emerged from The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate's (2016) studies are addressed.
- Only novels were included as selected texts. Short stories, poems, films and any other genres are excluded.
- The queer texts – *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg (2013), *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (2004), and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (1985) – only contain either gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual characters' points-of-view. Other sexual orientations are excluded.
- Guidelines are only provided for Senior phase and FET English language teachers.
- The findings are based only on the researcher's interpretations of the queer texts, relevant academic articles, and input from the researcher's supervisors and editor. The views of in-service teachers have not been included.
- Guidelines are only provided for the English language.
- A narrow point of view reflects New Criticism.

Firstly, The Other Foundation (2016), the Atlantic Philanthropies (2011), and Love Not Hate (2016) highlight various social issues in their studies, but this study only addresses three: the search for identity, prejudice and abuse and religious zealotry. Other social issues, such as suicide, murder and violence, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, are not addressed. Consequently, guidelines are not provided for Senior phase and FET English language teachers concerning suicide, murder and violence, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Secondly, dramas, short stories, poems, films etc. were excluded as non-human participants for this study. The CAPS (2011a:35; 2011b:33; 2011c:35; 2011d:28) includes novels, dramas, short stories, poetry, and enrichment [such as films, series, folk tales, (auto-) biographies, etc.] as genres in the National Literature Catalogue. As a result, should Senior phase and FET English language teachers decide to focus on two genres, for example drama and short stories, I only provided guidelines for teaching queer novels in the language classroom. The scope of this dissertation does not allow for the inclusion of all genres.

Thirdly, the queer umbrella includes various sexual orientations: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, genderqueer, demisexuals, twospirited, questioning, asexuals, allies, pansexuals, polyamorous, etc. However, the chosen queer texts – *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg (2013), *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (2004), and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (1985) – only address social issues from either gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual characters' perspectives. Other sexual orientations are excluded. This may result in a challenge for language teachers should they want to implement a queer text that addresses a social issue (such as prejudice and abuse) from the point-of-view of a sexual orientation (such as intersexuality) that is not addressed in this study.

Fourthly, this study only provides guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers [one grade of the primary school level (Grade 7) and the entire secondary school level (Grades 8–12)]. The primary school level (Grades R–6) and tertiary education have been excluded from this study. The guidelines provided do not include suitable texts for these two levels.

Fifthly, this study did not include any human participants. The findings are based only on the researcher's interpretations of the selected queer texts and relevant academic articles and input from the researcher's supervisors and editor. Accordingly, the guidelines that are provided for Senior phase and FET English language teachers do not include in-service teachers' input.

Sixthly, South Africa has 11 official languages (South Africa, 1996): "Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu". This study only provides suitable texts for the English language. The other 10 languages are excluded. Non-English language teachers may, however, still use the given guidelines that are provided in this study to implement a non-English queer text (if available) in their classrooms. Rhebergen and Human (2015) identify seven queer novels which Afrikaans teachers, if deemed suitable, may implement in their classrooms: *Tyd van herkenning* (1984) and *Klaprose teen die wind* (1992) written by Marzanne Leroux-Van der Boon; Barrie Hough's *Vlerkdans* (1992), *Skilpoppe* (2000) and *Breek* (2002); François Bloemhof's *Slinger-slinger* (1997) and *Nie vir kinders nie* (2005); Jackie Nagtegaal's *Daar's vis in die punch* (2002); Marita van der Vyver's *Die ongelooflike avonture van Hanna Hoekom* (2002); Derick van der Walt's *Lien se lankstaanskoene* (2008); and *Uit* (2014) written by Fanie Viljoen.

Lastly, when learners read a text from their point of view, there is a narrow focus on the reading. When one does not also take into account the intentions of the given author, New Criticism is reflected. This is also pointed out by Nordin (2015: 21), who states that:

...to ignore the intentions of the author and focus solely on the reading, belongs to the hermeneutic tradition of New Criticism and literary hermeneutics, where the text is seen as a mirror rather than a window. That is, the text is not a window through which one can see the author and the time of the author, but a mirror in which the readers see themselves through the text and the text through themselves.

Therefore, to avoid this narrow focus, one should also take into account the intentions of the given author in order for the text not to be necessarily seen as a mirror, but a window as well.

8.5 Recommendations for future research

The following recommendations for future research stem from the limitations of this study. The following studies may be conducted:

- A literary analysis of queer literature that addresses other social issues than those discussed in this study (suicide, murder and violence, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic).
- A literary analysis on various genres recommended by the CAPS documents (such as dramas, short stories, poems, films, etc.) that include queer topics.
- A literary analysis of queer texts that contain the points-of-view of other sexual orientations (such as transgenderism, intersexuality, etc.).
- A literary analysis that provides guidelines for primary and/or tertiary level English language teachers in selecting and teaching queer texts.
- Empirical research that includes the input of human participants when providing guidelines for the inclusion of queer literature in the language classroom. These may include interviews with pre- and in-service teachers to explore their beliefs about including queer literature in the English classroom. Observations in classrooms where queer texts are presented may shed light on teachers' approaches, methods and strategies when teaching such texts.

- Guidelines that include other non-English languages (such as Afrikaans, isiXhosa, etc.) and possible suitable texts.

The recommendations address all the limitations of this study and in time researchers may be able to provide guidelines for all language teachers at all three levels of education that are available in the South African context.

8.6 Contribution of the study

Since the academic purpose of a study is to investigate a problem, Maree (2016:43) explains that there should be a strategic purpose to the research conducted in the study. With this in mind, this study conducted a literary analysis of queer texts to provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers. The implementation of these guidelines may contribute to the educational field by:

- implementing and including suitable queer literature in South Africa's NSC and the language classroom;
- addressing social issues (such as queer-phobia and hegemonic heteronormativity) that are relevant in the South African context in an appropriate and sensitive manner; and
- introducing fictional queer characters to queer- and non-queer learners who are searching for their identities and experience prejudice, abuse, and religious zealotry in their school- and/or home environments.

Furthermore, the implementation and inclusion of queer literature that addresses social issues through the experiences of queer characters, may:

- allow for a critical curriculum (in terms of queer topics) to be developed instead of it being avoided or rejected;
- allow teachers and learners to think critically and question, where necessary, the status quo and the decisions they make;

- inform the DBE of the necessary exposure and introduction to queer individuals and their possible experiences in a heteronormative South Africa; and
- provide recommendations for future research in fields such as education and/or humanities.

In the next section I provide a final reflection on this study.

8.7 Final reflections

This study focused on a literary analysis of queer texts to provide guidelines for Senior phase and FET English language teachers. The findings reveal that themes that are relevant to queer South Africans in a heteronormative society manifest in the selected queer texts. The portrayal of queer characters and their experiences as well as social messaging were critically analysed and explored. These may introduce South Africans to queer topics and change ingrained perceptions. Furthermore, the findings indicated that there is room for queer literature in the English curriculum for Senior and FET phase South African learners and that the DBE has not yet paid attention to queer texts and the information within these texts.

The aim of this study was not to define South Africa as a heteronormative environment and queer-phobic nation, but to change prejudices towards queer individuals and to combat queer-phobia and heterosexism by using queer texts in an age-appropriate manner. This study was a challenge as it necessitated an interdisciplinary traversing of the humanities and education sciences.

Furthermore, the topic of this study is sensitive, which makes it ever more important to select the appropriate texts for a school environment. It was challenging to select suitable texts for the Senior and FET phases and to address the themes that manifested. In times of frustration or confusion, my supervisors and editor supported me in making better decisions, improving this dissertation where necessary, and to finish in time. The hope remains that this study may positively expose or introduce any reader to queer individuals and their experiences in heteronormative environments, and that this would be instrumental in changing any prejudices. The suggestions for inclusion within this study is a first step and the inclusion may become more comprehensive in subsequent studies.

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APPENDIX A: CONFIRMATION LETTER FROM THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE OF THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION (EDUREC)



NWU[®]
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NORO-OES UNIVERSITEIT
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Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education (EduREC)
Faculty of Education
Tel: 018 285 2078
Email: Jako.Olivier@nwu.ac.za

9 October 2019

Dear Prof Nel

PROOF THAT THE FOLLOWING STUDY DOES NOT REQUIRE ETHICAL APPROVAL

Study title: A literary analysis of queer texts: guidelines for senior and further education and training English language teachers
Promoter: Prof C Nel
Co-promoter: Dr S Romyos
Student: MJ Uys
Ethics number: NWU-01612-19-A2

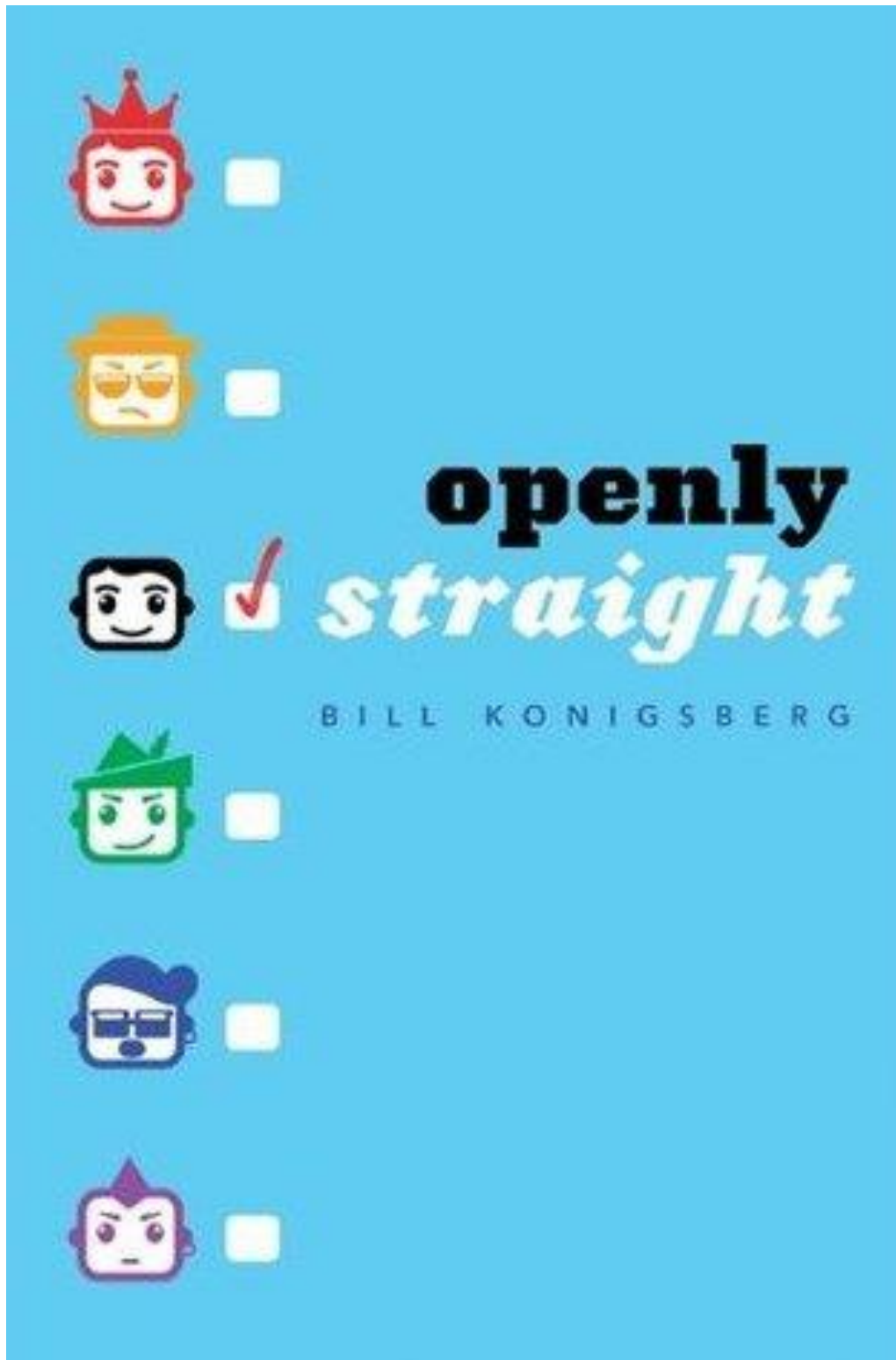
On 19 September 2019 the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education (EduREC) reviewed the aforementioned study, as approved by the Faculty of Education ROE Scientific Committee on 12 August 2019, after which it was confirmed that no ethical approval was required as this study does not involve any human participants or their data/information.

Yours sincerely



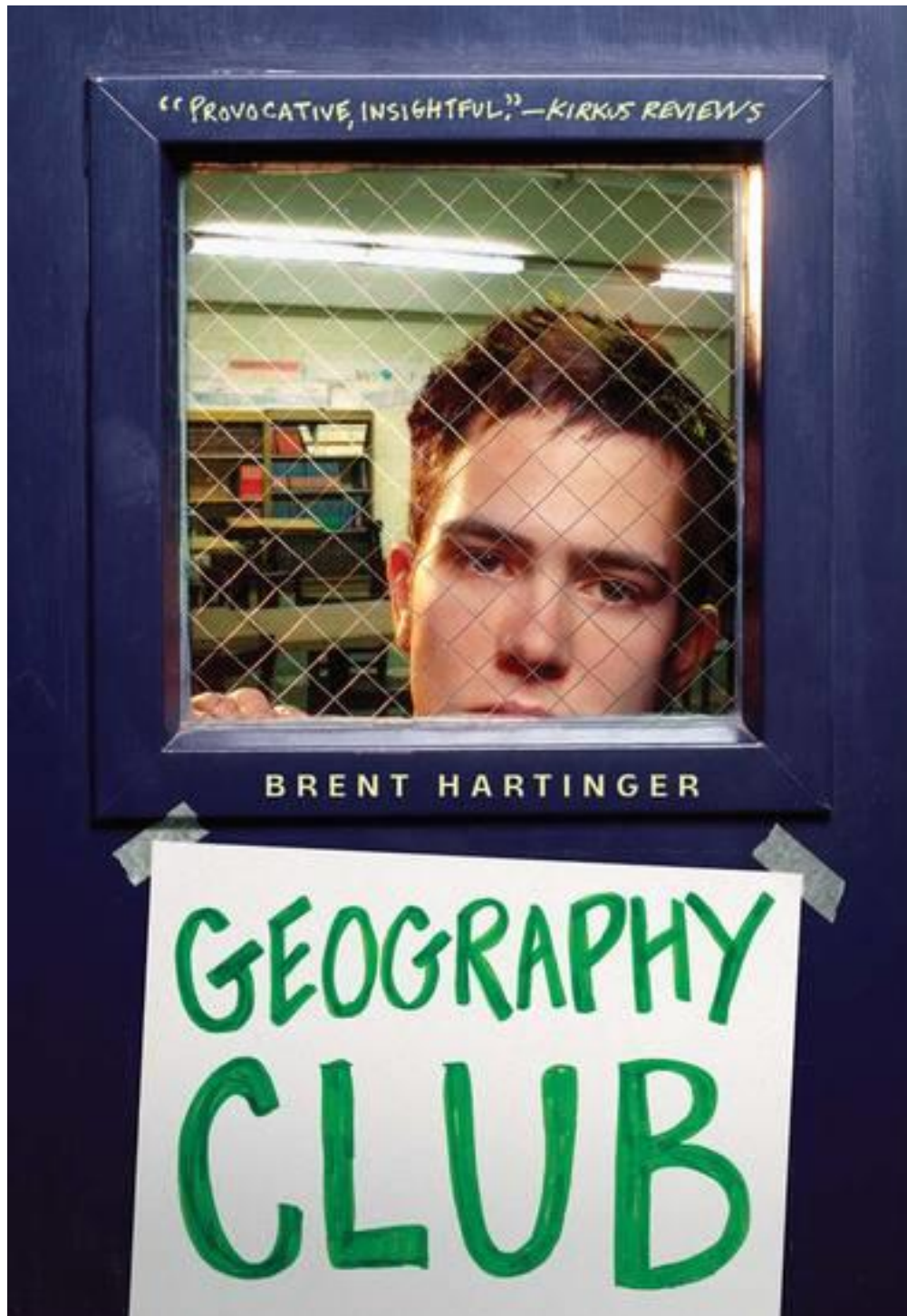
Prof JAK Olivier
Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education (EduREC)

APPENDIX B: FRONT COVER OF *OPENLY STRAIGHT*



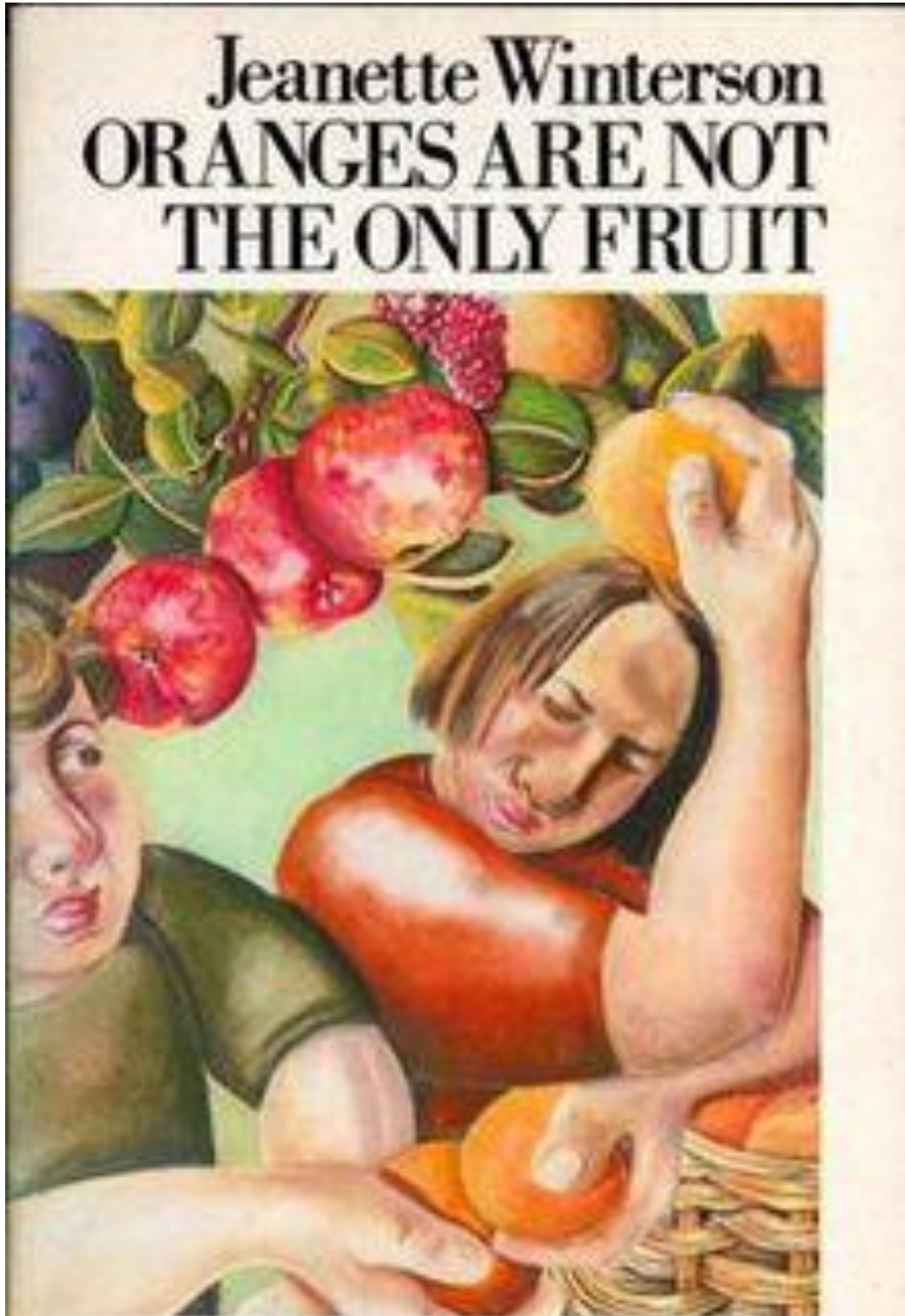
Konigsberg (2013).

APPENDIX C: FRONT COVER OF *GEOGRAPHY CLUB*



Hartinger (2004).

APPENDIX D: ORIGINAL FRONT COVER OF *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*



Winterson (1985).

APPENDIX E: LESSON PLANNING TEMPLATE [School for Language Education, English for Education (NWU), 2020]

1. Context:

1.1 Subject & Grade:

1.2 Time: What is the duration of one lesson? How many lessons do you have in which to complete the topic?:

1.3 Context: Who are your learners? Do they have English as a Home Language or First Additional Language? How proficient are they in English? What are their particular strengths and weaknesses? What prior knowledge do they bring to the classroom? What resources are available at the school?

2. Topic (as set out in the CAPS):

2.1 What is your lesson's topic, subtopic (if relevant), and theme?: _____

2.2 What do your learners know about the topic, subtopic (if relevant), and theme?: _____

2.3 What is the purpose of your lesson and the rationale for inclusion?: _____

2.4 Write a short summary of what you are going to teach in this lesson: _____

3. SMART Task:

You need to design a Task that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Traceable (SMART) that will challenge your learners and aid them to successfully achieve the lesson's goal:

What are the Specifics of the Task? In other words, they need to submit some sort of product at the end of the lesson for assessment (such as a collage, a presentation, a poster, a personal journal, a book review, an advertisement, etc.) So, what are the Specifics of the product?:

At the end of the lesson my learners should be able to_____

[illegible]

4. Teaching Strategies, Learner Activities, Assessment, and Resources:

You can implement three teaching and learning activities that will scaffold your learners towards the SMART Task. In other words, your learners need to do three individual and/or pair and/or group work activities that will eventually aid them to successfully complete the SMART Task. (There must be alignment amongst the four columns):

Teaching Activity	Learning Activity	Assessment	Resources
4.1 What will the teacher do? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	4.1 What will the learners do? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	4.1.1 What is the form of assessment?: _____ 4.1.2 What is the method of assessment?: _____ 4.1.3 What is the tool of assessment? _____	4.1 What resources will the teacher and learners use? _____ _____ _____ _____
4.2 What will the teacher do? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	4.2 What will the learners do? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	4.2.1 What is the form of assessment?: _____ 4.2.2 What is the method of assessment?: _____ 4.2.3 What is the tool of assessment? _____	4.2 What resources will the teacher and learners use? _____ _____ _____ _____
4.3 What will the teacher do? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	4.3 What will the learners do? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	4.3.1 What is the form of assessment?: _____ 4.3.2 What is the method of assessment?: _____ 4.3.3 What is the tool of assessment? _____	4.3 What resources will the teacher and learners use? _____ _____ _____ _____

5. Introduction:

Explain how you will creatively introduce your lesson's topic to your learners:_____

[illegible]

6. Pertinent Question:

What pertinent question can you ask your learners that will arouse interest in what is to come, elicit individual responses, transport them out of the classroom and into the world, have multiple answers, arouse their curiosity about the topic, and lead to more questions?: _____

_____?

APPENDIX F: EXAMPLE OF A LESSON PLAN FOR SENIOR PHASE

1. Context:

1.1 Subject & Grade:

English First Additional Language (Senior phase): Grade 9.

1.2 Time:

I have 45 minutes for one lesson. On a Thursday, I have the learners for a double period. Therefore, I will have 90 minutes. I will need a double period to successfully complete this topic, the teaching moment, and the assignments.

1.3 Context:

My learners are boys and girls that attend *Academic Central*, a public school. They are in Grade 9, between the ages of 14 and 15 years. There are white, black, and learners of mixed race, numbering 32 in the language classroom. They speak both Afrikaans and English. The majority of the learners speak Afrikaans as a home language and English as a first additional language. Their proficiency in English is as follows: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are good, but there are grammar, pronunciation, and fluency errors. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is acceptable, but their speaking and writing in English need a great deal of improvement. Their strengths are: they can understand, speak, write, read, and communicate in English – they want to improve their English where necessary. They also enjoy reading English books, and/or watching English films, and/or writing creatively. They are technologically literate, and some learners may also be eager to participate in sports and/or cultural activities. Their weaknesses are: accuracy when speaking and writing in English. The message in their speaking and writing activities is delivered (BICS), but accuracy,

fluency, and (academic) vocabulary need improvement. The learners' prior knowledge entails the work completed in Grade 8 and other previous grades – key features of texts and parts of a book, including literary genres (DBE, 2011d:43). For this lesson, they already have knowledge of the queer text, *Openly Straight* (Konigsberg, 2013), and they previously partook in speaking activities (such as prepared and impromptu speeches). The following resources are available at the school: laptop (with PowerPoint presentation), a data projector, black and white boards, prescribed texts, workbooks, a printer, and internet.

2. Topic (as set out in the CAPS):

2.1 What is your lesson's topic, subtopic (if relevant), and theme?:

Topic: Read a literature text (Novel) – Grade 9, Term 2, Weeks 5 & 6 (DBE, 2011a:105).
Subtopic: Text features (plot, characters, setting, and theme).
Theme: Queer-sexuality and the search for identity (Bill Konigsberg's 2013 queer text, *Openly Straight*).

2.2 What do your learners know about the topic, subtopic (if relevant), and theme?:

Topic: My learners have read shorter novels in previous grades and are familiar with the structure of novels and the elements of literature.
Subtopic: My learners know that a novel contains a plot structure, characters, settings and themes. (Prior knowledge from previous grades.)
Theme: My learners may know that there are various sexualities in the world and that heterosexuality is not the only one. However, I cannot be sure about their knowledge. Some may have prior knowledge which they received from their homes and parents, media, or friends, and schools, while others may have a very basic understanding.

2.3 What is the purpose of your lesson and the rationale for inclusion?:

The purpose of my lesson is to introduce my learners to the stages the main queer character in the novel, Rafe, undergoes as he searches for his identity. For some queer individuals it may be easier to find their sexual identity, but other individuals may struggle or this process may be prolonged at first as they endure some challenges, advantages, and few opportunities to find their identity. I am including a queer text in my language classroom in order to introduce queer-themed topics to all my learners.

2.4 Write a short summary of what you are going to teach in this lesson:

I am going to teach my learners that the homosexual character, Rafe Goldberg, in the queer text, *Openly Straight* (Konigsberg, 2013), moves through four stages as he searches for his sexual identity: acceptance, rejection, tolerance, and celebration. I will achieve this by activating my learners' prior knowledge through an informal baseline test, a formative mind-map activity, and a formative PowerPoint presentation on role-play and oral presentational skills.

3 SMART Task (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Traceable):

It is important to inform the learners that no learner will be forced to participate in the activities if they feel uncomfortable about the context. At the end of the lesson my learners should be able to design (Measurable – high cognitive thinking) a role play wherein they portray the stages Rafe undergoes when he searches for his identity. The learners will be divided into four groups (8 learners per group) and be assigned one of Rafe's stages each: Group 1 = Acceptance; Group 2 = Rejection; Group 3 = Tolerance; Group 4 = Celebration. The learners should take on the roles of the characters that are relevant in each stage. Since the learners and I (theoretically) read the queer text in Weeks 1 to 4 of Term 2 (DBE, 2011:103-104) (Attainable), this dramatisation will act as a summary of the stages Rafe undergoes when he searches for his identity. The dramatisation will also introduce the learners to the process a queer individual may follow when they search for their identity and that it may contain challenges, advantages, opportunities, and realisations. The dramatisation will also allow the learners to

develop their speaking skills, to perform in front of an audience, to cooperatively work in a group, and to teach their fellow peers their understanding of their assigned stage (Relevance).

The following should be taken into consideration when the learners plan and rehearse their role play (Specifics): Each group will receive 7 minutes to deliver their dramatisation. Each learner should receive a chance to portray a character – a group mark as well as an individual mark for speaking will be awarded. The learners may use any props that are available in the classroom, or act as props themselves when they are not speaking. Should there be limited characters in one or all of the stages together with one or more dominant characters, the learners will be allowed to take turns being a dominant character.

Finally, the dramatisation will be assessed by the teacher using a rubric (Annexure A). This task will act as a summative assessment activity that will provide the learners with an overall understanding and summary of the stages Rafe undergoes as he searches for his identity. This activity may also be used as Task 1 (Oral) for Term 2 Weeks 9–10 (DBE, 2011a:106) (Traceable).

Time: 28 minutes.

4 Teaching Strategies, Learner Activities, Assessment, and Resources:

Teaching Activity	Learning Activity ⁵⁵	Assessment	Resources
4.1 The teacher activates the learners' prior knowledge of the queer text by asking them 10 questions (Annexure B). The teacher displays	4.1 The learners individually write the informal class test that activates their prior knowledge of the queer text. Afterwards, the learners switch	4.1.1 Baseline assessment. 4.1.2 Peer assessment.	4.1 The teacher needs a laptop, PowerPoint, a data projector, and a white board.

⁵⁵ The possible language skills the learners may use when completing a learning activity are: Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Listening (SWRL). However, I want to mention that should the learners write something (like a test, completing a mind map, or making notes), it does not necessarily mean their writing skills are improving. Writing skills usually improve when the learners have an actual writing activity (such as transactional writing or grammar activities) to complete.

the informal class test on the white board using a PowerPoint presentation. The rationale for this activity is to activate the learners' prior knowledge concerning the text. The test also focuses on key aspects that may assist the learners when they complete their SMART Task. <u>Time: 10 minutes.</u>	their tests with one another and peer-assess them⁵⁶. <u>Skill(s): Reading.</u>	4.1.3 Memorandum.	The learners need their workbooks.
4.2 The teacher divides the learners into four groups and provides them with a mind-map template (Annexure C). As the learners complete the mind-map template, the teacher observes and acts as a facilitator. The rationale for this activity is to guide the learners to make a summary of the assigned stage of Rafe searching for his identity. When the learners plan their dramatisation, the information in the summary will assist them. <u>Time: 18 minutes.</u>	4.2 The learners, in their groups, complete the mind-map template. Group 1 receives Template 1: Acceptance; Group 2: Template 2: Rejection; Group 3: Template 3: Tolerance: and Group 4: Template 4: Celebration. Afterwards, each group gives feedback to receive comments from the other groups to improve the content of their mind-map where necessary. <u>Skill(s): Speaking and Listening.</u>	4.2.1 Formative assessment. 4.2.2 Group assessment. 4.2.3 Verbal feedback.	4.2 The teacher needs a printer to print the assigned templates for each group. The learners need stationary to write and their queer text as a resource.
4.3 The teacher shows a PowerPoint presentation (Annexure D) on role play and oral	4.3 The learners, still in their groups, listen to the PowerPoint presentation and make notes in	4.3.1 Formative assessment.	4.3 The teacher needs a laptop, PowerPoint, a data projector,

⁵⁶ The app, *Kahoot*, may also be functional for learners to write a class test: it is time efficient, provides immediate feedback, and records the final results. However, the school should either have Wifi that makes the use of the app possible, or the teacher should have enough data to create a hotspot.

presentational skill. Afterwards, the teacher provides the learners with the opportunity to plan and rehearse their dramatisation by using the information on their mind-maps and the feedback they received from the other groups. The rationale for this activity is to provide the learners with the necessary information and time to plan their dramatisation. The learners will be aware what a dramatisation entails. <u>Time: 26 minutes.</u>	their workbooks. Afterwards, the learners plan and rehearse their dramatisation using the information on their mind-maps and the feedback they received from other groups. <u>Skill(s): Reading and Listening.</u>	4.3.2 Teacher assessment. 4.3.3 PowerPoint Presentation.	and a white board. The learners need their workbooks, their mind-maps, and the queer text as a resource.
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5. Introduction:

I will play a YouTube video to my learners: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLI9XBg7wSs>. The video is about the 1985 *Super Mario Bros.* Gameplay. The video is approximately 39 minutes long, but I will only play the first 3 minutes and 10 seconds.

During the YouTube video's 3 minutes and 10 seconds, Mario goes through three stages that all have challenges, advantages, and opportunities. There are, for example, mushroom men, eating plants, and tortoise-like ducks that pose threats to Mario as he tries to successfully complete a stage. There are also coins or money that Mario may collect and a vegetable he may eat that allows him to become bigger, stronger, and to have the ability to shoot fire balls.

After I have played the YouTube video, I will ask my learners the following questions: What possible threats do Mario face? What advantages may Mario get? What opportunities do Mario receive? What does Mario have to accomplish in the game? What happens when Mario successfully completes a stage? The learners will give verbal feedback and I will act as a facilitator and observe.

The purpose of this introduction is to introduce learners to the challenges, advantages, and opportunities Mario may face in order to rescue a princess from a dragon. In order to reach the princess, Mario has to go through various stages that pose more challenges, advantages, and opportunities. I will then make the link to *Openly Straight* (Konigsberg, 2004) in that Rafe, just like Mario, goes through various stages as he searches for his identity. Each phase has challenges (lying to his fellow peers at Natick), advantages (being included in a pre-dominantly heterosexual environment), and opportunities (a bromance relationship with Ben).

Time: 6 minutes.

6. Pertinent Question:

Why is it important to know who we are in life? Why do certain individuals find the search for identity more challenging than others?

Time: 2 minutes.

Senior Phase Lesson Plan Annexure A:

Dramatisation: Role Play					
Criteria	5	4	3	2	0-1
Content	The dramatisation excellently portrays the assigned stage of Rafe searching for his identity. The content corresponds to the facts in the novel.	The dramatisation adequately portrays the assigned stage of Rafe searching for his identity. The content mostly corresponds to the facts in the novel.	The dramatisation portrays the assigned stage of Rafe searching for his identity to some extent. The content is mostly correct. However, there are 1 or 2 discrepancies.	The dramatisation portrays the assigned stage of Rafe searching for his identity poorly. The content does not correspond to the facts of the novel in more than 3 instances.	The dramatisation does not portray the assigned stage of Rafe searching for his identity. The content does not correspond to the facts in more than 4 instances.
Dramatisation (Group)	It is apparent that the members of the group can work cooperatively. Each member receives a chance to speak and act. The dramatisation is presented without hesitations and pauses.	It is apparent that the members of the group can work cooperatively – minor improvements are needed. Each member receives a chance to speak and act. The dramatisation is presented with only 1 or 2 hesitations or pauses.	It is apparent that the members of the group need to improve working cooperatively. Each member receives a chance to speak and act. The dramatisation's presentation needs improvement – three or four hesitations or pauses.	It is apparent that the members of the group can barely work cooperatively. Some members barely receive a chance to speak and act. The dramatisation has hesitations and awkward pauses.	It is apparent that the members of the group cannot work cooperatively. Some members do not receive a chance to speak and act. The dramatisation is presented poorly – many hesitations and awkward pauses.
Speaking (Individual)	The learner delivers their performance with fluency and accuracy – no grammar or pronunciation errors.	The learner delivers their performance with fluency and accuracy – one to three grammar and/or pronunciation errors.	The learner delivers their performance with some fluency and accuracy – four to five grammar and/or pronunciation errors.	The learner delivers their performance with some fluency and accuracy, but improvement is needed – six to seven grammar and/or pronunciation errors.	The learner struggles to deliver their performance with fluency and accuracy – more than seven grammar and/or pronunciation errors. Errors impair comprehensibility.
Total: 15					

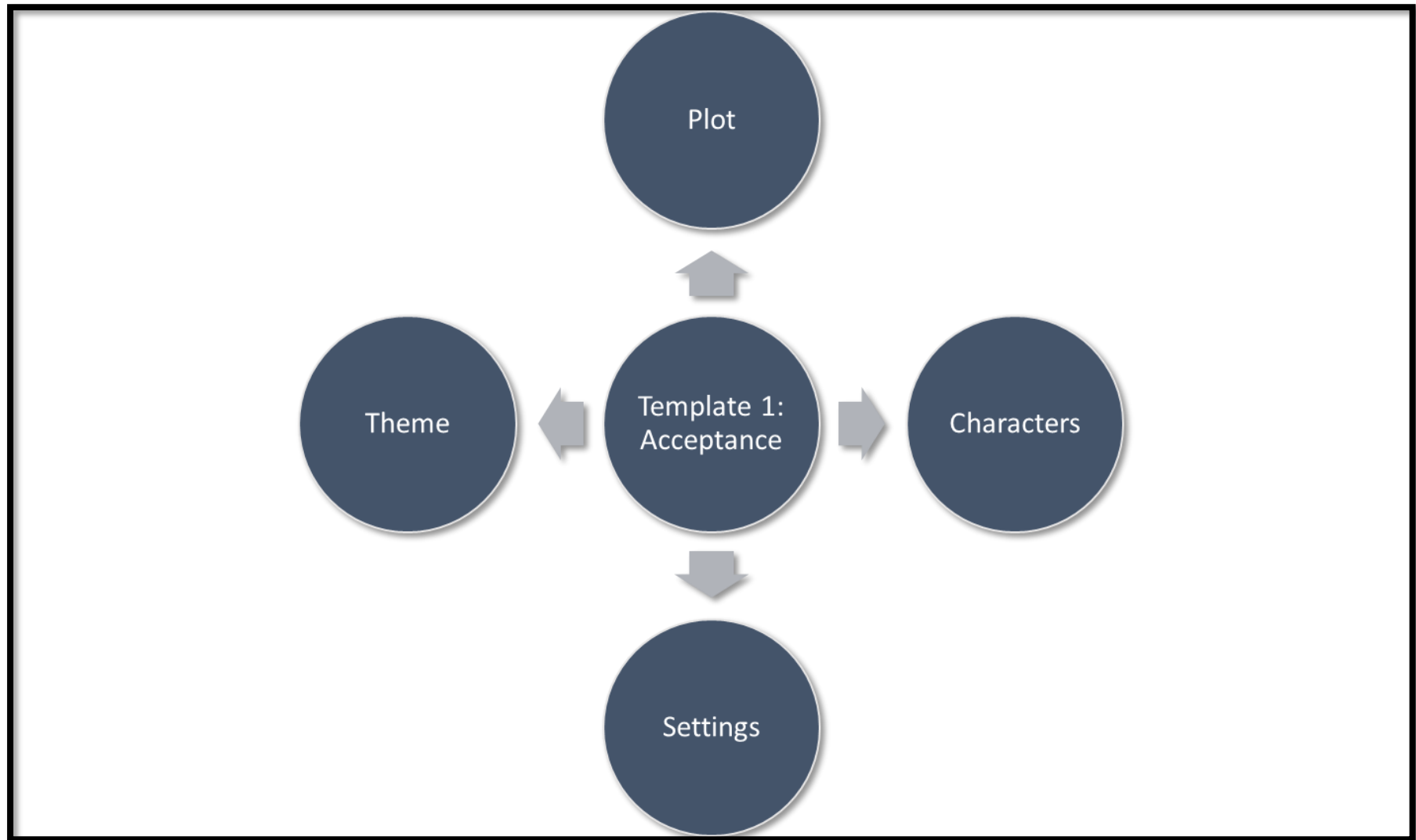
Senior Phase Lesson Plan Annexure B:

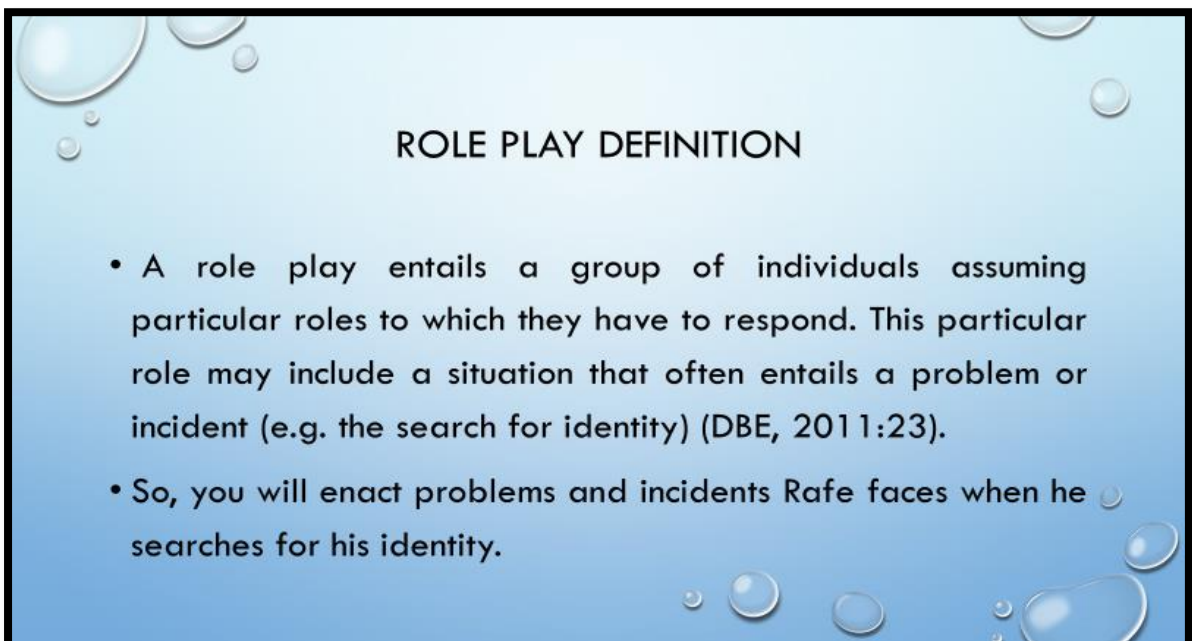
Baseline Class Test

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|---|
| 1 | What is the main protagonist's name and his sexual orientation? | (2) | Rafe Goldberg and homosexuality. |
| 2 | What school does the protagonist attend to assume a different sexual orientation? | (1) | Natick. |
| 3 | What false sexual orientation does the protagonist display at this school? | (1) | Heterosexuality. |
| 4 | Provide the main reason for the protagonist to reject his original sexual orientation. | (1) | His homosexual label. |
| 5 | Who is Albie, Toby, and Ben? | (3) | Roommate, openly gay peer, and fellow Jock – all of them are friends of Rafe. |
| 6 | What are the protagonist's parents' and best friend's names? | (3) | Gavin, Opal, and Claire Olivia. |
| 7 | Why does the protagonist start to tolerate his original sexual orientation? | (1) | Rafe develops a bromance with Ben that leads to a relationship between the two. |
| 8 | True/False: the protagonist starts to celebrate his original sexual orientation as he wants to form part of the school's GSA. | (1) | False. |
| 9 | What happens between Ben and the protagonist when the latter learns of the prior's true sexual orientation? | (1) | Ben wants time away from Rafe. |
| 10 | What is the main theme of Bill Konigsberg's (2013) <i>Openly Straight</i> queer text? | (1) | The search for identity. |

Total: 15

Senior Phase Lesson Plan Annexure C (Example):





ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS (PART 1)

- Address the audience directly – do not turn your back on the audience.
- Refer to relevant sources (such as *Openly Straight*) that have been consulted. (Use the information of your mind-map and your text.)
- Include a range of facts and examples (e.g. plot, character, setting, and theme) according to your task's requirements. (Use the information of your mind-map – where is Rafe currently in the story? Which characters are with him? Where is he when he searches for his identity?) (DBE, 2011:18).

ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS (PART 2)

- Provide an effective introduction and conclusion for the audience. (E.g state who you are and which role you are portraying, and after the role play state the relevance of your stage to Rafe's search for his identity.)
- Use appropriate everyday language (day-to-day oral communication) .
- Use repetition, rhetorical questions (asking a question without expecting an answer), and pauses where appropriate.
- Use verbal and non-verbal techniques for presentations [tone (such as a friendly, sad, and/or angry tone), modulation/voice projection and volume (speaking loudly, softly, or mediocrely), tempo/pace (speaking fast, slowly, or mediocrely), facial expressions (such as smiling and/or frowning) and eye contact, body language and gestures] (DBE, 2011:19).

APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE OF A LESSON PLAN FOR FET PHASE

1. Context:

1.1 Subject & Grade:

English Home Language (FET phase): Grade 11.

1.2 Time:

I have 45 minutes for one lesson. On a Wednesday, I have the learners for a double period. Therefore, I will have 90 minutes. I will need a double period to successfully complete this topic, the teaching moment, and the assignments.

1.3 Context:

My learners are boys and girls that attend *Academic Central*, a public school. They are in Grade 11, between the ages of 16 and 17 years. They are from different racial groups and there are 18 in the language classroom. They speak both English and Afrikaans. The majority of the learners speak English as a home language and Afrikaans as a first additional language. Their proficiency in English is as follows: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are good; minor grammar and pronunciation errors. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is good; their speaking and writing in English may improve. Their strengths are: they can understand, speak, write, read, and communicate in English – they want to improve their English where necessary. They also enjoy reading English books, and/or watching English films, and/or writing creatively. They are technologically literate, and some learners may also be eager to participate in sports and/or cultural activities. Their weaknesses are: higher cognitive thinking. The learners' prior knowledge (concerning novels) entails the work completed in Grade 10 and other previous grades on the key features of literature text, such as

characterisation, character, background, setting, plot, conflict, narrator, and theme (DBE, 2011d:78, 84). For this lesson, they do not have any knowledge of Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, as it is introduced for the first time in this lesson. Furthermore, they previously partook in writing activities (such as transactional writing) and should be able to write an argumentative essay (see SMART Task). The following resources are available at the school: laptop (with PowerPoint Presentation), a data projector, black and white board, prescribed texts, workbooks, a printer, and internet.

2. Topic (as set out in the CAPS):

2.1 What is your lesson's topic, subtopic (if applicable), and theme?:

Topic: Key features of texts and parts of a book, including literary genres; Literature study (Novel) – Grade 11, Term 1, Weeks 1 & 2 (DBE, 2011d:53).
Subtopic: Essay: Argumentative.
Theme: Queer sexuality and religious zealotry (Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*).

2.2 What do your learners know about the topic, subtopic (if relevant), and theme?:

Topic: My learners have read novels in previous grades and are familiar with the key features of texts and parts of a book (such as the novel's title, front cover, and themes), including the literary genre, "novels".
Subtopic: My learners know what an argumentative essay is since they have written argumentative essays in previous grades.
Theme: It is difficult to assume what my learners may know of queer sexuality and religious zealotry. I am making the assumption that my learners are aware that there may be various sexualities in their societies – they may have prior knowledge that they received from their homes, parents, friends, the media, church, schools, etc. The theme, "religious zealotry", though,

may be uncommon to them, but they may be aware that religion can have an influence on individuals being open or accepting of their sexual orientation.

2.3 What is the purpose of your lesson and the rationale for inclusion?:

The purpose of the lesson is to introduce the learners to Jeanette Winterson's 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. Furthermore, I will explain that the main theme I will focus on during this cycle is religious zealotry and the influence it may have on queer individuals. I am therefore including a queer text in my language classroom in order to introduce queer-themed topics to all my learners.

2.4 Write a short summary of what you are going to teach in this lesson:

I am going to remind the learners that they can write argumentative essays in which they argue their point of view on something or someone. In this lesson, the learners will provide their opinions on whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not. I will achieve this by providing the learners with various opportunities to develop their higher cognitive thinking through analysis and inferences. This lesson only entails an introduction to the queer text in question, since we have not read the novel yet. Therefore, my focus will be on the novel's title and front cover, the meaning of "religious zealotry", a brief description of the novel, formative assessment activities, and a formative PowerPoint presentation (which recaps the format and purpose of an argumentative essay). I will tell the learners that no learner will be forced to participate in the activities if they feel uncomfortable about the context.

3 SMART Task (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Traceable):

At the end of the lesson the learners should be able to provide their opinions on whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not (Measurable – high cognitive thinking). The learners should be able to write an argumentative essay as they have done so before, but I will still recap the format and purpose with them. The word count of the argumentative essay adheres to the

requirements of the EHL CAPS (2011d:40) and they will also be given enough time to complete this task (Attainable). The argumentative essay will act as an introduction to the queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (1985). A foundation for critical thinking with regard to queer literature is developed. The argumentative essay will also allow the learners to develop their higher cognitive thinking skills, their writing skills, to argue a given topic, and to cooperatively work in a group (where relevant in the teaching–learning activities) (Relevance).

The following should be taken into consideration when the learners write their argumentative essays: the format should reflect an argumentative essay. The argumentative essay should contain 350–400 words (DBE, 2011d:40). The content of the argumentative essay should entail an argument on whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not. Historic present tense, spelling, and grammar will be taken into consideration as this is a writing activity. The argumentative essay is also an individual assignment.

Finally, the argumentative essay will be assessed by the teacher using a rubric (Annexure A). This task will act as a formative assessment activity that introduces the learners to Jeanette Winterson’s 1985 queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. This task may also be used as Task 2 (Writing) for Term 1 Weeks 1–2 (DBE, 2011d:55) (Traceable).

Time: 25 minutes⁵⁷.

4 Teaching Strategies, Learner Activities, Assessment, and Resources:

Teaching Activity	Learning Activity	Assessment	Resources
4.1 The teacher displays the front cover of <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i> (Winterson, 1985) on the white board using PowerPoint.	4.1 The learners, in their groups, analyse the title and the front cover of the novel and predict what it may be about. The learners then	4.1.1 Formative assessment. 4.1.2 Group assessment.	4.1 The teacher needs a laptop, PowerPoint, a data projector, and a white board. The learners

⁵⁷ Only thirty minutes are needed for the learners to plan and draft their argumentative essays. Editing, proofreading, and presenting occur at a later stage in the term.

The teacher firstly asks the learners, in their groups (see Introduction), to consider the text's title and front cover and to predict what the novel may be about. Secondly, the teacher mentions to the learners that the text is actually queer, entails lesbian characters, and "oranges" refer to "heterosexuality", and asks the learners to consider the text again and predict what the novel may be about. Thirdly, the teacher allows the learners to use their phones or dictionaries (that are available in the classroom) to provide a definition for "religious zealotry". The teacher asks the learners one last time to predict what the novel may be about by considering the title, the front cover, religious zealotry, and additional information given. The rationale behind this activity is to include queer literature and allow the learners to predict what the queer text, <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i> (Winterson, 1985), may be about – through self-discovery – by considering its title, front cover, theme, and additional information given. (Topic: Key features of texts and parts of a book.) <u>Time: 18 minutes.</u>	become aware that the text is queer, has lesbian characters, and that "oranges" refer to "heterosexuality". They have to predict what the novel may be about as they have been given more information and they may link this knowledge to their introduction. The learners, lastly, use their phones or dictionaries to provide a definition for "religious zealotry" and to predict what the novel may be about with this last piece of information. Throughout this activity the learners provide feedback in their groups and may make notes in their workbooks. <u>Skill(s): Speaking, Reading, and Listening.</u>	4.1.3 Verbal feedback.	need their workbooks, phones (if available) or dictionaries (that are available in the classroom).
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4.2 The teacher reads a brief synopsis of the queer text to the learners. The teacher instructs the learners to listen for specific information: what are the positive and/or negative influences religious zealotry may have on queer individuals in a heteronormative environment? The learners can then have a group discussion to get ideas for and against the inclusion of texts with alternative queer characters. The rationale behind this activity is to provide the learners with a brief description of the text. The learners also receive the opportunity to determine to what extent their prediction of the novel was correct. If there were errors, these will be cleared up. Following, the learners will have been introduced to the queer text, <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i> (Winterson, 1985), and will be able to brainstorm ideas for the inclusion of texts with alternative queer characters in the classroom environment or not. <u>Time: 15 minutes.</u>	4.2 The learners, still in their groups, listen for specific information when the teacher provides a brief description of the queer text. In doing so, they are allowed to make notes in their workbooks. The learners also determine to what extent their prediction of the novel was correct. Furthermore, the learners have a group discussion to get ideas for and against the inclusion of texts with alternative queer characters. <u>Skill(s): Listening.</u>	4.2.1 Formative assessment. 4.2.2 Group assessment. 4.2.3 Verbal feedback.	4.2 The teacher needs a brief synopsis of the queer text, <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i> (Winterson, 1985), that is available on the internet.
4.3 The teacher recaps the structure and purpose of an argumentative essay by giving a PowerPoint presentation (Annexure B) – an example and a template of an argumentative	4.3 The learners listen to the PowerPoint presentation and make notes in their workbooks. Afterwards, the learners plan and	4.3.1 Formative assessment. 4.3.2 Teacher assessment.	4.3 The teacher needs a laptop, PowerPoint presentation, a data projector, and a white

essay are included. Afterwards, the teacher provides the learners with the opportunity to plan, draft, and revise their argumentative essays. The rationale for this activity is to provide the learners with the necessary information and time to plan and draft their argumentative essays. The learners will be reminded what argumentative essays entail. <u>Time: 15 minutes.</u>	draft their argumentative essays using the notes they made throughout the entire lesson⁵⁸. <u>Skill(s): Reading and Listening.</u>	4.3.3 PowerPoint presentation.	board. The learners need their workbooks.
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5 Introduction:

The teacher divides the learners into five groups of 3 or 4 learners. Each group receives one type of fruit: Group 1 = 1 x orange; Group 2 = 1 x banana; Group 3 = 5 x cherries; Group 4 = 1 x bunch of grapes (there are 17 grapes); Group 5 = 1 x apple. The teacher asks the learners to consider the form, quantity and colour of the given type of fruit, and to make notes in their workbooks. After approximately one minute and thirty seconds, the learners rotate their fruit with another group and consider the form, quantity, and colour again, and compare it with the previous type of fruit they had. The rotation occurs three more times. In the remaining ten minutes of the introduction, the learners provide feedback on the form, quantity, and colour of the types of fruit they analysed (see Table 1), provide feedback on the comparison (similarities and differences) of the types of fruit (see Table 2), and ultimately make inferences about the five types of fruit as a whole:

⁵⁸ Since the Grade 11 learners have 10 weeks to complete multiple activities in Term 1, the argumentative essay does not have to be presented as a final draft in this lesson yet.

Table 1:

Types of Fruit	Form	Quantity	Colour
Orange	Round	1 (Singular)	Orange
Banana	Curved	1 (Singular)	Yellow
Cherries	Heart-shaped	5 (Multiple)	Red
Grapes	Ellipsoid; oval	17 (Multiple)	Purple
Apple	Mostly round	1 (Singular)	Green, red, or yellow

Table 2:

Similarities	Differences
Oranges and apples have similar forms.	Bananas, cherries, grapes, and oranges or apples all differ in form.
Oranges, bananas, and apples are singular in quantity.	Cherries and grapes differ in multiple quantities.
Cherries and grapes are multiple in quantity.	Oranges, cherries, grapes, bananas, and green apples all differ in colour.
Bananas and yellow apples are similar in colour.	
Cherries and red apples are similar in colour.	

Inference: There are similarities among the five types of fruit, but they all differ from one another in some way, whether it is form, quantity, or colour. As a result, each type of fruit is unique.

The purpose of the introduction is to provide learners with the opportunity to analyse the various forms, quantities, and colours of five types of fruit, and to make the inference that each fruit is unique in its own way, even if there are some similarities. This purpose will become clearer when the learners have enough information to link “oranges” to “heterosexuality” and “bananas”, “cherries”, “grapes”, and “apples” to various sexual orientations (such as homosexuality, bisexuality, transgenderism, and intersexuality) in the queer text, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (Winterson, 1985). Time: 15 minutes.

6 Pertinent Question:

In which way are individuals similar but also different? What makes individuals unique? Is it important to tolerate differences? If so, why? Why should one be aware of various sexual orientations? How can religion influence one's sexual orientation?

Time: 2 minutes.

FET Phase Lesson Plan Annexure A:

Argumentative Essay					
	24-30	18-23	12-17	7-11	0-6
Content of Argumentative Essay	The argumentative essay argues whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not exceptionally well.	The argumentative essay adequately argues whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not.	The argumentative essay to some extent argues whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not.	The argumentative essay argues whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not poorly.	The argumentative essay does not argue whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not.
	8-10	6-7	4-5	2-3	0-1
Format and Language of Argumentative Essay	The format corresponds to that of an argumentative essay: thesis statement, outline, body (three arguments), and a conclusion. Formal, academic language is used throughout.	The format mostly corresponds to that of an argumentative essay.		The format corresponds to that of an argumentative essay poorly.	The format does not correspond to that of an argumentative essay.
Historic present tense, Spelling and Grammar	The argumentative essay is written in the historic present tense throughout. The essay is free of spelling and grammatical errors.	The argumentative essay is written in the historic present tense with one to three tense errors. The essay contains one to three spelling and/or grammar errors.	The argumentative essay is written in the historic present tense with four to six tense errors. The essay contains four to six spelling and/or grammar errors.	The argumentative essay is written in the historic present tense with seven to nine tense errors. The essay contains seven to nine spelling and/or grammar errors.	The argumentative essay is written in the historic present tense, but there are more than nine tense errors. The essay contains more than nine spelling and/or grammar errors.
Total: 50					

FORMAT AND PURPOSE OF AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

PRESENTATION BY MR M.J. UYS

PURPOSE OF AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

- Why does one write an argumentative essay?

Lutrin and Pincus (2013:76) explain that an individual may have a belief, a point of view, or an opinion about something or someone, and it is the individual's objective to take a stand and support his/her/their view. For example, you will write an argumentative essay about whether texts with alternative queer characters should be read at school level or not.

FORMAT OF AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

Lutrin and Pincus (2013:76) provide the following characteristics that entail the format of an argumentative essay:

- An argumentative essay entails an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- The introduction entails a thesis statement and an outline. A thesis statement highlights (in one or two sentences) the main idea that the essay is based on. The outline highlights the manner in which you formulate your argument. Consequently, the introduction should capture the attention of the reader and clearly state the your opinion.

FORMAT OF AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

Lutrin and Pincus (2013:76) provide the following characteristics that entail the format of an argumentative essay:

- The body requires the essential support of the author's viewpoint. The viewpoint may be supported with facts and examples. Furthermore, the related facts and examples should be grouped into paragraphs – generally an argumentative essay's body contains three arguments. Conjunctions (also known as linking/connecting words) – such as “additionally”, “furthermore”, “accordingly”, “consequently” – back up the author's arguments and make it more convincing.
- The conclusion demands a short, strong, and memorable summary of the author's arguments.
- The argumentative essay should be written in the Historic Present Tense. For example, “This essay discusses ...” and not “This essay discussed...”. Do not write in the past tense unless you are referring to a historical event.

[illegible]

William Shakespeare wrote many plays that address universal themes. Albeit many viewers find Shakespearean English challenging, the themes provide images and messages that are relevant to today's societies. In the following essay I will argue that the plays of Shakespeare should remain part of the English curriculum of South Africa. Firstly, I provide a... Secondly, I explain that... Thirdly, I elaborate that... Lastly, I make a conclusion that...

In conclusion, Shakespeare should remain part of the ...

TEMPLATE OF AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

_____ (Title of Argumentative Essay)

Thesis Statement and Outline: _____

Argument 1: _____

Argument 2: _____

Argument 3: _____

Conclusion: _____

Conclusion: _____

APPENDIX H: DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



Director: CME Terblanche - BA (Pol Sc), BA Hons (Eng), MA (Eng), TEFL
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DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I, Christina Maria Etrechia Terblanche, hereby declare that I edited the
research study titled:

**A literary analysis of queer texts: Guidelines for Senior phase and
Further Education and Training English language teachers**

for **MJ Uys** for the purpose of submission as a postgraduate research study.
Changes were indicated in track changes and implementation was left to
the author.

Regards,



CME Terblanche
Cum Laude Language Practitioners (CC)
South African Translators Institute accr nr: 1001066
Full member of the Professional Editors Guild

APPENDIX I: *TURNITIN* PLAGIARISM REPORT

