

Snakes and Ladders: A Performed Ethnography

by

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Snakes and Ladders is a “performed ethnography” that tells the story of what happens when high school teachers and students in a fictional Canadian high school attempt to put on a Pride Day at their school. The ethnographic play script is based on data from an empirical study on anti-homophobia education I undertook in four Toronto schools from 2002 to 2003 (Goldstein, Collins and Halder, 2008). The richness of performed ethnography comes from three sources: the ethnographic research from which a play script is created; the reading or performance of the play; and the conversations that take place after the reading or performance. In these follow-up conversations, research participants and other readers or audience members have input about the conclusions of the research. The incorporation of audience input into on-going revisions of the play provides an opportunity for mutual analysis, and helps me create more collaborative relationships between myself, my research participants, and the communities to in which my research participants belong. Post-reading/performance conversations also allow me to link up my anti-oppression school-based research to my work as a teacher educator.

In their reading and discussion of *Snakes and Ladders* my students, who are both new and experienced teachers, are able to explore some of the contradictory desires educators have towards anti-homophobia education in public schools. On one hand, educators want to protect their students from homophobic violence at school. On the other, they want to hold on to their own beliefs about homosexuality and queer lives, which are often homophobic. By representing both contradictory and shifting positions in the performed ethnography, I am sometimes able to provoke a shifting of positions to anti-homophobia education among the readers of the script (Goldstein, 2004). It is in such moments that *Snakes and Ladders* is full of pedagogical possibility.

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Snakes and Ladders

Characters

- Rachel Davis: Teacher; born in Toronto; white; Jewish; lesbian; early 30s.
- Karen Diamond: First-year principal; born in Toronto; white; Anglo-Saxon Protestant; straight; early 40's.
- Anne James: Teacher; born in Jamaica; black; Christian; straight; early 40s.
- Amy Evans: Student teacher; born in Toronto; white Anglo-Saxon Protestant; questioning; early 20s.
- John Allen: Student teacher; born in Toronto; white; Anglo-Saxon Protestant; straight; late 20s.
- Roberto Rodriguez: Student teacher; born in South America, immigrated to Canada at the age of 12; raised Southern Baptist; gay; early 20s.
- Rahima Ali: Student teacher; born in Toronto; Pakistani descent; Muslim; straight; early 20s.
- Bob Byers: Experienced principal; born in Toronto; white; Anglo-Saxon Protestant; straight; early 50s.

The Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)

- Chris: Student; born in Toronto; white; Anglo-Saxon Protestant; gay; 16.
- Helen: Student; born in Toronto; Chinese; straight; 16.

Students and Teachers Against Racism (STAR)

- Ray: Student; born in Toronto; Caribbean descent; straight; 15.
- Diane: Student; born in Toronto; Caribbean descent; straight; 15.

Flashback scene

Young Roberto: Student; questioning; 15.

Roberto's friend: Student; race, ethnicity open; straight; 15.

Hotline Counsellor: Race and ethnicity open; early 20s.

Roberto's father: Born in South America; Southern Baptist; late 30s.

Roberto's mother: Born in South America; Southern Baptist; mid 30s.

School Council scene

Sara Phillips: Student teacher; born in Toronto; Anglo-Saxon Protestant; European descent; lesbian; early 20s.

Parent 1: Race, ethnicity open; late 30s.

Parent 2: Race, ethnicity open; late 30s.

Parent 3: Race, ethnicity open; late 30s.

Setting:

Pierre Elliot Trudeau Secondary School
Toronto, Canada
Spring, 2003

Scene 1

Principal's office. Rachel's classroom. English office.

RACHEL

(Sticking her head into the principal's office) Hi, Karen. Did you have a chance to read the GSA's proposal for putting on Pride Day?

KAREN

Yes. And I have a lot of questions.

RACHEL

Oh?

KAREN

(Looking at her watch) Starting with, what does GSA stand for?

RACHEL

Gay Straight Alliance.

KAREN

We have a student group called Gay Alliance?

RACHEL

Yeah – I mean, no. I mean it's called Gay *Straight* Alliance.

KAREN

Why didn't I know about it?

(AMY, ROBERTO, RAHIMA, and JOHN enter; walk over to the Principal's office, and then wait for KAREN.)

RACHEL

(Surprised) Well, uh, I'm not sure. We got started late last year. Before you arrived. We're listed in the Student Agenda book.

KAREN

I didn't see it. *(Looks at her watch)* Rachel, I'm sorry, but I have another meeting in five minutes. We'll have to talk about this later. But I want you to know that I am very surprised to hear that we have a gay group here. *(Pause)* I don't like surprises.

RACHEL

But it's not a gay group. It's a Gay Straight Alliance group. The students talk about discrimination. Homophobia.

KAREN

Who started the group?

RACHEL

One of my students approached me last year and asked me to be the faculty sponsor. Helen Lee. She's Jeffrey Lee's sister. Jeffrey was a gay grade 11 student who transferred out last year because of verbal harassment.

KAREN

What kind of harassment?

RACHEL

Three of his classmates surrounded him at his locker and taunted him.

KAREN

What did they say?

RACHEL

Things like, “Are you gay, guy?” “Are you gay?” “Are you a fag? We think you’re a faggot.” Karen, those words are just as hurtful as “Paki” or “Chink.” And you know how hard we try to make sure that we don’t let those slurs go by. If we had a Gay Straight Alliance group here last year, Jeffrey Lee would have had a place to come and talk about what was happening. Maybe he’d still be here.

KAREN

(Looks out of her office) Your student teachers are waiting outside. Look, I appreciate what you’re saying. We need to talk about this some more. But Rachel, we’re teachers, not social workers. It’s not our role to facilitate support groups for gay kids. We’re not experts. We have counsellors we can refer students like Jeffrey to if necessary.

RACHEL

But ...–

KAREN

(Moves closer to RACHEL, lowers her voice) Most parents don’t want their children to hear about regular sex at school, never mind gay sex. I need to talk to the student teachers. I’ll see you tomorrow.

(RACHEL leaves the office, nods at the student teachers, and walks to her classroom. KAREN greets the student teachers.)

KAREN

Good morning, everyone.

RAHIMA

Good morning.

ROBERTO

Morning.

AMY

Hi.

KAREN

Please come in and have a seat.

(RAHIMA, ROBERTO, and AMY enter the office and sit down.)

JOHN

(Enters last, walks over to KAREN and shakes her hand.) Hello, nice to meet you.
(Seeing that there aren't any chairs left) I'll stand.

KAREN

(Smiles at JOHN) So will I. It's John, right?

JOHN

Right.

KAREN

Welcome to Pierre Elliot Trudeau. I hope you all had a good first day yesterday.
(All four nod and smile.)

KAREN (Cont'd.)

I know you are going to have a wonderful experience at Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Anne James and Rachel Davis are both strong teachers and you'll learn a lot from them. The students here are academically inclined. Almost all will go on to university. But more importantly, we're a friendly school. Everyone gets along.
(All four nod and smile.)

KAREN

I want you to know that I have two openings in the English Department next year.
(All speaking at the same time)

RAHIMA

Really?

ROBERTO

Wow.

AMY

That's great.

JOHN

That's excellent news.

KAREN

If you like it here, and I'm sure you will, let me know. I prefer hiring teachers who have already taught with us. *(Looks at her watch)* One more thing before I let you go. I know you'll be very busy with your teaching assignments, but I recommend that you all get involved in some extra-curricular activity. There's more to school life than what goes on in the classroom. I need teachers who will work with students outside of class.

(All four nod.)

(RAHIMA, ROBERTO, AMY, and JOHN walk back to the English office and sit down.)

Scene 2 The Principal's Office.

KAREN

(On the phone) Principal Byers, please. *(Pause)* Thank you. *(Pause)* Hi, Bob, it's Karen Diamond from Pierre Elliot Trudeau. How are you? *(Pause)* Good. *(Pause)* Pretty good. Busy. Lots to learn in the first year. And we have 15 student teachers here this semester. Bob, can I run something by you? *(Brief pause)* Thanks. I just found out that one of my teachers is running a Gay Straight Alliance group. And I'm worried. *(Pause)* Well, I don't want to be involved in a huge controversy the first year I'm pPrincipal here. There are lots of people watching me. We have some kids from religious families here. *(Pause)* Sorry? *(Pause)* Oh. I guess I'm thinking of the Muslim families. What if some of the parents object? What if they complain to the superintendent? I love this school. I was a teacher here for 10 years before getting my principal papers, and I have been waiting five years for this position to open up. I don't want to be transferred. *(Pause)* No, she's not asking for approval. She got approval to run the group at the end of last year. Don't ask me how. *(Pause)* Oh. I didn't know the new equity policy included anti-homophobia. I thought it was mostly about racism. *(Pause)* It's been running since September. *(Pause)* No, no calls yet. *(Pause)* No. In fact, I don't know her at all. She arrived after I took the v-p position at West End Academy. *(Pause)* Drama and English. *(Pause)* Yeah. Very good. The kids like her a lot. *(Pause)* Would you? Thanks a lot. I really appreciate it. I'll see you next week.

Scene 3 The English classroom.

(ANNE enters and sits down near RACHEL.)

RACHEL

I tried to explain that it wasn't a gay group and that we were talking about homophobia, not sex. But she couldn't hear me. For her, talking about gay issues means talking about sex. Homosexuals are homo- sex- uals.

ANNE

Part of the problem was that she didn't know that there was a GSA at the school.

RACHEL

That's not my fault is it? I mean, the group is in the Student Agenda book.

ANNE

It would have been a good idea to talk to her about the group at the beginning of the year, maybe invite her to a meeting so... –

RACHEL

You know, I have a real problem with that. Bill didn't have to go in and talk to her about running the basketball team. And Sandra didn't have to talk to her about the choir, but I have to talk to her about the GSA?

(ANNE shrugs her shoulders.)

RACHEL

Did you go in to talk to her about your anti-racism group?

ANNE

Actually, yes I did. I have friend at West End Academy. She warned me. Karen Diamond hates surprises. And controversy makes her nervous. So in September, I made an appointment. I told her about the group, invited her to a STAR meeting and let her know that we wanted to do something on March 21, The International Day for the Elimination of Racism.

RACHEL

That was smart.

ANNE

So how did you leave things?

RACHEL

She told me that she doesn't think we need a GSA at the school because everyone gets along. That's outrageous. You can't walk down the hall of this school without hearing someone yell out "fag" or "faggot." Most teachers let the slurs and jokes slide. They pretend they didn't hear anything.

(ANNE nods.)

RACHEL

And then at lunch, I found a note in my box saying that she wants to come to the next meeting.

ANNE

Really?

RACHEL

The kids think that we are going to be discussing the first Pride Day ever at the school and the principal is coming to the meeting to shut down the group.

ANNE

Well, you don't know that for sure. But I am really sorry to hear all this. *(Pause)* There's a student in my Creative Writing class who I think is wondering about his sexuality. He's also a member of STAR. I wanted to suggest that he go to your next meeting, but hadn't quite figured how to go about it. I mean, if someone hasn't come out to you, and maybe hasn't even come out to himself, and you suggest he attend a GSA meeting, it seems intrusive. But I really think he needs to be in a space where he can hear people talk about gay people in a positive way.

RACHEL

You see. That's exactly why holding a school-wide Pride Day is so important. It's a chance for the whole school to hear positive things about gay people. And to do some anti-homophobia education. I can't believe we're going to be shut down.

ANNE

(Puts her hand on Rachel's arm) I think I have an idea.

Scene 4 The cafeteria

(RAHIMA and ROBERTO are standing at the back, supervising lunch.)

RAHIMA

Did you have to supervise the cafeteria during your first placement?

ROBERTO

No. You?

RAHIMA

Yeah.

ROBERTO

Every day?

RAHIMA

Every second day.

ROBERTO

Well, that's one way to get to know the kids.

RAHIMA

True. A lot of Pakistani girls came up to talk to me at lunch. They told me that they had never had a Muslim teacher before.

ROBERTO

That must have been cool. Being their first Muslim teacher.

RAHIMA

Very cool. I'd love to get a job there. I'd start up a club for Muslim students.

ROBERTO

To challenge Islamophobia.

RAHIMA

Exactly.

ROBERTO

That was a great workshop your group did in our School and Society class. I've never been to an anti-Islamophobia workshop before. I was kind of surprised at how many misconceptions people had about the Islamic faith and Muslims.

RAHIMA

(Nods) There's a lot of work to do. But on a completely different topic, I've been thinking about your grandmother. How's she doing?

ROBERTO

Much better. She's home from the hospital and staying with my parents. Thanks for asking. I'm going to try and visit her this weekend.

RAHIMA

I'm sure she'll be glad to see you. *(Looks at her watch)* That's it. Lunch is over. *(Smiles)* I'll see you later.

ROBERTO

Later.

(RAHIMA, ROBERTO, AMY, and JOHN all walk to the English classroom. JOHN carries a notebook. Everyone but JOHN sits on the chairs. RACHEL and ANNE lean against the desk. JOHN stands.)

Scene 5 English classroom

ANNE

As you may already know, March 21 is the International Day to Eliminate Racism. The school's Students and Teachers Against Racism group, STAR, is planning a series of events and I'd like all four of you to be involved.

RAHIMA

I'd love to be involved.

ROBERTO

Me too.

AMY

Sounds great.

ANNE

Rachel and I have been talking. Rachel's the faculty advisor of the Gay Straight Alliance.

ROBERTO

There's a Gay Straight Alliance group at Trudeau?

(JOHN takes a pen out of his pocket and starts doodling on his notebook.)

RACHEL

Yes. It started last year.

ANNE

While the two groups have not worked with each other before, we thought it was time to bring them together. Rachel's group has been talking about putting on a Pride Day at Trudeau. We decided that this year to commemorate our week of working towards eliminating racism and discrimination, we are going to put on a set of Pride Days. Racial and Ethnic Pride, and Gay Pride.

ROBERTO

Wow.

RACHEL

We still have to clear the idea with Karen. And we also need to talk to the students in the GSA and STAR. But we wanted to let you know we're counting on your help. We only have four weeks to get everything organized.

JOHN

I've already told Gary Wilson I'd help him out with the Snakes and Ladders Competition. My second teachable is history.

ROBERTO

What's the Snake and Ladders Competition?

JOHN

It's a contest sponsored by the History Department. Students answer questions in different categories, like World History, Canadian History, American History. If they are right, they roll the dice and work their way up and down the Snakes and Ladders game board.

RACHEL

It's very popular.

ROBERTO

Maybe we could come up with a special set of questions for each Pride Day. You know, like, special questions on Canadian Black History or Canadian Asian History for Racial Pride and questions on Gay History for Gay... -

RACHEL

That's a great idea, Roberto. I'll talk to Gary and see what he says. Any other ideas?

(ANNE and RACHEL walk offstage. JOHN and AMY walk to the English office. RAHIMA and ROBERTO stay in the classroom.)

Scene 6 English office

AMY

How's Marcia doing? Is she still dealing with morning sickness?

JOHN

Yeah. It's still pretty bad.

AMY

When's she due?

JOHN

Sometime in August. We're hoping that she'll be able to go on maternity leave for a full year. I guess it will depend on whether or not I have a teaching job in September.

AMY

Maybe you'll get a job here. You're certainly making a good impression. You work every lunch hour running the Snakes and Ladders game. And you're here until five or six every night marking and preparing questions.

JOHN

I'd love to get a job here. I really hope all this pays off. I had to change my tutoring appointments to stay after school, so I'm working on both Saturday and Sunday now.

AMY

Sounds like you're really busy.

JOHN

Yeah.

AMY

Are you too busy to come for a drink at the Duke next Friday? Sara's trying to get everyone in the cohort together. She asked me to invite everyone here.

JOHN

Thanks, but I'm going to be tutoring.

AMY

Too bad. It's going to be a good time. People are going to let off a little steam.

JOHN

(Grinning) Well, if Sara's organizing it, it will be a party.

AMY

(Grinning back) Yeah.

JOHN

I don't have to ask if you'll be going.

AMY

(Laughing) No.

JOHN

You two are as close as peas in a pod.

AMY

(Startled) What do you mean?

JOHN

Nothing. Just that you two are always together. You see one, you see the other.

(AMY is silent.)

(Changes the subject) So how's Sara's practice teaching going?

AMY

Fine. But she'd rather be here and working on Pride Days.

JOHN

(Nodding) Yeah. She'd be right in the middle of Pride Days. *(Looks at his watch)*

Well, gotta go. Say hi to Sara when you see her. And have a beer for me.

Scene 7 English classroom

ROBERTO

Has Amy told you about the get-together next Friday?

RAHIMA

Yeah. Are you going to go?

ROBERTO

I think so. You?

RAHIMA

It's at a bar. I don't go to events where they serve alcohol.

ROBERTO

I didn't know that. *(Pause)* Is that why you didn't go to the other party before practice teaching?

RAHIMA

Partly. I mean, I had a family event that night, as well. But if they hadn't served alcohol, I probably would have come, at least for a while.

ROBERTO

Maybe you should e-mail Sara. She could plan something else.

RAHIMA

It's always awkward. There are only two of us who don't go to events where there's alcohol. People think we're extreme.

ROBERTO

Extreme?

RAHIMA

They respect our choice not to drink, but can't understand why we won't attend a social event where there's drinking.

ROBERTO

I think Sara would understand.

RAHIMA

I don't know. People don't like to change the way they usually do something.

ROBERTO

Maybe. But I still think you should talk to Sara.

(RACHEL enters.)

RACHEL

Hi. How's it going?

ROBERTO AND RAHIMA

Fine.

ROBERTO

I've finished marking all the papers you gave me.

RACHEL

Thanks so much. I really appreciate it.

RAHIMA

(Looks at her watch) I've gotta go and set up for my next class. See you later.

ROBERTO

Later.

RACHEL

Have a good class.

RAHIMA

Thanks.

(RAHIMA exits.)

ROBERTO

Rachel, can I ask you about something?

RACHEL

Sure.

ROBERTO

I came in early this morning to get my photocopying done for first period, and I ran into one of the VP's in the parking lot.

RACHEL

Which one?

ROBERTO

Brian Hanson. He noticed the rainbow sticker on my car. (*Speaking quickly*) You know, I had thought about it. Should I take the car to school? Should I park it in the lot? Should I take the subway? But I had all this stuff to take today so I decided to just drive in.

RACHEL

What did he say?

ROBERTO

He looked at the sticker, then he looked at me and said, "You know, if you want to get around having any reaction, you can just back the car in." It's not like I had asked him about the sticker on the car. He just noticed it and decided I should back it in. Has anything like that happened to you?

RACHEL

No. I don't have a rainbow sticker on the back of my car.

ROBERTO

It's so disappointing. On one hand, the school has a Gay Straight Alliance and is planning a Gay Pride Day, and on the other, Brian advises me to back my car into a parking spot so that people won't think I'm gay.

RACHEL

You need to remember that we haven't been given permission to hold Pride Day yet. And the GSA is only a year old. We've only begun to do the anti-homophobia work we need to do here. Brian worries about teachers being out at school so... -

ROBERTO

What's he so worried about? You're out, aren't you?

RACHEL

Yes. But not everyone thinks it's a good idea. You know. There are still lots of parents who don't like the idea of gay and lesbian teachers in their kids' school.

ROBERTO

That's... -

RACHEL

I know, I know. I'm just saying that lots of parents are uncomfortable. They don't know any gay people themselves and... -

ROBERTO

They don't think they know any gay people. But they do. It's just that so many gay people are closeted, that people don't know that they know gay people.

(RACHEL is silent.)

Sorry, I interrupted you.

RACHEL

No, that's okay. I agree with you. It's just that there's still a myth out there... I mean, people, - some people, believe that gay men and lesbians are promiscuous and will try to recruit their children into a gay lifestyle.

ROBERTO

I hate that word.

RACHEL

Promiscuous?

ROBERTO

Lifestyle. I don't have a lifestyle. I have a life.

Scene 8 Principal's Office

KAREN

Thanks for visiting Bob. It's nice to have you here.

BOB

Thanks for showing me around. Your new computer lab is very impressive.

KAREN

We're thrilled to have it.

BOB

I bet. *(Pause)* So what's happened to that Gay Straight Alliance group you were talking about?

KAREN

I think they've joined forces with the anti-racism group.

BOB

Really? Good for them.

KAREN

You think so?

BOB

Yeah. I do. The more school support there is for anti-homophobia work, the better it will be received.

KAREN

Or the more support there is, the bigger the backlash.

(BOB smiles.)

Why aren't you worried about the backlash at your school?

BOB

Well, I've been a principal longer than you have. And I've survived more than one conflict in my career. But I guess it's because, for me, the work is personal.

(KAREN is silent.)

My daughter is gay. She came out to us in her first year of university.

KAREN

Oh.

BOB

But she had known for quite a while before that.

KAREN

Were you surprised?

BOB

Shocked.

KAREN

Did she have a hard time at school?

BOB

No. Well, not that I know of, anyway. But maybe that's because she was in the closet all through high school.

(KAREN is silent.)

You know, when your child comes out, you go into the closet.

KAREN

What do you mean?

BOB

After she told us, when people asked about Shannon, I wouldn't say anything. I was scared to tell anyone. Even close friends. I was afraid of what they might say to me.

(KAREN is silent.)

I was also afraid for her safety. Would she get harassed? Would people call her ugly names? But I couldn't talk about it. I couldn't reach out. A few weeks later, I was asked to go to a Professional Development session on the Board's new equity policy. When they talked about the five new Equity Implementation Documents and told us that one of them was about challenging homophobia, I felt grateful. Really grateful. I wanted every school, every university to have a document like that so that my daughter and kids like her would be safe. After the session, I talked to one of the Equity people about Shannon. That was the first time I came out about having a daughter who is lesbian.

KAREN

(Quietly) Wow.

BOB

But in order for the policy to do any good, we have to implement it. Even when it's difficult. Even when it brings us into conflict with staff and parents. Karen, the policy needs to be implemented. I'll support you.

(BOB exits. ANNE, AMY, RAHIMA, and students from the GSA and STAR clubs walk to the English classroom carrying enough chairs for almost everyone. People either sit on the seats or on the desk or lean up against the desk. The GSA and STAR students sit in two separate groups.)

Scene 9 Principal's Office. English classroom.

(In the principal's office. KAREN is reading the Equity Policy. In the classroom, people are talking among themselves in their two separate groups. RAHIMA sits with the STAR students, AMY sits next to RAHIMA, and ROBERTO walks back and forth between both groups.)

RACHEL

(Looks at her watch, then raises her voice to be heard above the conversation)
Okay. It's getting late. *(People quiet down)* Principal Diamond must be held up. Let's begin without her. Thank you all for coming. The purpose of this meeting is get your feedback on an idea Ms. James and I have worked on together. Ms. James, would you like to present our proposal?

(KAREN checks her watch, puts down the policy, and hurries towards the English classroom. As she reaches the door, she slows down and instead of entering, stands at the door, and listens to the discussion.)

ANNE

As the students who participate in STAR know, every year the club puts on a week of events to commemorate March 21, the International Day for Eliminating Racism. This year, Ms. Davis and I thought about planning a whole week of events that not only challenge racism, but other forms of discrimination as well. The Gay Straight Alliance has been working on the issue of homophobia and has put together a proposal for a Gay Pride Day.

CHRIS

We're here, we're queer, get used to it!

(The GSA students laugh. The STAR students look uncomfortable.)

ANNE

(Smiling slightly) What we propose is a set of Pride Days: Racial Pride, Ethnic Pride, and Gay Pride.

CHRIS

Why are we calling it Gay Pride? Shouldn't we call it LGBTQ Pride?

RAY

What do all those letters mean?

CHRIS

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer.

HELEN

I thought the "Q" stood for "questioning."

DIANE

What's transgendered?

CHRIS

It's used to describe people who live in the gender that is not the one they were

raised in. Like a person who was born male and is living as a female or vice versa.

DIANE

Oh.

RAY

Why do we have to have Gay Pride Day during Anti-racism Week?

DIANE

Yeah. Why don't they celebrate it sometime in June when other gay people celebrate it? March 21 is supposed to be about racism.

ROBERTO

Some people experience racism *and* homophobia. We need to fight both together.

DIANE

(Matter of fact) Black people aren't faggots.

HELEN

(Angry) What?

RACHEL

(Calm) Okay. Hold it there. *(To DIANE)* The last word you used. What was it?

DIANE

(Embarrassed) What? Faggots?

RACHEL

Right. How is faggot used in the hallway? Is it a compliment?

HELEN

No.

DIANE

It's not a put down.

RACHEL

Although some people might use it as a joke, I think the consensus is that it's usually used as a put down. So we won't use it. Okay?

DIANE

Okay.

RACHEL

Okay. Before we continue with the proposal, let's talk about the idea that black people aren't lesbian and gay. Is that true?

RAY

On television, the only people who are gay are white.

HELEN

Gay people aren't only white. My brother is Chinese and he's gay. He went to this school last year but had to leave because he was harassed for being a "faggot."

CHRIS

And there's that Sri Lankan guy. The one who wrote that book. What's it called?

AMY

Funny Boy?

CHRIS

Yeah.

AMY

Shyam Selvadurai.

CHRIS

Yeah.

ANNE

And Frida Kahlo.

CHRIS

Who's she?

ANNE

A Mexican painter who was famous for her self-portraits. There was a movie done about her recently. It starred Salma Hayek.

HELEN

I loved that movie. But Frida wasn't a lesbian. She was married to that guy, what's his name?

ANNE

Diego Rivera. Kahlo was bisexual. She was married to Rivera, but was also attracted to women.

DIANE

If we help out with Gay Day, people might think that we're gay.

HELEN

I'm going to help out and I'm not gay.

DIANE

But some people may think you are.

CHRIS

What's wrong with people thinking that you're gay?
(DIANE is silent. There's an awkward pause.)

ANNE

Mr. Rodriguez, why don't you tell us the ideas you and Ms. Davis have come up with for Gay Pride Day.

CHRIS

We should call it LGBTQ Pride Day.

ANNE

Let's hear from Mr. Rodriguez first. We'll talk about the name after.

ROBERTO

Okay. We talked about inviting a group called T.E.A.C.H. to come and do an anti-homophobia workshop with us. T.E.A.C.H. stands for Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia. The members of T.E.A.C.H. identify as LGBTQ and straight.

HELEN

Are they all white?

ROBERTO

No. The group is mixed. And as part of the workshop they tell their coming-out stories, of when they first knew they might not be or weren't heterosexual. We also thought about holding a special game of Snakes and Ladders on Canadian minority history.

CHRIS

What about a queer talent night? And a drag contest?

DIANE

What's drag?

HELEN

It's when guys dress up like girls and girls dress up like guys.

CHRIS

Or maybe we could put on an "Ask Dr. Ruth" show with questions and answers about queer sex.

KAREN

(Loud) Good afternoon everyone.

(People are startled.)

I'm sorry I'm late.

(ROBERTO gets out of his seat to provide a seat for KAREN.)

Thank you, Roberto.

ROBERTO

You're welcome.

KAREN

(Looks around the room at each member of the group) Ms. Davis and Ms. James have talked to me about the idea of Anti-racism and Pride Week and I've been listening to the last part of your discussion. I have some thoughts. *(To Roberto)* First, I think Mr. Rodriguez makes a good point that some people experience both racism and homophobia and that it is helpful to educate people about both forms of discrimination. That's also what the Board equity policy says. So you have my support for a set of different Pride Days that teaches tolerance for others.

RACHEL

It's not really about toler-

ANNE

Thank you, Karen.

KAREN

(To RACHEL) Ms. James and the STAR group have a lot of experience conducting anti-racist education and I am sure that this experience will be helpful to the GSA. But I am concerned about some of the ideas I have heard you talk about. I read the Board's pamphlet on "What Anti-Homophobia Education Is and What It

Isn't." (To CHRIS) The Board is clear that anti-homophobia education is *not* sex education, so there will be no question and answer show about sex.

CHRIS

But... -

KAREN

Which brings me to another concern, which is about language. Lots of people don't like that word you used.

CHRIS

Which word?

KAREN

Queer. It makes them uncomfortable. So I suggest, insist really, you not use it. Since there is some confusion about the term LGBTQ and about the term transgendered, I also suggest you stick with name Gay Pride Day.

CHRIS

But not all queers are gay. Some are bi, some are... -

KAREN

People will understand that you are using the word "gay" to mean all people who are not heterosexual. Finally, (*looks directly at RAHIMA*) given the religious diversity present in this school, we need to be careful not to offend anyone. This is a school, not a nightclub. So no gay talent night and no drag contest. The T.E.A.C.H. workshop is approved by the Board so it's fine. You can contact someone at the Board's Equity Office for a list of other resources. (*Looks at her watch, stands up to leave*) I'm sorry, but I have to go. Good luck in your planning. Keep me informed of your progress. I want to see the final program for the entire week.

ANNE

No problem. Thanks for your time.

KAREN

You're welcome. Have a good evening.

ANNE

You too.

(*KAREN exits.*)

CHRIS

If the school is not a nightclub, how come we have straight talent night?

(The students and ANNE and RACHEL leave the stage taking the extra chairs with them. RACHEL, ROBERTO, and CHRIS remain in the English classroom. AMY and RAHIMA join JOHN in the English office.)

Scene 10 English office. The hallway. The English classroom.

(In the English office.)

RAHIMA

And then she looks right at me and starts talking about respecting religious diversity at the school. I felt so singled out.

JOHN

But doesn't the Koran say that homosexuality is a sin?

RAHIMA

Yes, but so does the Old Testament. So does the New Testament. Why only look at me when talking about religious objections to homosexuality?

JOHN

Your religious beliefs are visible. Most people's are not.

(RAHIMA and AMY are silent.)

AMY

Anyway, by the end of the meeting, we all had a long list of things to do. Do you have any time to help me come up with a set of questions for the Pride Day game of Snakes and Ladders?

JOHN

Sorry, I can't. I got my hands full with the normal Snakes and Ladders game. The finals begin next week, and I just don't have the time.

(ANNE and DIANE enter and stand in the hallway.)

ANNE

So what's the problem?

DIANE

I don't want to introduce the people from T.E.A.C.H.

ANNE

Why not?

DIANE

People will think *I'm* gay.

ANNE

In your introduction, you can tell people that you are a member of STAR and are there as a straight ally to fight homophobia. If you want, I can get you a button that says "Straight, but not narrow." That way everyone will know you aren't gay.

DIANE

But what if I don't want to be a straight ally?

ANNE

What's the problem with being an ally?

DIANE

It means that I agree that it's okay.

ANNE

That what's okay?

DIANE

That (*looks down at the floor*) it's okay to be a fag... - tTo be gay.

ANNE

I think what we're saying, as straight allies, is that we should all respect other people's differences.

DIANE

But if I don't agree that it's okay to be gay, then shouldn't my opinion be respected?

ANNE

(*Pauses*) I want you to think about something. People are. We have to respect the right of all of us to just be. Be who we are. And that's not easy. And it doesn't happen without some kind of conflict. Because we don't live in the world all by ourselves.

(*In the English classroom*)

RACHEL

So what's the problem?

CHRIS

It's just not fair.

RACHEL

What's not fair?

CHRIS

That Ms. Diamond gets to say what can and can't happen at Pride Days.

RACHEL

She's the principal.

CHRIS

I know. But can't we, like, protest or something? Can't you talk to her about the drag contest?

RACHEL

What do you want me to say?

CHRIS

Tell her that if the school can host a gospel choir and draw from black culture to educate about racism, then it's only fair that we host a drag contest and draw from gay culture to educate about homophobia.

(In the English office)

JOHN

So what else are you guys doing for Pride Days?

AMY

Well, I am supposed to facilitate a follow-up discussion on a film that deals with homophobia.

JOHN

That's not too time-consuming. Though I guess you have to preview the film.

AMY

I already have. It's a good film, but I'm very nervous. What happens if someone asks a question or makes a comment and I say the wrong thing?

RAHIMA

Have you talked to Rachel about it?

AMY

Yeah. And she said if I waited until I knew absolutely everything about every topic I was asked to teach I would never teach anything.

JOHN

She has a point.

AMY

Maybe. But that doesn't change how I feel. I'm thinking of asking Roberto to co-facilitate the discussion with me.

RAHIMA

That's a good idea.

JOHN

(To RAHIMA) What do you have to do?

RAHIMA

I'm doing a workshop on stereotyping Muslims with a student from STAR. I'm also supposed to organize the visit from T.E.A.C.H. and welcome the speakers.

JOHN

The workshop will take some work, but organizing the visit isn't too hard.

RAHIMA

It's not hard, but it's a problem.

AMY

Why?

RAHIMA

If I welcome the speakers to the school, to Gay Pride Day, it will look like I think it's okay to be gay.

AMY

And you don't.

RAHIMA

No. I mean I don't believe that gay people should be discriminated against. I bust kids for saying "fag" in the hallway, and I have gay friends in the cohort, like Roberto. But I don't think it's okay to be gay. You can't be gay *and* Muslim.

(ANNE and SHERRY exit downstage left. RACHEL AND CHRIS exit. RAHIMA walks to the English classroom and sits down next to ROBERTO.)

Scene 11 The English classroom.

ROBERTO

It's not true, you know. You can be gay and Muslim.

RAHIMA

What?

ROBERTO

I have a friend who is Muslim and he was gay. He found this organization on the Internet. An organization of Muslim gay men. It's called "Al-Fathiha."

(RAHIMA nods.)

Yeah. It's a group that is working out how to be gay and still follow the faith.
(Pauses, waiting to see if she will say anything)

(RAHIMA is silent.)

But if you don't want to introduce the T.E.A.C.H. speakers, I'll do it for you.

RAHIMA

Thank you.

ROBERTO

You're welcome. But in return, I want you to co-facilitate the workshop on name-calling with me.

RAHIMA

Sure.

ROBERTO

I'm planning to look at both racist and homophobic name-calling.

RAHIMA

Okay.

ROBERTO

Okay.

RAHIMA

Thanks for understanding.

ROBERTO

Yeah. I know what it's like. My family is very religious.

RAHIMA

Really?

ROBERTO

They're members of one of the few congregations of Spanish-speaking Southern Baptists. To Baptists, homosexuality is a horrible sin, right up there with killing your father and blaspheming God.

RAHIMA

So I guess you're not out to your family.

ROBERTO

Oh, I'm out.

RAHIMA

You are?

ROBERTO

I've been out since I was sixteen.

RAHIMA

Sixteen!

(YOUNG ROBERTO, ROBERTO'S FRIEND, THE HOTLINE COUNSELLOR, ROBERTO'S FATHER, and ROBERTO'S MOTHER enter.)

ROBERTO

People always ask me, "When? When did you know?" I never could really pinpoint the exact moment when I knew for sure. But I can remember the moment that got it all started. I was at a friend's house. I was in grade 9 and living in Mississauga. We were looking at the yearbook and trying to decide who we'd go out with. He had chosen two or three potential girlfriends or girls at school he'd like to have sex with. When it came my turn to choose, we went through the whole yearbook looking for someone for me to go out with, or at least to do *it* with me. For every girl in my class, I had some sort of excuse.

YOUNG ROBERTO

She's not my type. She's like a sister to me. I like her, but not *that* way.

ROBERTO

Then we moved on to girls in other grade 9 classes. Then to girls in grade 10, grade 11, and grade 12. After exhausting all the possibilities, my friend turned to me and said:

ROBERTO'S FRIEND

So we've looked at all the girls in our school, and you haven't chosen any of them. (*In a mocking way*) Would you go out with any guys?

ROBERTO

I was kind of disgusted and kind of insulted.

YOUNG ROBERTO

No. That's gross! A guy? Ugh! Never! That's just too gross to imagine! I guess I'm just not ready to go out with anybody right now.

ROBERTO

And we left it at that. But that got me thinking.

YOUNG ROBERTO

Do I really like boys? I think they're attractive. But doesn't everyone think guys are attractive? I mean, girls look at other girls and think: "Oh, she's so pretty!" "She has great skin!" "She has beautiful hair." "I HATE HER!"

ROBERTO

I thought guys looked at each other and thought the same thing, only that we couldn't say anything because we're supposed to be macho. But, was I really attracted to guys as opposed to girls? Why hadn't I ever had any desire to go out with a girl? I mean, I loved girls, but I'd just want to be friends with them. But with guys, I wanted to have a more intimate relationship. I was confused. And horrified! I didn't know much about homosexuality. Just the things that people talked about under their breath and the things kids made fun of in the playground. But I did remember what my parents had said about homosexuals when we had the sex talk. They were the men that we wanted to stay away from because they molested little kids. That's pretty much all I knew about homosexuality, and the fact that it was a perversion and a sin. So there I was with these feelings of abnormality. I didn't know what to do. I thought I was the only person in Mississauga with this problem and I felt really alone. I needed to find some help. The most obvious place to look in was in the phone book. I looked at the white pages under

“Gay.” I was so relieved to find out that were so many people with the last name “Gay.”

(RAHIMA laughs.)

I thought, “Hey I’m not so alone after all!” There was the Gay-Lea dairy company, which made perfect sense to me, since they also produced “homo” milk.

(RAHIMA laughs.)

Then I finally found the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Youth-Line. I decided to call.

YOUNG ROBERTO

Hello. I’m fifteen years old, I live in Mississauga, I think I’m gay, and I don’t what to do.

HOTLINE COUNSELLOR

Okay, do not commit suicide.

RAHIMA

She didn’t say that, did she?

ROBERTO

No. I was joking. She referred me to this gay youth support group running out of the 519 Community Centre in downtown Toronto. They met every Tuesday evening and Saturday afternoon. Since it took me two hours to get to downtown Toronto from where I lived, I decided to go on a Saturday. When I got up the courage to go, I told my parents I was going to the library to prepare for a project. I thought there would be at least four other people. I was the one person from Mississauga, then there would be another one from Scarborough, one from Etobicoke, one from downtown, and one from North York. I remember wondering if they would all be wearing feather boas and sequin gowns with high heels. Was I dressed up enough for the occasion?

(RAHIMA laughs.)

But when I got there, there were about 15 or 20 people, and they didn’t look like “freaks” at all, but “normal,” like me. Whatever that means.

RAHIMA

What did you talk about?

ROBERTO

We talked about coming out, about telling our families, about our school life, about life in Toronto, and being gay. They told me about safe sex and gave me a lot of pamphlets with information on using condoms and safe sex. It was exciting. After the meeting, a group of us decided to go out for coffee and talk some more. Then they invited me to play pool. Then we went to another person’s house to see a movie. Well, before I knew it, it was 11:00 at night. I freaked out and raced to

the subway station in order to catch the bus to Mississauga. I got to my house two hours later, at like 1:00 in the morning.

RAHIMA

Oh, no.

ROBERTO

When I walked in the door, my mom was crying and my dad was calling the police.

ROBERTO'S FATHER

Where have you been?

YOUNG ROBERTO

At the library and afterwards I went to a friend's house.

ROBERTO'S FATHER

Which friend?

YOUNG ROBERTO

Uhm, Chris.

ROBERTO'S FATHER

We called your friend Chris. We called all your friends and everyone from church. Where have you been?

YOUNG ROBERTO

I was in downtown Toronto.

(Roberto's parents gasp.)

ROBERTO

For my South American, Southern Baptist, conservative parents who lived in Mississauga, downtown Toronto was like the dark pit of Hell.

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

What were you doing in downtown Toronto? Are you doing drugs?

YOUNG ROBERTO

No, no, it's none of that!

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

Then tell us! We're your parents, we love you, and we want to know what's going on.

YOUNG ROBERTO

I'm sorry I can't. *(Pause)* I can't tell you what I was doing downtown. All I can ask you to do is pray for me.

ROBERTO

We talked for a bit longer in my room. We cried, we prayed. I'll spare you the mushy details. It was late. Finally we went to sleep. The next morning my parents came into my room and woke me up very softly.

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

(Whispers) Robby, wake up.

YOUNG ROBERTO

(Sleepy) Wha... What's going on?

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

We want to talk to you for a second.

YOUNG ROBERTO

(Sleepy) What?

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

We think we know what's wrong with you.

YOUNG ROBERTO

(Still sleepy) What?

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

We think we *know* what's wrong with you.

YOUNG ROBERTO

(Suddenly wide-awake) You think you know?

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

(Calm) Yes, we think we know.

YOUNG ROBERTO

How?

ROBERTO'S FATHER

We found these in your bag.

RAHIMA

What? What did they find?

ROBERTO

The pamphlets and flyers I had received at the meeting. I went pale. I could feel the blood draining from my head. I couldn't breathe. My mother was holding a pamphlet showing a man putting a condom on another man's penis.

RAHIMA

Oh, no.

ROBERTO

My dad was holding a pamphlet talking about the use of dental dams and rimming. *(Pause)* I was mortified.

ROBERTO'S MOTHER

(Calm) It's okay. You're our son and we love you. We know that with God's help you will change.

ROBERTO

So that's how I came out to my parents.

RAHIMA

And you never changed.

ROBERTO

I never changed. But because I came out when I was sixteen, I've had plenty of time to work it out with my parents.

RAHIMA

Do you still go to church?

ROBERTO

No. But I know other gay people who do. Some of them go to the Metropolitan Community Church, downtown. Others go to welcoming United and Anglican churches. These folks, they're Christian and gay.

(YOUNG ROBERTO, ROBERTO'S FRIEND, THE HOTLINE COUNSELLOR, ROBERTO'S FATHER, and ROBERTO'S MOTHER exit.) ROBERTO AND RAHIMA walk to the English office. KAREN, ANNE, and RACHEL enter and sit down in the principal's office.)

Scene 12 Principal's office.

RACHEL

We put them up yesterday afternoon, after school. Fifty of them. Then we checked on them at lunch. Ten had been torn down or defaced.

KAREN

Defaced how?

RACHEL

With graffiti. Next to the word homophobia, one said "We're not afraid, we just don't agree." There was another that said "God hates fags."

KAREN

I assume that... -

RACHEL

We took down the posters that had been defaced.

ANNE

This is all very disturbing. In the last few years that STAR has put on Anti-racism Week, there's been low attendance at some workshops, hot discussions in others, some resistance from teachers. But none of our posters have been defaced in this way.

KAREN

So what's next?

RACHEL

We need to send a strong message that this will not be tolerated. That students caught tearing down or defacing the posters will be suspended. And I think you need to tell students this face-to-face. In an assembly. Tomorrow morning.

KAREN

Can it wait? I have an important meeting tomorrow morning.

ANNE

I don't think we should wait.

KAREN

(Sighs) Okay. We'll schedule the assembly for first period.

RACHEL

Karen, I'm sorry about this.

ANNE

It's not your fault. *(Pause)* In fact, it proves your point. There's work to be done in our school.

(ANNE and RACHEL walk to the English classroom. ROBERTO, AMY, RAHIMA, and students from the GSA and STAR clubs walk to the English classroom carrying enough chairs for almost everyone. People either sit on the seats or on the desk or lean up against the desk. The GSA and STAR students sit in two separate groups.)

Scene 13 The English classroom.

RACHEL

Spring Break begins next week, so this is our last meeting before Anti-racism and Pride Week. I want to talk about any outstanding issues and confirm who's doing what, when. Okay. Outstanding issues.

(Everyone is silent.)

No outstanding issues?

CHRIS

Did they find the people who were tearing down and writing on the posters?

RACHEL

No. But after the assembly, there were no more incidents.

HELEN

Lots of people are saying that they won't be going to the anti-homophobia workshops.

RACHEL

Four teachers are taking their entire classes to the T.E.A.C.H. workshops on Thursday morning. And if there are fewer people at the lunchtime workshops, so what?

ANNE

We'll work with who shows up.

RAY

We had more anti-racist workshops last year.

ANNE

We did. But we agreed to try something different this year. We'll evaluate what happens and decide what changes we want to make next year.

CHRIS

Well, at least you get to have your gospel choir perform. Ms. Diamond won't let us have a drag contest.

RAY

You can't compare a drag contest to a gospel choir.

CHRIS

Yes, you can, if you take queer culture seriously.

RACHEL

I know you're disappointed about the drag contest, but we agreed that presenting the workshops and films Ms. Diamond approved of was a way to begin.

ROBERTO

We also agreed that we would try not to pitch the anti-racist work against the anti-homophobia work and vice-versa.

CHRIS

I know, but... -

KAREN'S VOICE ON THE INTERCOM

Please excuse the interruption. Are Ms. Davis and Ms. James there?

(RAHIMA, who is sitting close to the intercom, catches ANNE's eye. ANNE nods.)

RAHIMA

(Turns on and speaks into the intercom) Yes.

KAREN'S VOICE ON THE INTERCOM

Could you ask them both to come to my office? I need to speak to them immediately.

(ANNE and RACHEL get up to leave the classroom.)

RAHIMA

They're on their way.

ANNE

Ms. Ali, would you go over who's doing what, when? If we're not back by the time you've finished that, you can close the meeting.

RAHIMA

Okay.

(ANNE and RACHEL walk over and enter the principal's office.)

ANNE

What's up?

KAREN

One of our parents has called the superintendent to complain about Anti-racism and Pride Week.

RACHEL

What?

ANNE

What's the problem?

KAREN

He doesn't want the topic of homophobia discussed in school.

RACHEL

Why?

KAREN

He says *(looks at the notes she made)* talking about homophobia is a vehicle to promote homosexuality. And *(embarrassed)* he says that homosexuality is not a normal lifestyle.

ANNE

Did you tell the superintendent that our workshops are about creating safe schools, not promoting homosexuality?

KAREN

Yes. And I reminded him of the Board's equity policy.

ANNE

And?

KAREN

He told the parent that he should attend our next School Council meeting and raise his concern there.

RACHEL

But Anti-Racism and Pride Week begins on the Monday after Spring Break. When's the next School Council meeting?

KAREN

Tuesday of that week.

ANNE

Is Anti-racism and Pride Week in jeopardy?

KAREN

I don't know.

ANNE

We've all worked so hard. The work is so important. If any of the activities are cancelled, the kids will be very upset.

RACHEL

Only one call. One call from one parent. In a school of almost 1,200 students.

KAREN

What we don't know is how many other concerned parents might show up at the meeting. We'll just have to wait and see.

RACHEL

What about the stuff we planned for Monday and Tuesday? Before the School Council meeting?

ANNE

I think it would be good to go ahead with what we've planned. If there's a lot of pressure to cancel the anti-homophobia workshops, at least we'll have done a little work.

RACHEL

Most of the anti-homophobia stuff is planned for Wednesday and Thursday. T.E.A.C.H. doesn't come until Thursday. *(Pause)* I can't believe this is happening.

ANNE

(Puts her arm around RACHEL's shoulder) Don't worry. We'll help the kids prepare a response to the concerns that might be raised. It will be a lesson in struggle. Our kids will learn we can't take our human rights for granted.

Scene 14 The School Council meeting.

AMY

(Looks at her watch) It's almost 8:00. It'll start in a few minutes. Sara, thanks again for coming.

SARA

(Puts her hand on Amy's arm) My pleasure. I'm happy to support you. Where's John?

AMY

He's standing at the back. Near the window.

SARA

Right. I see him. Hey, do you want to go out for beer after we're done? Just one, it's a school night.

AMY

I'd love to.

SARA

Great.

AMY

(Tentative) There's something I want to talk to you about.

SARA

We'll catch up.

KAREN

(Looks at her watch) Good evening everyone. It's now 8 o'clock. Let's begin. There are several items on tonight's agenda. We're going to begin with a discussion on Anti-Racism and Pride Week so that those of you who are here for this particular discussion can leave as soon as it's done. *(Takes a deep breath)* Two of our faculty, Rachel Davis and Anne James, have prepared a list of the activities taking place this week at Pierre Elliot Trudeau. That list is being circulated. Ms. Davis has also copied the Board's Equity Foundation Statement for you to read.

All of our activities this week are an attempt to implement the Board's equity policy. (*Pauses.*) The floor is open for questions and comments.

PARENT 1

I am a parent with two kids in this school. I don't want my kids learning about homosexuality from gay and lesbian guest speakers who have been invited to the school to share their coming-out stories. Our church teaches that homosexuality is wrong. We do not believe it's a normal lifestyle. It is not the school's place to contradict what we teach our children at home.

PARENT 2

Even if you don't believe in the gay lifestyle, and you feel that this is against your religion and not a good thing and against God, don't you think it's helpful that the school opens the topic so that you can teach what you believe to your child? It's hard to talk about this. So when our kids come home with questions, it opens the dialogue. Even if you are against (*makes imaginary quotation marks with her hands*) "the lifestyle," don't you think it still needs to be addressed?

PARENT 1

Not by the school.

ANNE

My church also taught me that to be gay or lesbian was wrong. And I brought that with me because I don't stop being Christian when I walk into the building. So I have had to work really hard coming to terms with what I've been taught. Because I know that in my classroom, at my school, I have to be there for all my students. I have to affirm who they are and that includes kids of gay and lesbian families and kids who may be gay or lesbian themselves. I know what it's like not be affirmed at school. I want my students' school experience to be different.

PARENT 3

I agree that we shouldn't throw stones. But I don't believe that we should be using taxpayers' money for promoting homosexuality either. It's up to parents to teach their children about sexuality, according to their own set of moral values.

PARENT 1

I agree.

RACHEL

It's not appropriate that values only be taught at home. There are social values, community values. When teachers allow one student to hurl the word "faggot" at another and don't address the issue, I think it's unconscionable. What message does the student get? The student gets the message that it's okay to verbally as-

sault gay people. If it weren't, then the teacher would step in. And what happens when the student who was called a "faggot" suspects they're gay and needs to talk to someone about it. He thinks I can't let anyone know. They'll think there's something wrong with me. Because when I was called a "faggot" last year, they thought it was okay.

HELEN

My brother Jeffrey used to be a student at this school. And when he was in Grade 9, he was called a "faggot" almost every day. When he finally told me what was going on, I tried to help him. But there wasn't anything that I could do on my own. Jeffrey finally got so depressed that he refused to go to school. That's when my parents decided to transfer him to another school.

RAHIMA

What Helen has just said is very important. We need to stop the name-calling that goes on in our school. Many of the events that have been planned for Anti-Racism and Pride Week have been designed to help us do that.

CHRIS

Homophobia is not only about name-calling. It's also about being beat up.

ROBERTO

In addition to the issue of gay bashing, there's the issue of suicide. The amount of suicides and attempted suicides by gay, lesbian, and questioning youth is alarming. Thirty percent of all youth suicides are undertaken by gay and lesbian youth. Because our society is saying it's not okay to be gay, kids think that *they* aren't okay. So what do they do? They try to kill themselves. We are not taking good care of our kids.

SARA

When I was growing up, nobody ever gave me any sense that it was okay to be who I was, a lesbian, or that there were support, resources for me, anything. I want to help the students I teach to grow up knowing, grow up feeling it's okay and not to feel so isolated. At some churches they believe that there is God in every person and those people include queer people, too.

PARENT 1

That's fine for people who attend those churches, but not for me. All I am asking is that the school respect my religious beliefs by not bringing any discussion of homosexuality into my children's classroom.

RACHEL

If you want the school to respect your religious beliefs, then you need to respect the stance we take about teaching about tolerance for others.

(All three student teachers and the students from the GSA and STAR applaud. Some of the students whistle.)

(To Anne) I can't believe I said tolerance.

ANNE

Whatever gets the job done.

CHRIS

As a school, I think we have do to more than teach about tolerance. I don't want to be tolerated. I want to be respected for who I am. A gay teenager.

PARENT 2

We live in a world where the person in the next cubicle to you at work could be gay. You don't have to believe in what they do or what they think or say, but you do have to be able to work with them.

(There is a pause in the discussion.)

KAREN

(Looks at her watch) Well, it's getting late. Can we move on to other business? Or are there other comments or questions?

PARENT 1

I have a comment. I call on you, as principal of this school, to prohibit any further discussion of homosexuality during the school day.

PARENT 3

Or at least require permission slips for students to attend the sessions on homosexuality.

RACHEL

(Angry) If you want us to send home permission slips to talk about gay and lesbian lives, do you want us to also send home slips to talk about African-Canadian lives or Chinese lives or women's lives? I really have a problem with that, I really do.

ANNE

Your point's well taken. At the same time, as the members of STAR, Students and Teachers Against Racism, will tell you, we still have a long way to go before we can say the school curriculum does a good job of affirming all our students' lives.

KAREN

Well, there's been a lot of food for thought shared here tonight. I want to think carefully about what everyone has said tonight. I also want to undertake an in-depth assessment of what students have learned from this year's Anti-racism and Pride Week before making any decisions about its future. I'll report the results of the assessment at our next School Council meeting.

PARENT 1

Well, you can be sure my kids won't be attending any of the gay activities.

KAREN

Thank you all for your participation in this discussion. We're going to move on, now, to the next item of business, the Government's Community Service requirement.

END OF PERFORMED ETHNOGRAPHY

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