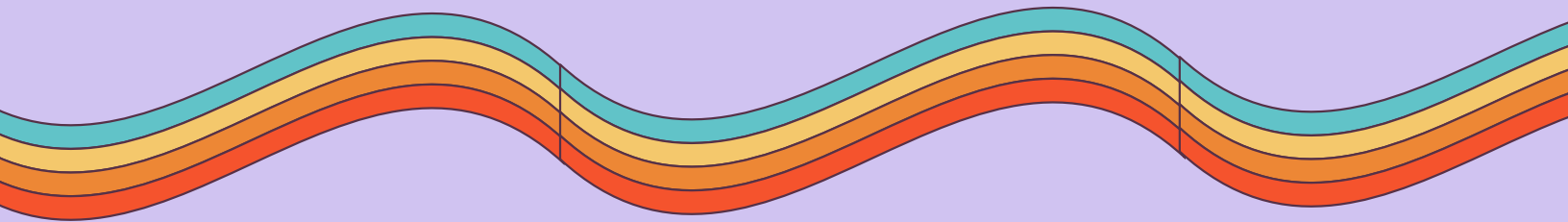


A Month of Queer Thriving

20 ways to queer your classroom



A resource for teachers

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Hello!

Welcome to your month of queer thriving!

My name is Tristan and I'm a high school teacher in Ontario. This resource is the culmination of my research for my Master of Education degree at Queen's University. It's designed to take some of the guesswork out of finding innovative ways of engaging students while employing queer and trans pedagogical practices. I hope you'll use it to foster queer thriving via your teaching practice in concrete, practical, but perhaps unexpected ways.

"What do you mean by queer thriving?"

The principles behind queer thriving are about acknowledging that 2SLGBTQIA+ people have and do experience marginalization, but that's not the whole story. Queer thriving is radically hopeful, recognizes the joys that come with being queer, and imagines possibilities beyond the mainstream narrative of harassment, sadness, and death. It's important to note that queer thriving isn't something that's achieved—it's an aim that we're always working toward. But it's not only for queer and trans people! Fostering queer thriving in your classroom and in your teaching is good for all students. 2SLGBTQIA+ content in class is always a wonderful addition, but I'm more interested in giving you ways of thinking about your teaching practice and amping it up for students who aren't always first on our minds.



“What am I going to find in this resource?”

The resource starts with some guiding questions (the “Getting Queerious” section) so you can reflect on your teaching and we can have a little chat about what you’re afraid of doing, and what you’re already doing that’s great! The bulk of the resource is a set of twenty cards to give you suggestions for ways to foster queer thriving via your teaching practice, for the day or week. If you use a card every day, it’ll take you a month to get through the deck. If you draw one a week, it’ll take you about a semester to try every card. The choice is yours! One side of the card has the activity (“Today, let’s try...”), and the flipside has the rationale or some extra information or suggestions. The cards aren’t arranged in any particular order and should be chosen at random. After you’ve used all the cards, I invite you to reflect on how it all went down in the “Let’s Have a (Debrief) Kiki” section.

“What if I don’t want to use one of the cards?”

You know your class better than I do, and you know your school. Some of these cards may not be feasible for you at this time. It’s also important to think about the physical and emotional needs of your students. No one should feel uncomfortable when you implement suggestions from these cards, and no one should feel unsafe in any way. I know that some teachers may be judged more harshly for disrupting the status quo. This resource asks a lot of you, the teacher. Some of this may be outside your comfort zone, but I’d love it if you gave it a try. Performance and creativity play into a lot of the suggestions, which may not be your strong suit. Just remember: teaching is performance! You’re already doing it!

“What should I expect when I use the cards?”

Don't have any particular students in mind as you go. You might have students in your class who are already “out” as queer or trans, but there may be others who haven't made any public declarations. Other students may not be queer or trans but can still thrive with some of the suggestions on the cards. As I said before, this resource is for everybody. Different students will have different reactions to this, and they're all perfectly acceptable. Don't try and guess how things will play out, and don't worry too much if things don't go “according to plan.”

“Who are you?”

My name is Tristan (he/him) and I'm a queer high school teacher in Ontario. My teachable subjects are English, Drama, and History. As a new teacher, I've had trouble being bold enough to work against what's “expected” of teachers. These cards are as much for me as they are for you (but ultimately, they're for our students).

I've had a lot of privilege my whole life. I'm a white cisgender man, and I've been financially stable most of my life. I didn't have a lot of opportunities to connect to the queer community growing up, and I still struggle with that disconnect. My experiences aren't unique in the queer and trans community, but they aren't emblematic either.

“How do I get in touch with you?”

I would love to hear about your experiences with your month of queer thriving! You can connect with me on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/lewistristan.



Glossary

“What the heck does that mean?”

Word	Definition
2SLGBTQIA+	Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual. This is my current preferred acronym for the queer and trans umbrella.
Drag	A gender-bending performance popular in the queer community. The costumes and performances are often over the top and frequently involve music. RuPaul's Drag Race is a reality TV show that has brought drag into the mainstream.
Reading	A practice in queer culture where a person notices something about you (usually a flaw) and points it out in a clever way. This is usually done between friends and can be interpreted as constructive criticism. It differs in this way from “shade,” which is meant to insult, demean, or belittle.

Queer	Both an umbrella term for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and an identity in itself, generally referring to someone non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender.
Queerness	A much more nebulous term than “queer.” This definition goes back to the idea of queer meaning “different” or “weird.” While queer and trans people may engage in queerness, it’s not reserved exclusively for them. Anyone acting outside the norm is engaging in queerness at that particular moment.
Queer Thriving	A way of acknowledging that 2SLGBTQIA+ people experience marginalization but are not exclusively defined by this marginalization. Queer thriving takes a hopeful tone, recognizes the joys that come with being queer, and imagines possibilities beyond the mainstream narrative of harassment, sadness, and death. Queer thriving isn’t a thing you do or something that is; it’s something you foster, nurture, and build towards. Queer thriving is not an absence of homo- and transphobia but a flourishing despite these prejudices.
Trans(gender)	An identity referring to someone whose gender does not align with their sex assigned at birth. This can include non-binary and genderfluid people. A trans identity is not confined to “assigned male/female at birth, and now identifies as a woman/man.” Someone whose gender is aligned with their sex assigned at birth is “cisgender.”

GETTING QUEERIOUS



Before you start using the cards, think about the questions below. How are you helping or hindering queer thriving in your classroom already?

How involved are you with queer and trans communities?

"Not at all" is an acceptable answer!

What is your top priority when teaching?

What do you want students to take away?

What is your classroom management style?

Boo authoritarianism!

How do you convey authority in the classroom?

Respect goes both ways!



What are the established routines in your classroom?

Do your routines ever vary?

What are the current dynamics between you and your students?

Get to know your students better!

What external factors, if any, may make it difficult to implement a program of queer thriving?

Do your students get along well?

What are your hesitations surrounding new ways of teaching, particularly teaching for/about queer and trans people?

Don't rely on stereotypes!



What messaging from your school, if any, has made you nervous to engage with queer and trans issues in your class?

Look for allies!

What is your awareness of conversations surrounding queer and trans issues in education?

Consider the local, regional, and national.

What external factors, if any, may make it difficult to implement a program of queer thriving?

What is the community where you teach like?

What are your hesitations surrounding new ways of teaching, particularly teaching for/about queer and trans people?

Be brave!

Today, let's try...

referring to anyone who isn't a student *and* who isn't in the room using "they/them" pronouns.

Today, let's try...

incorporating technology into a lesson or relaxing rules around cell phones for the class.

Today, let's try...

asking a student to explain something you know nothing about, like a TikTok trend, TV show, or phone app.

Today, let's try...

encouraging students to boo, hiss, or heckle you for making mistakes. Mess up on purpose!

This is an easy way to introduce familiarity with gender-neutral pronouns without putting anyone in the class on the spot.

Let students learn what works best for them, and find unique ways to make technology a learning tool in your class!

Give a student the opportunity to show how much they know about something that's not obviously relevant to their academics.

Following "drag pedagogy," form a connection with your heckler—the student—against the outside world.

Today, let's try...

looking online to see what "(inter)national day" it is (e.g., National Cat Lady Day or World Tuna Day).

Many occasions marked in schools are religious holidays. These holidays are important and shouldn't be ignored, but they're not for everyone.

Today, let's try...

allowing students to form their own groups—of any size—for an activity.

This can create a safer environment and bring an element of fun to the lesson. Although students may "slack off" with their friends, there's often motivation to do good work together.

Today, let's try...

ignoring the seating plan, including the requirement to sit on chairs. Let students get creative (while staying safe!).

Loosening where students can sit is a great way to rebel against a school structure that isn't very welcoming of difference.

Today, let's try...

letting students demonstrate their learning in any format—poem, word, song, skit, dance—whatever they like!

All students benefit from arts and performance, but it's good to give options for those with different talents and interests.

Today, let's try...

initiating a "call and response" routine (e.g., "When I say BEDMAS, you clap twice").

This exercise highlights the performer/audience dynamic of teaching. Let students get excited about something mundane!

Today, let's try...

asking students to teach you an up-and-coming slang word and using it during class (without making fun of it).

A lot of slang comes from queer and trans people of colour, and incorporating this language in class is affirming for everyone who uses it.

Today, let's try...

taking attendance out of order. Ask a question of the day, and have students respond to show they're present.

It's great if students volunteer to speak so the order isn't determined by you, but make sure you don't miss anyone!

Today, let's try...

lying down on the floor (or doing something else unexpected) during a break in the class.

Show students that the unexpected is welcome in your class by modelling it yourself. Get weird!

Today, let's try...

responding positively when a student sasses you in class. Thank them and tell them something they're right about.

If a student says they hate an activity, thank them for the feedback and work to include something they find interesting.

Today, let's try...

changing the "vibe" of the classroom by altering the layout, lighting, sound, or space (e.g., go outside!).

Switching up the space can be a refreshing change of pace, and some students may work better in this different environment.

Today, let's try...

treating the classroom like a runway while passing out papers. Be big, be bold, be dramatic!

It's important to let students engage in play, and a great way to do this is to model our own playfulness. It's okay to be silly sometimes!

Today, let's try...

cheering when a student gives an answer, right or wrong. Whoop like they just scored a touchdown!

We should be celebrating students' successes *and* failures. Get everyone hyped to learn and participate!

Today, let's try...

finding a creative way to check understanding of yesterday's teaching (e.g., review vocab by playing charades!)

Today, let's try...

gently correcting a student who repeats a gender stereotype (e.g., "boys are X" or "girls like Y").

Today, let's try...

reacting to something "out of the ordinary" as if it is totally normal.

Today, let's try...

asking student volunteers to put on a small performance about yesterday's class.

Engaging different learners is possible by reimagining how we teach (and learn) previous material.

Back up your point with an example. This is an easy way to lead into what "boy-ness" and "girl-ness" really are.

Queerness is all about welcoming the unexpected!

This is a fun way to see what stuck out to students and to have them flex their creative muscles at the beginning of class.

LET'S HAVE A (DEBRIEF) KIKI

Reflection time! Now that you've used all the cards, how do you feel about things?

How have the routines and dynamics of your classroom changed since you began using the cards?

What have you noticed?

How has your relationship with your students changed since you began using the cards?

Do they ask for things they didn't before?

Which card/activity was your favourite? Which got the best response from students?

The best isn't necessarily the loudest.

What explicit feedback have you gotten from your students—positive or negative? How has this feedback influenced you?

Some of the cards can feel pretty weird!





Are there any activities you repeated without prompting from the cards?

How did it go the second time?

Which cards, if any, did you skip? What made you pass over these cards? Could they have been adapted in some way?

Some cards are a "not right now" suggestion.

What do you feel is missing from the cards?

Twenty cards isn't a lot!

What conversations have you had with school staff or administrators since you began using the cards?

Are you getting support or resistance?



References

I have adapted the work of many queer education scholars into a number of suggestions on these cards and have learned so much from them throughout this process. Queer thriving itself comes from Adam J. Greteman (2018). All the performance elements in the cards are inspired by drag pedagogy, coined by Harper B. Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess (2020). Culturally sustaining pedagogies—found in the cards about incorporating student interests and letting students “read” the teacher—are inspired by Tadashi Dozono (2023). Disrupting ideas of gender and welcoming the unexpected in a classroom come from the incomparable Lee Airton (2019; 2023). Thank you to all these scholars and more!

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