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Hello, my name is Thorsten Merse. I come from the LMU Munich where I work, research and teach in English didactics and my main field of work is the application of queer theory in English didactics and consequently also in teaching English. And from this field of work and research, we can derive the title of today's lecture on "Queer Theory: Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Diversity in English Didactics".

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This leads to the following learning objectives of the lecture. First, I would like to introduce you to the different meanings of the term 'queer'. The second learning objective is getting to know the different issues that queer theory deals with in the field of sexual and gender diversity. These two learning objectives are still quite general in relation to queer theory. The third learning objective concerns the specific application of queer theory in my context of English didactics, where I would like to give you practical application examples and present possibilities of a queer perspective in the context of school education and in English lessons in particular.

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First of all, we need to narrow down and define the term 'queer' so that we know what we are dealing with when we work on queer theory or with queer theory. The term 'queer' has a colourful linguistic history which becomes particularly apparent when we look at the Oxford English Dictionary which documents the meanings of words from a historical linguistic point of view. Since the 16th century it has been documented in the English-speaking world that the word 'queer' has predominantly or strongly negative meanings as an adjective and as a verb. These include, I have gathered a few words here, odd, strange, peculiar, bad, unreliable, worthy of hate, dubious, of questionable character, or as verbs, to swindle, to cheat, to confuse someone.

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And here you can already see very well that the word 'queer' has predominantly negative meanings from a historical linguistic perspective, which can be conceptually narrowed from the 20th century onwards, or from the turn of the 19th century to the 20th century, to the context of non-normative sexualities and genders. All of a sudden, the word 'queer' is used colloquially as a strongly derogatory and insulting term against gays, lesbians and transgender people. And here we see basically a continuation of the negative meaning of the verb or even the adjective, but now used as an insult against gays, lesbians and transgender people. The researcher Jagose for example says: "Once the term 'queer' was, at best, slang for homosexual, and now it is, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse". And what becomes quite evident is that 'queer' also denotes a discursive practice through which those who use the word 'queer' as a label against gays, lesbians and transgender people always also call to mind the norm. The norm that you generally must be heterosexual and clearly male or female.

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It is particularly interesting what happens in the 80s and 90s. The term 'queer' is suddenly used in political activism, initially especially in the USA, for example in the gay rights movement or in AIDS activism, which is beautifully reflected in the slogan "We're here, we're queer, get used to it!". And the interesting thing here is that the word 'queer' is undergoing

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a provocative conceptual change which can also be described by the term 'reclaiming', where the negative insult as an external label now becomes a positive and affirmative self-designation which LGBTIQ* people now claim for themselves. LGBTIQ* stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex and Queer, Questioning, with the asterisk leaving the possibility for all non-normative identities. And 'queer' is now used as a positive self-designation, a drastic change in terminology. And from this so-called "queer moment", as Hark calls it, the term 'queer' makes a career, as a self-chosen identity designation, as a collective term for political interventions, and as an academic theoretical term. At this point, we have to become aware once again that queer theory as a combination of terms definitely has something provocative about it because the negative connotations of the term still resonate when we speak of queer theory.

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The researcher Kraß sums it up as follows, which also serves as a summary of the definition of 'queer' at this point: "The fact that queer studies", here I am quoting Kraß, "which have been firmly established in the United States for a decade and a half, are still finding it difficult to gain a foothold at German universities has not least to do with the fact that the English term queer hardly rings any bells for anyone in this country". Hence the definition of the term we have already done here. "It means something like 'strange, odd or weird'. And in order to understand the provocative impulse of queer studies, but also the rejection they are sometimes still met with, one has to translate the term tentatively into German." And this is where it gets interesting: "Andersrum-Studien" would be a possible translation. However, this term is difficult to get across in the German academic world. It is often not understood, because the term needs explanation, perhaps even puts itself on the sidelines because of the provocative tone. And what Kraß therefore tries to do is to transfer the term 'queer' into German via the issues or concerns of queer studies or queer theory. And following this impulse of Andreas Kraß, in the next part of this lecture I would like to define and narrow down the concerns of queer theory in more detail.

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However, this proves to be quite difficult. If you look at the popular introductory texts on queer theory, the first thing you always come across is the statement that 'queer' is difficult to define. Jagose speaks of a "resistance to definition" and Hall and Jagose, in a later publication, state that 'queer' only reveals its field of application with great difficulty. On the one hand, this might be due to the fact that 'queer' has a colourful conceptual past or conceptual history and thus there is no one meaning. On the other hand, it might also be because the labeling or clear shaming or insulting of sexual identities has led to discrimination over decades and thus 'queer' does not want to be homogenised or confined at all. This can potentially be frustrating when I deal with queer theory for the first time and want to know what I can do with queer theory as a researcher.

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However, reframing this positively, it is also possible to follow Edelman and see 'queer' as a "zone of possibilities" or to speak with Jagose's words as a "mobile field" where you can apply 'queer' in very different contexts for very different purposes.

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Nevertheless, the concerns of queer theory can be narrowed down to different areas which I would like to present in the following.

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On the one hand, queer theory is concerned with achieving visibility and recognition of sexual and gender diversity. In research, this is also referred to as a "determined push for visibility", which is also intended to soften and expand cultural homogeneity with regard to the diversity of possible sexual and gender identities. Queer theory thus very courageously and unambiguously opposes the exclusion, marginalisation or discrimination of LGBTIQ identities, always in light of heterosexual and binary male-female dominance. It is about considering these forms of identity as identities in their own right, not merely as deviant. And this impulse came very early on in the 90s through de Lauretis, whose founding text, as it is often called, on queer theory already considers precisely that.

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'Queer' has developed into a very inclusive concept of difference over the last two or three decades. Hall calls it a "catch-all phrase" that theoretically encompasses all non-normative sexual and gender identities. The danger, however, and Giffney points this out, is that 'queer' degenerates into a so-called "meaningless melange", if the diversity of sexual and gender identities turns invisible again in one big umbrella term. And at this point the important impulse is to remain sensitive and open to possible sexual and gender identities, as fluid and indeterminable as they may sometimes be.

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At the same time, and from my perspective that is especially important for teaching, there are limits to the representability of all theoretically conceivable and constantly changing sexual and gender identities, because I cannot represent all theoretically conceivable identities in the limited amount of time and with the limited resources available to me in the classroom. Thus, I always need an exemplary focus and always have to check which form of identity I can bring into the class and connect to the topic of the lesson. And so at best we can achieve what Lütge and I derived from our research as an asymptotic approximation. This comes from the mathematical discussion of curves, where line and function only ever approximate each other, but never become completely congruent. A complete representation is therefore not possible.

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The second concern that can be extracted from queer theory can be well described as the critical examination of normality. In addition to making non-normative sexual and gender identities visible, where 'queer' is often used synonymously with LGBTIQ, queer theory is also always about questioning and raising awareness of normative and seemingly natural classification systems of body, gender and sexuality.

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And here one can refer to the important text by Warner from 1993, where he says, "The preference of 'queer' represents ... a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal". And here it becomes very clear that 'queer' is always about questioning or even unmasking the seemingly normal.

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Accordingly, queer theory is particularly concerned with the effects of natural normality, privileges, inequality, discrimination or exclusion that a heteronormative social system implies. This also yields one of the main terms or the main concept of queer theory, the so-called heteronormativity. I have brought a definition from various sources for you, according to which heteronormativity refers to an individual thought pattern that is anchored in people's minds, but also to a social regulatory principle that only allows heterosexuality and a clear male-female gender division to appear as normal, natural and privileged, while everything so-called 'other' is hierarchically degraded or excluded, which does not correspond to the logic of heteronormativity. The researcher Judith Butler uses the term "heterosexual matrix" for this, which refers to a socio-cultural system in which clearly defined male or female bodies have a clearly defined feminine or masculine gender, which are then in turn related to each other in heterosexual desire.

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And here we can go through some thought experiments to explain or represent the concept of heteronormativity. Just think about how often men or women are asked if they have a girlfriend for men or a husband for women, which basically always reflects the basic assumption that people feel heterosexual. And another good example can often be found in advertising for sweets, where sweets are eaten in families and often the caring mother presents the sweets to the family and the family then rejoices harmoniously over the sweets. And here we can reflect on the models or ideas of family, of love, of family roles, which are often heteronormative, but at the same time so natural that they almost become invisible and have to be made visible before they can be criticised.

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In the following, I would like to mirror the queer theoretical concerns to the context of English teaching and school. And I would like to start by explaining why English lessons, or more generally speaking school is an important place to work with queer perspectives. First of all, English class in its theorisation is always also a place of confrontation with the diversity of English-speaking cultures and also always a place where one is supposed to learn how to deal with language sensitively. And this is particularly relevant from a queer perspective because sexual and gender diversity is also part of the diversity of English-speaking cultures, we will see some examples towards the end which illustrate that. And it is also about how language is used, for example, to talk about LGBTIQ identities or to discuss the experience of exclusion, discrimination and inequality in a heteronormative system.

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In a somewhat broader sense, school always has the potential to explicitly address social structures, to encourage learners to engage with diversity in general and also to stimulate processes of reflection and awareness in order to ultimately open up new perspectives on the world, as König aptly summarises. It is particularly important to be aware of what learning actually means. Learning never means merely confirming what the learners already know from their everyday lives, for example, but always enabling learners to encounter new, perhaps somewhat unusual content.

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What am I doing in English classes, in English didactics, from a queer perspective as a queer-

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oriented researcher? I have brought along three exemplary fields of work from English didactics. One important point is to look at the curricula and the schoolbook or textbooks that are used as the main medium in English lessons. This is so important because textbooks are the main medium and often the most important source of entry into English-speaking cultures for the students. Curricula, on the other hand, are an important regulatory instrument for school content and determine what is discussed and covered, but also what is not discussed and not covered, and often that happens implicitly and tacitly. Furthermore, I am interested in the question which texts I can work with in English classes to get students in touch with sexual and gender diversity and heteronormativity. And as a third example of application: how to formulate tasks for lessons. And here I will present the example of a photo rally for critical work with the concept of heteronormativity.

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Let's focus on curricula and textbooks. Research has shown that curricula and school framework guidelines are potentially heterosexual constructed types of text that implicitly assume and anticipate a heteronormative world and at the same time do not address things such as LGBTIQ* identities. I will share an example in a moment that softens this assumption a bit. But this is one of the basic assumptions from a queer perspective, that an invisibility is created in the curricula. This invisibility of LGBTIQ* topics and identities also continues in textbooks and schoolbooks, which is not surprising, because if the curricula do not bring such topics into play, the textbooks naturally do not depict them either. This is where the basic conceptual assumption in research states that textbooks and schoolbooks also transport a heteronormative worldview and thus make LGBTIQ* topics and identities invisible. And here you could do a little thought experiment and ask yourself the question: Which textbooks and schoolbooks do you remember? And to what extent did these textbooks and schoolbooks depict, for example, LGBTIQ* issues and identities?

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So, from a queer perspective, I ask myself at which points heteronormativity is reproduced in curricula and textbooks and at which points sexual and gender diversity is indeed inscribed in English lessons. And here I brought an example from a curriculum in Lower Saxony for secondary level 1, where the diversity of sexual identities has to be addressed in English lessons alongside a whole range of other topics since 2015. And this is actually a novelty in the German curriculum landscape for English lessons, because for the first time sexual identities have to be dealt with in lessons, in English lessons, starting in 2015. And if something is firmly anchored in the curriculum, it is then also reflected or it must then also be reflected in the lessons.

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It is still the case today that textbooks are generally organised in a heteronormative way, that, for example, the families that are depicted, falling in love, dating, which is often the subject of discussion, or even ideas about the future of one's own life follow a heteronormative pattern, that, for example, the families have heterosexual parents, if there are then children in the family. However, we increasingly see exceptions, for example the textbook "Camden Town Advanced. Young People: Going Global in the Digital Age", which is used in Lower Saxony, and which includes a unit on LGBT and gender issues. And from my own work experience: I was asked by the Cornelsen publishing house to develop a thematic

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booklet for teachers on how to bring the topic of "Family and Home" into the classroom via worksheets and copy templates. And my colleague Grit Alter and I were explicitly asked whether we could also address diverse family models. It can therefore be said that there is a lot happening in the German textbook landscape to make sexual and gender diversity visible and to address it with learners.

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The next aspect as a field of work is text selection. Here, it is a challenge for teachers and researchers to identify and select suitable texts to make the spectrum of sexual and gender diversity visible in English lessons and thus to stimulate an engagement with heteronormativity and its effects. Possible text types that are typically used in English lessons are literary texts, films, non-fiction texts, pictures, autobiographical narratives, digitally available texts such as videos, and from this spectrum of possible text types I have brought an example which you are welcome to look up on the internet via the link that is provided. This is the website "We are the Youth: Sharing the Stories of LGBTQ Teenagers in the United States". In the beginning of this video, we have heard that English lessons are also always about representing the English-speaking world as diverse as possible. Here we have an example of how LGBTQ teenagers in the USA talk about their life experiences. On this website, you will see that autobiographical narratives have been gathered in the form of interviews and photographs of the teenagers, which always actually represent an honest and very profound negotiation of their own LGBTQ identity. And they, and this is the interesting thing from a queer point of view, always include a reflection on the perception of societal norms and expectations.

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I have brought some text examples from these autobiographical narratives. Blake, 17 years old, from Charlotte in North Carolina, for example says: "Being a black trans man is an especially unique experience. When you transition from any gender to another gender, that affects you. I went from a black woman to a scary black guy. My white trans guy friends say they get all these great privileges. I've had a lot of experiences where people look at you differently. It's scary."

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What becomes very clear here is the experience of being confronted with social expectations and reactions as a trans man of colour, which does not always go smoothly, which is probably why he says, "it's scary". And at the same time, we also have a reflection on the topic of privilege, who after all has privilege in society, and here it is also very interesting from an intersectional perspective that he, as a trans man of colour, is less privileged than his "white trans guy friends" and thus societal normative systems are also profoundly reflected here.

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Another example comes from Anne, 19 years old, from Omaha in Nebraska, who says about herself: "I identify as queer. I think queer is a better word, ... because I don't want to put myself in a box. Like, primarily and almost entirely I am attracted to women, but at the same point I don't want to discount the idea that someday I might meet a guy and that might be what I've been looking for. So I do think it's really limiting to fit into one little group, and I

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think queer does a nice job of encompassing everybody. And people have to ask you what you mean by "queer" and then you can make that definition your own."

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What we see here is a very engaged analysis of the problem of assigning oneself an identity label and Anne reflects about the fact that all the socially available classification grids such as gay or lesbian are unsuitable for her. She deliberately keeps her identity fluid and open. And what she finds very promising is that the word 'queer' encourages other people to ask for explanations and she can then explain her complex feelings.

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The last example comes from Qwill, 20 years old, from Northfield in Minnesota, who says the following about her gender perception: "I feel like my gender is kind of a pendulum. Sometimes I feel more feminine, sometimes I feel more masculine, but I definitely swing somewhere between the genders. I don't really have a pronoun that I prefer, so people just always use female pronouns. It's kind of complicated if I say I want people to use all the pronouns. ... I'm in choir, where choosing a gender is hard to avoid. We wear dresses and tuxes instead of choir robes and there's just a lot of gender involved, which bothers me."

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Here we also have the reflection that Qwill does not want to define her own gender, that it swings back and forth like a pendulum and thus cannot have a clear location in the binary male-female system. And what is especially interesting from a language learning point of view is the reflection on pronoun use, since for Qwill "he and she" can both be used as pronouns or "her" and "his" can both be possible, which many people who tend to think in binary terms might find confusing. Furthermore, we also see a reflection of heteronormative effects in everyday life, in engaging in a hobby where, in order to sing in a choir, a clear decision is required whether to sing on the male or female side.

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And these text examples show in exemplary form how diversity of sexual and gender identities can be brought into the classroom via available texts. But also how, and this is also inherent in these texts, a reflection on heteronormativity and the two-gender system as social principles of regulation is made possible.

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The third task for English classes or the third area of tasks for English teaching is the development of tasks, what we call 'task' in English didactics, and these tasks are supposed to have a queer focus to activate learners, to encourage reflection processes, to stimulate critical thinking, ultimately to broaden perspectives on the world.

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And here I am sharing an example of something that I carried out with my university class in which I train future English teachers. Under the slogan "Put your queer glasses on", the students went on a photo rally in Munich and were supposed to detect and reflect on existing heteronormativity in everyday life and take photos of these observations and bring them back to class.

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For example, my students photographed advertising walls and posters, photographed the

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organisation of shops or drugstores, where it became very clear to what extent the public space is organised in a binary and heteronormative way. But my students should also pay attention to whether there are moments in which heteronormative and binary patterns are imagined in an expanded way and thus are representing sexual and gender diversity as well.

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And I have brought some results of this photo rally. It was probably to be expected that in a perfume shop there is a specific department for men's fragrances and a specific department for women's fragrances and thus for the customers, the decision is really forced in which area one is allowed to shop.

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This second example are two findings from clothing shops and perfume shops, where a perfume is advertised with the message that the woman is supposed to be "delicious" when using the perfume and thus brings herself into play as a possible sexual partner for a man. But, and that is the openness of this image, perhaps also for a woman, which is not determined by the image itself. The other advertisement is much clearer, where man and woman are related to each other in their desire. And what is interesting here, in relation to heteronormative role models, is that the man takes on a more protective role and the woman rather clings to the man. My students also found it very significant that even normativity, heterosexual normality, is often depicted with this pattern.

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This example shows quite well how sexual and gender diversity becomes visible in everyday life. These are examples of job advertisements where no longer only male or female employees are sought, but gender diverse people are also addressed. And this is the last example from clothing shops, where the basic assumption is very clearly presented that one is "perfectly dressed" with suits and can thus also make the woman at one's side happy, so to speak. And the other picture, where we have more options for interpretation, because here it might as well be that the two gentlemen shown are perhaps a couple, but perhaps not, who knows, and thus perhaps something playful is depicted, where the meaning only becomes apparent in one's own mind when looking at the picture.

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After this excursion into English didactics and English teaching, I would now like to offer a conclusion and outlook that summarizes the discussed and presented contents once more. First, we have gotten to know 'queer' as a very multi-faceted term that can set more than one possible agenda and occupy more than one meaning. So this is the call to you, if you work on queer issues, to see how 'queer' can become relevant and productive for you, from which angle 'queer' can become relevant and productive for you. At the same time, 'queer' always demands an explanation. Is it used as a personal identity marker? Does it imply or stand for a connection to political activism? Or does 'queer' rather denote a theoretical field of work that you want to engage with?

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Overall, however, it can be stated that 'queer' provides a very potent perspective and impulse for thought that can take effect in various social areas, in this lecture in the context

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of school education and English lessons, but possibly also in other contexts, such as the work environment.

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Furthermore, 'queer' is a very useful term, especially in the field of education, to focus on the confirmation, affirmation and visibility of sexual and gender diversity, which in turn must always be coupled, and this is the queer impulse, to the critical examination of heteronormativity as an effective principle of social regulation, which leads to a very good theoretical twin point for all those working in the field of education, which can then define a field of work on queer issues. Especially in English teaching, a queer perspective results in a relevant and guiding principle for addressing and representing diversity, for identifying blind spots, for example in textbooks and curricula, and also for queer-oriented selection of texts and design of assignments.

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Connected to this conclusion are some further resources for your self-study. This slide contains general introductions to queer theory if you would like to familiarise yourself with the subject area of queer theory from scratch. On the next slide, I have gathered queer perspectives on school and education in particular, which basically transfer queer theory to the field of school and education with these useful resources. And last but not least, queer perspectives, especially on English didactics and on English teaching, also some more in-depth reading for you. And last but not least, the literature used in this lecture, which of course can be useful for you as well as the sources mentioned for further self-study.

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I would like to thank you for your attention, and I hope that I have been able to map out the topic of queer theory in the context of school education and English teaching in an interesting way for you.