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LGBTQ+ in Schools

Whole School Approaches to LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Schools

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LGBT+ Inclusion in Schools

INTRODUCTION

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The articles in this volume address whole school approaches to LGBT+ inclusion in schools. They all make an important contribution to the debate and facilitate the sharing of good practice. I am grateful for all contributions.

In this introduction I summarise key evidence from Stonewall's latest *School Report* (Bradlow et al, 2017), a study of over 3,700 lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) young people aged 11-19 across Britain. In addition, I suggest possible approaches for schools to consider in facilitating the inclusion of children and young people who identify as LGBT+.

The key findings from Stonewall are alarming: 45% of LGBT students are bullied for being LGBT at school; 64% of trans pupils are bullied; 86% regularly hear phrases such as '*that's so gay*' or '*you're so gay*' in school and 84% have self-harmed (Bradlow et al, 2017).

Whilst the statistics are a slight improvement on previous statistics published by Stonewall, they demonstrate that more work needs to be done to ensure that all schools can meet their statutory duties in relation to the Equality Act (2010) and human rights legislation. There is a clear need to provide teachers with further training and education during their initial teacher education programme and whilst they are in-service, to enable them to *proactively* address the needs of children and young people who identify as LGBT+.

The standard response of referring an LGBT+ young person to counselling can have a pathologising effect by placing the focus of the intervention on the individual and thus, neglecting the contribution that wider structural forces (for example, the curriculum) play in reinforcing marginalised and stigmatised identities. Bullying, harassment and discrimination can result in marginalisation and psychological distress. However, dominant discourses of bullying in the LGBT literature (Payne and Smith, 2013) emphasise suffering and portray LGBT+ young people as 'victims'. Given that multiple identities intersect, this is problematic (Formby, 2015) because one aspect of a person's identity might be wounded, whilst another aspect might be positively affirmed. It could therefore be argued that the portrayal of LGBT+ young people as *vulnerable* and in *need of protection* might be disempowering (Airton, 2013). In addition, a focus on bullying places emphasis on discrimination by peers and detracts attention away from wider structural forces which result in inequality, marginalisation

and discrimination (Formby, 2015). This includes the contribution that the school (through the learning environment, the teaching resources, the curriculum and the attitudes of staff) makes to discrimination.

Deconstructing the heteronormative culture in schools (Airton, 2013), which privileges heterosexuality, through the invisibility of non-heterosexual identities in the curriculum, the learning resources or through the silencing or self-policing of the identities of those who are LGBT+, makes it possible to examine the structural forces which result in inequality, thus moving the debate beyond the dominant discourse of bullying. Heteronormative cultures re-inscribe marginalised identities on those members of the school community who identify as LGBT+. Marginalisation can also be a consequence of micro-aggressions, resulting in individuals who identify as LGBT+ not experiencing a sense of belonging. Mental health and LGBT+ should not be automatically conflated. Indeed, the act of referring an LGBT+ person to a counsellor might *create* mental health needs, especially if this process results in feelings of being 'othered' or encourages individuals to revisit painful experiences.

School environments should be critically interrogated to examine the extent to which they promote heteronormativity (or 'compulsory heterosexuality'). This includes both the hidden and the formal curriculum. Displays around the school, in corridors and in classrooms, should demonstrate a visible commitment to diverse relationships and a zero-tolerance approach to homophobia. Stories in school libraries should reflect the plurality of relationships that exist in 21st century society. All pupils and staff need to be educated about LGBT+ and other identities (such as gender fluidity) and taught to *respect* and *celebrate* all forms of diversity. Addressing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying is essential, but it is not sufficient in itself; it is reactive and becomes a 'sticking plaster'. Instead, educating children and young people (and staff) about respect, discrimination and prejudice demonstrates a proactive response and has greater potential to change attitudes and values.

School assemblies may go some way towards addressing prejudice. However, the visibility of LGBT+ identities and issues are also critical. Embedding these into subjects such as history, art, music, English, science and so on, demonstrates a visible commitment to LGBT+ young people that they are valued and engenders a sense of belonging. The absence of LGBT+ issues in the curriculum and the invisibility of LGBT+ identities and experiences in sex and relationships education have been well documented in previous literature (Formby 2011; DePalma and Atkinson 2006; Ellis 2007).

Providing confidential and safe spaces for LGBT+ young people to meet informally is another way of facilitating a sense of belonging. The provision of gender-neutral toilets is also a simple step towards fostering a sense of belonging for children and young people who identify as trans or for those who identify as non-binary. School staff need to be supported to respond appropriately when young people ‘come out’ because responses which are intended to be sympathetic, such as ‘*don’t worry, we are all the same*’, can be interpreted as offensive as this essentially erases the LGBT+ identity. The fact is, we are all different and there is a need to recognise and value difference. Celebrating difference is critical to inclusion.

There is more work to be done. We need more research on the experiences of transgender pupils and we need data which illustrate the experiences of younger pupils who identify as LGBT+. We also need to know more about the experiences of those who identify as LGBT+ in Black and Minority Ethnic communities. Intersectional identities are complex, multi-faceted and always in a state of flux. Finally, there is a clear need for the government to reverse the financial cuts to youth services as this has resulted in the drastic shortage of youth support in communities in recent years. Without this support in the community, young people who identify as LGBT+ experience social isolation and are forced to access the virtual world for support.

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Inclusion For All- A Whole School Strategy Success Story

Shaun Dellenty

The Equality Act 2010 places statutory expectations upon **all** schools to protect students from discrimination. Such statutory expectations were not in place in November 2009, when pupil questionnaires in my own London primary uncovered 75% of Key Stage 1/2 pupils were **covertly** experiencing bullying related to LGBT+ identity; whether or not they actually identified as LGBT+. The use of the word 'gay' as a pejorative 'cuss' was widespread, even in our 'outstanding' school cited as a beacon for 'best practice' for special needs inclusion in the mainstream context. Despite our existing inclusion work, we had a problem.

As leadership our response was noticeably informed by our life experiences of relating to LGBT+ people and our collective experience of studying (and working) under Section 28, a UK law repealed in 2003 seeking to prohibit the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools. There existed residual anxiety that should we attempt to tackle the issues raised by our data, we might face reprisal from parents, OFSTED, local authority or the media. Yet we agreed that had the data presented similar statistics on race related bullying, we would not have hesitated.

I formulated another questionnaire to survey our 115 staff. It demonstrated that 0% had professional training on LGBT+ inclusion. 75% thought we had no LGBT+ pupils citing 'children are too young to know'. 55% were unsure if we should even be tackling LGBT+ bullying.

The correlation between data sets became clear; explicit training was required. I researched existing work in the primary context. It became obvious that established organisations such as Stonewall were (then) working more or less exclusively in secondary education. Other initiatives, such as the 'No Outsiders' project had resulted in negative reprisals.

Our children had sent a clear message, they were suffering. As leaders we had a duty of to care to ensure that **all** our children were safe, happy, included and successfully educated *without exception* and this meant addressing bullying relating to perceived or actual identity. Staff, parental or societal personal, political or theological prejudices could leave our children vulnerable if left covert and unchallenged.

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In response over Christmas 2009/10 I wrote a training programme 'Inclusion For All' informed by my experience as class-teacher, school leader and part time improving schools consultant. To elicit a consistent whole school approach **all** staff needed to attend the training. I requested the January INSET day and made attendance for all staff a non-negotiable.

I considered whether using the terms 'lesbian' and 'gay' in a professional context might prove challenging for some staff and this indeed proved to be the case; my initial explanations of what 'LGBT' stood for resulted in some giggling, reddening of faces and inability to use the words confidently. I spoke non-judgementally, exploring the impact of prejudice related bullying for those who might have never had experienced it, sharing my own journey of forced exit from state education due to homophobia aged 16 and nearly ending my own life as a result.

I felt vulnerable as a gay man, that I might be accused of a having a 'gay agenda' or was or attempting to 'sexualise' primary aged pupils, when clearly our **only** agenda was the safety and well-being of pupils. It became abundantly clear that some school based professionals define or judge LGBT+ people by their sex lives, as opposed to the many other multi-facets of their human being. This approach was to me at odds with the way non-LGBT+ people are defined and judged. I sensed this might be a core challenge when working with primary phase in particular, thus I was careful to explore perceptions of identity and stereotypes early on.

The initial morning of training was spent establishing rationale (including comparing our data with national data) compassionately exposing, then debunking myths and misconceptions before sharing personal testimony and identifying existing strengths. This afforded the opportunity to move into the afternoon whole school strategic vision, teaching, learning, assessment and action planning session having reached a level of equanimity towards the journey our learning community was undertaking.

Staff assessment of the initial training day was very positive, with a few delegates candidly expressing a shifts in thinking, for example that gay men only work in primary schools due to paedophile agendas, to expressing growing acceptance that the school's agenda was including all young people, staff and parents using Human Rights as an agreed framework.

Informed by delegate feedback I wrote a three year multi-layered action plan, increasing LGBT+ visibility in policies, school rules, staff, pupil and parent handbooks. The school ethos

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was collectively rewritten to highlight the school's commitment to 'celebrating difference' of all kinds. We delivered targeted assemblies and teaching (at an age appropriate level) from nursery onwards, celebrating the diversity of human relationships. If *occasionally* parents raised challenges about what the school was delivering, these were handled on a one to one basis using school ethos, our pupil data and the UN Convention of Rights for the Child to support our stance. In 2010 sexual orientation and gender reassignment became 'Protected Characteristics' in the Equality Act, galvanising our confidence in delivering (for example) a school assembly in which I fed back pupil bullying data and explored LGBT+ role models, 'outing' myself in the process to the whole school community.

Visible images and texts were sourced to represent a fuller range of human relationships. I supported teachers in planning lessons and themes for PSHE, Circle Time and Philosophy for Children, in addition to core subjects such as Maths where children looked at hate crime data. I devised a whole school 'Our Heritage' topic to start every year and an 'Overcoming Adversity' topic aimed at building empathy and resilience. The school embraced LGBT History Month and Anti-Bullying Week foci, aiming to 'thread' LGBT+ identity positively through the daily life of the school in the same manner as faith, disability, race, gender, age and heterosexual identity.

A campaign was run around word use of 'gay' significantly reducing its use as a negative term, this in turn empowering pupils, staff and parents to be more open in their own experiences of having LGBT+ identities, family and friends as a safe space opened up.

Utilising high quality training our school lifted the veil of apprehension (and prejudice) shrouding LGBT+ identity, undertaking a journey over a relatively short timescale that had the potential to make more young people safe, happy and more authentically included, with all the benefits this affords in terms of lower bullying statistics, improved attendance and pupils outcomes.

Deploying the initial data as rationale, I became pro-active in contacting key agencies in order to share the findings and the positive transformation occurring in our school. I offered Inclusion For All as a two hour or half day twilight to other local schools, requesting from the outset that the session be a non-negotiable for **all** staff at **all** levels.

The DFE and OFSTED visited the school, exploring the rationale, content and impact of Inclusion For All. Work was judged to be 'outstanding' by OFSTED, informing in part their initial training around LGBT+ inclusion for school inspectors. I presented my work at the

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National College and national anti-bullying events for Stonewall (who along with several other leading national agencies became more confident in working with primary phase as a result) and to the main teacher unions.

Inclusion For All is about organisational change. I established one 'in house' training days per term, with delegates ranging from governors, secondary colleagues, youth workers, children's home staff, therapists, local authority representatives, primary colleagues, even to House of Commons staff and celebrities.

I ran outreach in my own time, in order to reach as many different audiences as possible including human rights and hate crime organisations, the NHS and police. I was invited to write for national newspapers and academic journals and appear on television to discuss the work, appearing on children's television as part of the BBC 'Our School' series.

In 2012 a website was set up dedicated to Inclusion For All along with Twitter and Facebook profiles, not only to publicise Inclusion For All (in the absence of funding) but also to debunk myths from the outset and disseminate relevant writing and best practice.

As of 2017, I've had the privilege of personally training over 14,000 education professionals in the UK alone; training schools and lecturing at initial teacher training faculties whilst supporting leading anti-bullying, human rights, hate crime and child welfare national organisations across the country to become more LGBT+ inclusive. These range from the NSPCC, to Kidscape to Amnesty International. I've worked with all the main teacher unions and have recently assisted the NAHT with guidance for supporting LGBT staff.

I recount surviving school based bullying in primary, secondary and faith schools assemblies around the UK. I have also advised on education policy at Westminster and helped the Archbishop of Canterbury launch the Church of England's anti-LGBT bullying resource- in which Inclusion For All is recommended.

Inclusion For All reached beyond the boundary of one school, local authority or even country, evidence is available of its impact as far as Nigeria, Armenia and Australia; such is the power of celebration of good practice.

Inclusion For All has won several national awards, including the Excellence In Diversity Awards and official recognition from the 3 Faiths Forum. I was honoured for my work firstly by the Mayor of Southwark at Southwark Cathedral and then at Number 10 Downing Street by Prime Minister David Cameron in May 2016.

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In September 2017 I began working as an independent LGBT+ inclusion in education consultant. I am about to start work on a large- scale suite of work involving nearly all of the schools on the Isle of Man.

I aim to build on the legacy I have achieved in order to make all young people safe in our schools, whatever their identity.

My journey continues to bring with it many milestones and many privileges- however my sincere wish is for there to be no need for Inclusion For All's work in the first place.

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'Being 'outed' in school made me want to curl up into a ball and want to just to die.'

Exploring the experiences of transitioning transgender students

Kate Bancroft

Introduction

This paper will discuss two narratives collected as part of a qualitative study into the experiences of school-age transgender (trans*) students. This was undertaken as part of a pilot study to test my methodological approach ahead of my full data collection for my Doctoral study. The research began as a result of my experience in teaching Physical Education to a teenage student who identified as trans*. Through engaging in discussions with him about the complexity of transitioning, both medically and socially, I decided that, due to the way in which I wanted to capture the personal and human dimensions of transitioning students experiences over time, a narrative inquiry approach would help present their experiences in a way that could be best understood and embraced.

Aims and research questions

1. What are the experiences of school-age transgender children?
2. How and why are students self-presenting their experiences on YouTube?

In order to help schools and educational providers provide more inclusive pastoral and pedagogical support, this research aims to advise policy surrounding the care of school-age trans* children at both local and national level, whilst also helping further highlight the challenges they experience during their time in school.

Methodology

The doctoral research involves listening to the experiences of ten school-age students, who identify as trans*, as they discuss their transition both socially and medically via YouTube 'vlogs.' A 'vlog' is a 'record of thoughts, opinions or experiences that are filmed and published on the internet' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017). Many trans* children are publishing their narratives of their transition online order to connect with others who are going through similar experiences (Drushel 2010). Using YouTube's relevance-based search mechanism, and a criteria which the vlogs which I will not explain for this short piece, I selected two school/college age users. I analysed vlog's both users created which discussed their experiences of

transitioning. A narrative inquiry was undertaken so that the stories of their experiences could connect with others, to examine the social structures in place at their educational sites, and to make sense of the surrounding events in their lives as they transitioned. Due to the fact that the students narrating in the vlogs are under 18, I made the ethical decision to not explicitly identify the video names or URL citation in this article or my wider research. It is also important to point out that only a relatively privileged subgroup of trans* young people are able to share their experiences on YouTube. The ability to record and share a video on YouTube is dependent on all types of privilege - access to the internet (most of the vlogs are filmed in domestic settings), a device to film on, filming and editing software skills (however basic), and a private and safe space in which to film.

Queer Theory

I will be analysing the narratives of the students experiences through the lens of Queer Theory and it will provide the framework for this research. Queer theory was initially used as a humorous term (Halperin, 2003) but is now used in academia to group the research of a number of theoretical pioneers working in this subject area (Butler, 1990). Anyone can identify as queer if they question the gender roles imposed upon them. Being queer can be described as being 'at odds with with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing particular to which it necessarily refers,' (Halperin, 1995, p62). Queer theory rejects conventions or mainstream expressions of all types of behaviour, including gender and sexuality.

Historically the term 'queer' has been used an insult and an abusive word against those who identify, or were perceived, as homosexual. However, it was reclaimed around the 1990's when queer politics began to emerge and groups like Queer Nation and Act Up were formed as activist organisations who were outraged at anti-gay violence that was prevalent at the time. Queer theory relates to homosexuality operating in a fluent and expansive field (Seidman, 1995) and it acknowledges that homosexuality and heterosexuality ceases to exist when heteronormativity (the idea that there is a worldview that promotes heterosexuality as the normal and preferred sexual orientation) is challenged (Rich, 1983).

YouTube 'coming out' videos have been a recent focus within Queer Studies on the role of negative feelings associated with realising a person identifies with an LGBT identity, (Love, 2007). Butler (1993, p69) has argued that normative, heterosexual subjectivities are constituted in relation to 'a prohibition that works through delivering the threat of punishment

[which] compels the shape and direction of sexuality through the installation of fear.’ Because of this, to identify as not heterosexual and in the context of this paper cisgender, is something that society tells us is something we should be fearful of. Therefore those who identify as LGBT have often had to endure experiences of ‘insult, mockery, aggression’ (Eribon, 1994, p19) and feelings of ‘shame, self-hatred, defeatism and loneliness,’ (Love, 2007, p4). Many video users find themselves growing up in an environment where homosexuality and transgender feelings were made explicitly clear to be far from normal and thus unacceptable (Lovelock, 2017) and they use their vlogs as a way of trying to make sense of these kinds of experiences

YouTube as a source of social support

LGBT youth were once described as ‘a forgotten, invisible minority (Savin-Williams, 1990, p1). Yet 27 years later a simple YouTube search for ‘coming out’ (a metaphor for a person self-disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity) produced over 19 million results, thus arguing that this claim can be strongly contested (Lovelock, 2017). Across the world, LGBT youth are filming themselves discussing their ‘coming out’ experiences, sharing tips and advice to support others who may be finding doing so extremely tough. Where social support in schools for trans* children is often lacking, and heteronormativity in school is deemed ‘normal and anything else deviant,’ (Donelson & Rodgers, 2004, p128), trans* students have been turning to online methods of support through social media and digital technology.

The qualities that make a person’s individuality is often referred to as ‘selfhood’ (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017). After coming out, and during transition, a trans* student is not merely revealing a pre-existing gender identity but also *making* this new self through discourse (Sedgwick, 1990). A new body of research examines how the production of videos, images and written text, in and through digital media has become integral to young people’s constructions and enunciations of their sexual identities (Lovelock, 2017). The ways in which trans* youth have vlogged their experiences on this particular platform to construct, represent and make sense of their own identities remains relatively unexplored. Online communities help bring LGBT people closer together through the ways in which they help people explore their own identity. They find themselves reflecting a similar pattern of expression when offline expression is often not possible.

Two Students Stories and Discussion

Plot one: Coming to terms with my gender identity

'I never ever thought I'd be making this video. It is as scary as hell. From as far as I can remember I have always felt incorrect. I have always felt faulty. I have always felt isolated from what is 'normal.' I was verbal about this from the age of about three when I knew that there was something that was not right. My body and my mind weren't functioning the way they should be. And this was something really hard to notice as young as three but I knew that there was something that just wasn't right. I grew up as a flamboyant, interesting young boy that a lot of people were quick to assume was just a funny little gay kid. But the more I grew up and noticed other people around me I knew I wasn't functioning in the same way they were functioning and I knew that whatever was going on inside wasn't something that I could just brush under the carpet and I couldn't just carry on living life as just a flamboyant young boy. I knew it was something a lot deeper than that. I was always very verbal about this to my family but they just thought 'No this is just our little boy who happens to see the world differently and they were okay with that. But I most definitely wasn't. And the more I would grow up the more isolated, depressed, angry, sad I was becoming.'

In this story the student is sense-marking to assist in gaining insight into herself and processing experience over time (Johnstone & Dallos, 2006). Within her narrative was the plot that seemed to pertain to how she was creating her current identity in a relational form by drawing on who she used to be, by going back and reflecting on her childhood and upbringing. We see her describe herself as feeling 'incorrect' and 'faulty.' We hear her tell a story about how ashamed she was with that she was not fitting into the mainstream conventions of how a boy should behave, and how her non-normative expression of her gender was considered deviant from 'typical mainstream' boy behaviour. She spoke about her previous gender identity, before she knew any different, and how that has changed over time. Perhaps the inclusion of the narrator's' gender identity history was offered to show how the historical aspects of her life led to who she was confidently speaking at the time of filming her vlog. Filming this way helps others who may be feeling how she felt at that time 'isolated, depressed and angry' as she went onto explain how she did not feel like that anymore.

Story plot: being unwillingly 'outed' at school

'Being outed is pretty much when someone other than yourself goes and tells other people that you are trans. I would unfortunately say that about 90% of the time when people find out I am trans* it is because other people tell them, and I don't tell them. I will know someone and they will think I am a 'safe guy' and it's chilled, and then they'll come up to me later on and say 'Someone came up to me and said you were trans,' and I will just want to curl up into a little ball and die. What I have come to realise is I might as well just tell people straight away because they find out anyway 'cause someone always goes and tells them. I had an instance the other day and it was this guy and he knew that I didn't want everyone knowing I was trans*. I then saw him and his friend and he just told his friends I was trans* for no reason. And then this kid went and asked my friends if it was true, and it's like why tell someone that someone else is trans*? It's not your business to tell someone you know, it really doesn't matter. If they don't want someone to know then you shouldn't go and tell everyone. So the thing I have about this is it's never acceptable to 'out' someone. I don't want to be known as a trans* male. I just want to be known as 'male.' Or be known as a boy! My college tutors don't know I am trans* and I really want to keep it that way, but I give it another two weeks until my friend accidentally outs me. 'Cause I have one friend who I do mix with but I don't talk to him about being trans* that much. He knows I went to Tavistock¹ but he still gets my pronouns wrong, and I can just imagine the other college students overhearing and finding out I am trans* and it will just suck. It is so nice that they call me male on the he/him because that's who they think I truly am. And everyone just does that not because I told them to do it but when I get outed they just see me as someone who is trans*.'*

The desire to not be known as trans* is reflected in his story here, and that others finding out made him want to 'curl up and die.' He talks as if his needs are invisible because he is so frequently talked about, narratives of invisibility was discussed earlier in this paper. As he discusses his fear of his friend accidentally outing him in his new college it convinces the audience the extent of the fear in his emotions as he is so scared of being positioned as trans* unwillingly. In this story he is really concerned about how others will position him, as being seen as 'something other' falls in line with his preferred identity being different. He talks about his current fears in present tense, implying that is his current position as he posts his vlog online. Underneath his videos are 55 comments there are contributions from viewers offering

¹ Tavistock here refers to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust based in London who offer Gender Identity Development Services.

him advice such as relating to his experience and saying 'it does feel weird.' And that 'it sucks and I am sorry that is happened to you.' So it can be seen how allies and supporters of the LGBT community are chipping into help him and provide further support, where previously he might not have had any.

Conclusion and Implications for School Practice

LGBT vlogs, as a performative process, can be construed as an act of self-acceptance (Lovelock, 2017). This short article argues that vlogging the experiences of their transition, has become a key way in which trans* students create and express their new gender identities in the 21st-century. Where trans* children are 'vlogging' and are providing stories about overcoming particularly challenging experiences during their time at school, it assists in bringing together an emotive community which helps them make sense of their own situations, in what can be argued as a still predominantly heteronormative world. Schools must examine their own policies and practices to identify where heteronormative practices still exist in school, and YouTube vlogs and other forms of social media can be used in school training to increase practitioners understanding on experiences transgender students go through when transitioning during their school years.

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Microaggression in relation to transgender and gender diverse young people in school environments

Claire Birkenshaw

Educators are aware that schools can be intimidating and hostile places for young people for a multitude of reasons. Academically they can daunt - for example, if a young person has difficulty with reading. Socially, they can be disheartening places too, particularly if a child finds it difficult to make friends - more so if the young person is seen by others as being 'different' somehow and as such doesn't fit in or made to feel they don't belong. By and large, humans are social creatures and thrive when validated by others. If, who we are, is not validated and respected, our dignity as a human being is compromised affecting esteem, self-regard and how we see ourselves. Children and young people in their formative years are especially vulnerable, particularly if they are perceived to be 'different'.

Obviously, there are many forms of difference. Some forms of difference may be seen as minor and supported with little difficulty. Others, such as 'gender identity', are considerably much more complex, challenging our knowledge and understanding of what it means to be human in profound ways whether intellectually, morally, ethically and legally. Hence, transgender and gender diverse young people can face many difficulties in school environments, consciously or subconsciously. Therefore, in order to support this vulnerable group of young people it is important for school leaders to understand some of the key issues that affect their wellbeing.

Some of the traits displayed by young people that are noticed by the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS - the nation's specialised support service for children and young people who experience difficulties in the development of their gender identity) include social withdrawal, anxiety, low-mood, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Clearly these traits have complex origins but may be a result of social rejection as a result of stigmatisation. Dr Polly Carmichael (Director and Consultant Clinical Psychologist for GIDS) states, "We see young people who, often, are experiencing real distress." So, how does social rejection manifest itself in the first place which possibly leads to the traits observed by GIDS? I would argue that the kernel of social rejecting behaviours belongs to the concept of 'microaggression'.

What exactly is 'microaggression'? The original definition was 'brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that

communicate hostile, derogatory or racial slights'. The term has now been expanded to include other marginalised identities of which transgender and gender diverse people belong. Due in part to my position of privilege in British society I was unaware of 'microaggression' because I had not been the recipient of it. However, because of my own gender transition that locus has changed. I am now very much aware of just how it feels to be bombarded by subtle forms of communication that infers that I don't belong in society. Clearly, if 'microaggression', based on my gender identity, challenges my resilience, I am certain that younger, less resilient people will find it exhausting and debilitating potentially leading to academic failure. Therefore, it is of extreme importance that school leaders understand the form of 'microaggression' with a view to address its manifestation in education environments. How does 'microaggression' reveal itself in relation to transgender and gender diverse people?

First, it is important to recognise that our own thought processes and behaviours reflect our sub consciousness which in turn is based on patterns or stereotypes. Transgender and gender diverse people are often portrayed negatively in wider society especially through the media. Transgender and gender diverse characters in the media are often shown as being 'deceitful' because they are hiding their assigned gender at birth or they are 'attention seeking', 'flamboyant' or 'pathetic'. Media information may also lead someone to conclude that being 'trans' is just a phase or is the latest 'fad' or 'trend'. Therefore, it is distinctly possible that school leaders employ selective stereotypes of transgender and gender diverse people to inform their decision-making based on the information they have acquired.

Second, is to be mindful of the influence of our own belief system in shaping decision-making. Individual belief systems are complex, often leaning on, but not exclusive to, theological and political ideology as well as personal experience. It is the combination of these factors that leads to the formation of our 'internal moral compass'. Therefore, it is possible for some people to hold the view that transgender people and gender diverse people are sick or suffering from a mental illness needing to be 'cured' somehow. Similarly, there may be a view that being transgender or gender diverse is sinful and contrary to dogma. It is also possible that some people hold the position that transgender and gender diverse people are 'wrong' and use science to justify their views even though the weight of medical evidence indicates there is a durable biological underpinning to gender identity (Endocrine Society (September 2017)).

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Consequently, the amalgamation of these thought processes lead to an array of demonstrated behaviours giving the impression of fear, disgust and discomfort when in the presence of transgender and gender diverse people. This is exhibited through verbal and non-verbal communications. It is also communicated through the fabric of the physical environment too – a lack of display material acknowledging the existence of transgender and gender diverse people. The combination of these various forms of communication lead transgender and gender diverse people to conclude whether they are made to feel welcome, safe, cared for and accepted as to who they truly are. This ultimately dictates whether a sense of belonging is being nurtured or not. It is this deep-rooted psychological need to 'belong' that all humans require for wellbeing and growth.

In conclusion, supporting transgender and gender diverse young people is much more than having a transgender policy or acknowledging 'Transgender Day of Remembrance' or 'Transgender Day of Visibility'. It is the simple, at no financial cost, day- to-day interaction that we, as humans, do to show someone that we care and respect them - the smile, eye contact and the warmth of our expression. It is also the use of language that affirms and confirms respect and dignity for transgender and gender diverse people. Ultimately, it is the replacement of 'microaggression' with 'microacceptance' to nurture an environment in which we all feel that we 'belong'.

Claire Birkenshaw

Equality and Diversity Advocate, Former Headteacher

Why we need to be authentic in our schools

Daniel Gray, Middle leader at Harris Academy South Norwood and Co-founder of LGBTed

When training to be a teacher ten years ago, I was told emphatically that I should not tell students I'm gay because it would give them "more ammunition". Comments like this grossly underestimate our young people who, in my experience, are open-minded and accepting then their parents and many of my former colleagues. Comments like this force teachers and school leaders to let down some of our most vulnerable students by not being a visible role model they can identify with. I believe teachers should lead by example and that's why, as part of LGBT History Month in February 2017, I finally came out to over 1,000 students in assembly.

No jazz hands, no tears, no hysteria. I simply talked all about how, as a school, we were going to commemorate LGBT History Month and said, "as a gay man, I know how important it is to have positive role models that can support you and tell you it gets better".

It's very telling that this was a much bigger deal than I ever imagined. It gained worldwide news coverage, particularly on the BBC, and the response to it has been phenomenal. I have received over 800 emails and messages of support from all over the world and also from former pupils. One man actually went to the trouble to hand-write a post card, track down my work address and post it all the way from Texas purely to thank me and say how moved he was. I have since decided to use my profile to make a difference for all the young people who are like I was.

I had a horrific upbringing and a terrible time at school due to being bullied for being gay before I even knew I was. I had wet toilet roll thrown at me in the changing rooms; I had sandwiches thrown at me from the window of the school bus that I was too terrified to board and I was pushed around, kicked and punched in corridors. I was called names I didn't even understand, but I was never without a sassy comeback. My coping mechanism was to fight, to be the best and strongest person I could be, to prove them all wrong. I disrupted the status quo, I was unapologetic and I owned it. I was told by my teachers that "it's just something I have to deal with" and my school simply did not know how to deal with it. These days, with hindsight, I say I was never a victim of homophobic bullying. I was subjected to it on a daily basis, but I was never a victim. I have had the strength of character to overcome it and use it my advantage, but without positive role models, so many other vulnerable children

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are less fortunate. All young people should feel safe at school and be encouraged to be themselves.

To help enable this, LGBTed is launching imminently. This is a result of months of ground work by Hannah Jepson from Ambition School Leadership and myself. We are supported on our mission by David Weston of Teacher Development Trust, who also famously came out in 2011. LGBTed will build a network of LGBT+ teachers and leaders, empowering us to be authentic in our schools, colleges and universities, to support our students and to be an advocate for increasing LGBT+ visibility in our education system. Like WomenEd and BAMEed, LGBTed will affect real change for teachers and leaders in order to make schools more inclusive. It will use its links with universities to conduct and publish research into being 'out' at work in schools and colleges; it will support and empower colleagues to come out at all levels in education; it will improve school leaders' knowledge of LGBT+ issues in education and will improve teacher retention by allowing colleagues to be more authentic in the workplace. LGBTed speak from experience: being able to be a visible LGBT+ practitioner and witness the tangibly positive impact it has on young people is empowering, motivating and rewarding.

If there is any doubt as to why LGBT+ teachers and leaders need to be authentic in school, the statistics in Stonewall's 2017 School Report are horrifying:

Nearly half of LGB students are bullied at school, and 64% of trans students

Half of LGBT+ students hear homophobic language regularly in school

More than half of LGBT+ students feel that bullying has a negative effect on their education

61% of LGBT+ young people have self-harmed

45% of young trans people have attempted to take their own life

Half of them have succeeded.

53% of LGBT+ students say there isn't an adult at their school they feel they can talk to.

For the sake of the young people that need us, this cannot continue. By having LGBT+ teachers and leaders who are authentic in the classroom, our young people will see it is possible to be successful and happy as an LGBT+ person. They will be reassured that there are other people out there who are different and are OK with it.

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Aside from being visible role models, there is lots more that teachers and leaders can do to support our LGBT+ students. You could ask themselves these questions:

How often do you teach about LGBT+ related issues in your school?

In our school, we incorporated LGBT+ plus issues into a range of subjects for LGBT History Month and it the students found it incredibly enlightening. In Maths, they learned the heart-breaking story of Alan Turing. In MFL, they learned all about the 'secret' gay language of Polari. In Music, they learned about some of the most iconic music by LGBT+ artists before learning what they all had in common and discussing it. In Media Studies, they learned about the positive and negative representations of both sexuality and gender in music videos and were surprised by what they saw. IN geography they learned about the huge number of countries that it is simply not save to visit as an LGBT+ person, where LGBT+ people are tortured and killed simply for who they love. This was contrasted with liberal, welcoming British cities like Brighton, my beautiful home.

What is your school's punishment for homophobic bullying?

You'd be surprised how many teachers don't know this when I have asked them. Obviously, all individual cases are different but if this is not treated equally to racism, we are, again, failing young LGBT+ people down.

When have you intervened to stop or prevent homophobic bullying or homophobic language?

Homophobic language is often used casually (phrases such as "that's so gay" are still commonplace) and may be used more out of ignorance than out of malice, but is this being challenged and brought to young people's attention enough? There are thousands of other words that can be used, but they chose "gay". What is this saying to all those who are struggling to come to terms with their own sexuality?

When have you missed an opportunity to support an LGBT+ student and what could you have done differently?

This might be the student who hangs around in your doorway and doesn't quite know how to broach what they want to say to you; or this might be the student whose friends dismiss their name-calling as "banter". When teachers and leaders reflect honestly, I am told about so many examples where they feel they could have done more.

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My story is not unique. There are thousands of children who still experience what I did but suffer in silence. Some have since entered the teaching profession, like me, to right these wrongs. A small number are also openly LGBT+. I recently spoke to a teacher who is beginning his first placement as an 'out' teacher because of what I have done. This is exactly my message to my colleagues in the profession: come and join me on a big gay adventure in education and let's be the visible role models we needed when we were at school.

Follow my journey on Twitter @thatgayteacher and hashtag #LGBTed

Thank you for all contributions. If you would like to contribute an article to the next volume please e-mail me: j.glazzard@leedsbeckett.ac.uk