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Hannah Lenore Rabalais

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**The Thesis Committee for Hannah Lenore Rabalais  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

**Creating a Haven: How One Art Teacher Promotes Acceptance for  
LGBTQ Students in the Art Classroom**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

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Christina Bain

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Paul Bolin

**Creating a Haven: How One Art Teacher Promotes Acceptance for  
LGBTQ Students in the Art Classroom**

**by**

**Hannah Lenore Rabalais, B.A.**

**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

My dog, Josephine Artemesia Rabalais I, or JoJo for short, operated as my honorary editor throughout the entire process of writing this thesis. She sat on my lap, on my shoulders; at times she pressed the keyboard keys for me. JoJo embodied loyalty and support for me and this thesis is dedicated to her.

## **Acknowledgements**

*Creating a Haven* was made with crucial support from many important people. Dr. Christina Bain, my thesis chair, has been a thoughtful guide, a constant cheerleader, and has believed in me, and this project, from the first day. There is no way I could have written this thesis without her! Thank you!

Dr. Paul Bolin served as the reader for this thesis. With a gentle smile and a keen eye for APA formatting, he has encouraged me and helped make this project happen. Thank you!

My amazing classmates at The University of Texas at Austin have befriended me, calmed me, consoled me, and written with me. Thank you, ladies!

John Laycock, my wonderful fiancé, has been my rock throughout this thesis. From bringing me coffee, hugging me, proofreading, and challenging me, this man has lit up my life. I cannot wait to marry you. Thank you! I love you, Bear!

My family, even if seven hours away, has been there, giving me kind words and lifting me up. Thank you!

A special thank you to the case study site, the participants, and especially the teacher that let me into her classroom.

I would be amiss not to acknowledge coffee, without which this thesis would remain incomplete.

## **Abstract**

### **Creating a Haven: How One Art Teacher Promotes Acceptance for LGBTQ Students in the Art Classroom**

Hannah Lenore Rabalais, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Christina Bain

The purpose of this study was to investigate how one art teacher in Nevada promotes acceptance for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) students in her classroom. Through case study methodology, the researcher observed the high school classroom for five consecutive days. With a focus on pedagogy, classroom management, curriculum, and interactions in the classroom, data collected included field notes, interviews and images of the classroom. The researcher interviewed the teacher and four former students that self-identify as LGBTQ. The collected data was analyzed through in-vivo coding, descriptive coding, axially coding, and visual analysis.

The results from this study demonstrated that the teacher promoted acceptance through four strategies. The first strategy was to incorporate the work of artists that self-identify as LGBTQ to provide positive role models for students. The second strategy was to establish a rapport with students through humor. The students reported that the sarcastic banter encouraged friendship between the students and teacher. The third

strategy performed by the teacher was to treat the students as adults, with respect, on a regular basis. Offering the students respect, and accountability, gave the students a sense of ownership over the space. Lastly, the teacher promoted acceptance for LGBTQ students by promoting acceptance for every student. By creating a space where everyone was respected, from conservative Mormon students, to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and queer students. The classroom operated as a haven for all individuals, including LGBTQ students. These strategies are shared so that art teachers may have a better understandings of how to create a safe learning environment.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

Adults often describe their time in high school as “the good old days” or as a peak formative experience. For many current lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) students, however, high school is not such a friendly place. LGBTQ students might face verbal harassment from classmates and even systemic oppression from school policies that are discriminatory.

Gay Lesbian Educational Network (GLSEN, 2013) conducted a survey that reported 73% of high school students hear derogatory homophobic remarks frequently. The report also found that 49% of students had experienced an escalation of these conditions to physical harassment. It seems logical that if one were to face verbal and physical harassment in school, one would not be able to perform at one’s best, or even feel safe to attend school daily. Considering that only 43% of students surveyed had access at school to a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) for support and resources, it is not surprising that these numbers are high. If a student is concerned about harassment, verbal or physical, for his, her or hers<sup>1</sup> identity, then that student would likely not feel comfortable in an art class involving self-expression. What can we as art teachers do to create a space for all of our students to feel safe to express themselves? This thesis was written in an effort to help answer this question.

The focus of this study centers on creating a space for art students to learn and make art without needing to worry about discrimination, oppression or neglect based on sexuality and gender. In order to ascertain methods of creating such a space, I traveled to a small town outside of Las Vegas, Nevada to perform a case study with a veteran art teacher who is given the alias Mrs. Potts at a school we shall call Sunny Vale High.

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<sup>1</sup> Hirs-- a non-gendered pronoun. For more information, see Definitions of Terms on p. 10.

I observed Mrs. Potts for five sequential school days with emphasis on teacher attitude, student interactions, curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom management. During class, I took field notes on the happenings of class for further analysis. Outside of class, I interviewed Mrs. Potts three times. The first interview enabled me to get to know Mrs. Potts better, learning her teaching history and positionality. During the second interview I had an opportunity to ask Mrs. Potts about climate towards the LGBTQ community in her town, as well as in the school. The third interview operated as an opportunity to ask follow up questions about specific events that occurred in her classroom throughout the case study, and for me to ask for details about her motivations and intentions.

I also interviewed adult former students of Mrs. Potts' to inquire what their experience was like in class. The interview subjects shared their stance on homosexuality and gender nonconformity before taking her art class, and if any change occurred since that experience.

After analyzing the field observations and interviews, this research illuminates methods and strategies that art teachers can employ to create a safer space for LGBTQ youth. My hope is that this information can be shared so that more teachers can learn strategies for building a safe haven in their school and welcome every student that comes into the classroom, even those that are different than ourselves.

#### **CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION**

The following question motivated this research: how does one art teacher create a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for the LGBTQ students in her classroom through curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom management?

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

I read at least once a week in the news a story about a LGBTQ youth that is either being bullied or has committed suicide due to bullying. It brings tears to my eyes that these individuals have no place where they can feel safe, often not even their own home. These stories caused me to research how to make an art classroom a safe(r) space. If LGBTQ youth can have access to at least one accepting environment, perhaps that can make a difference in their lives. My hope is that discovering strategies that art teachers employ in creating a haven for LGBTQ youth, not only will students' academic performance in art class improve, but also their lives as well.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research utilizes a case study methodology. Merriam (2009) defines a case study as, "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). This methodology takes a single entity and examines it closely to collect data, for a specific and pre-set period of time. In this study, I traveled to Sunny Vale High School and observed one art teacher's classroom for five consecutive school days. Merriam (2014) and Stake (1995) refer to this type of research as a heuristic case study with instrumental interest. Merriam argues that heuristic studies "illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (p. 44). My aim is to illuminate the strategies that one art teacher utilized to create a safe environment for LGBTQ youth in school.

This research can also be described as an instrumental study. As Stake (1995) explains, "the use of (this) case study is to understand something else. Case study here is

instrumental to accomplishing something other than understanding this particular teacher, and we may call our inquiry instrumental case study” (p. 3). Therefore, this study is not only looking at Mrs. Potts in order to decipher her solutions, but to hopefully help my own educational career and that of others. The inductive nature of the research will use the details of this case and offer general suggestions to art teachers so that they can determine how to transfer and incorporate solutions to their own situations.

This study used several data collection strategies. For example, during observations I took extensive field notes as well as photographs of the classroom. I interviewed Mrs. Potts about her past experiences, plans for the future, her interpretation of what works in the classroom, what needs improvement, and her relationship with students, amongst other things. I interviewed adult former students of Mrs. Potts about his or her experience in the class and if or how that affected the way he or she views LGBTQ issues and/or actions.

The theoretical framework for the study was comprised of two theories. First, I used constructivist theory, which argues that students and teachers build the class together, rather than a traditional dictatorial teacher style. According to Marlowe and Page (1998), “the main proposition of constructivism is that learning means constructing, creating, inventing, and developing our own knowledge” (p. 10). Since constructivism ensures that each student is developing one’s own knowledge, it is only logical that every result would look different. Naturally, this theory is often employed in diverse classrooms as it celebrates divergence.

Second, this thesis employed understandings from queer theory. In Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003), she contends, "...queer theory, as a deconstructive strategy, aims to denaturalize heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them" (p. 81). The aim of this study is to discover how Mrs. Potts naturalizes traits that reach beyond heteronormativity in her classroom. Art projects, classroom policies, conversations between her and students, and conversations of students with each other were studied to find examples of queer theory in practice. Wilkins (2004) impresses the importance of this naturalization when she says, "Gender stereotypes cause real, profound, and pervasive social suffering and hardship. It's no less real because we don't always see the issue" (p. 153). School policies, social norms and regional customs are often entrenched with influences of heterosexism and the gender binary. Taking a significant other of the same sex to the school dance is often banned. Something as simple as going to the restroom, or changing in the locker room after a physical exercise class can be a difficult task if you identify outside of the gender binary. Despite the tendency to not think of school dances or gendered bathrooms as forms of discrimination does not change the fact that people have been discriminated against because of them. The intent of this study is to determine and describe methods of removing discriminatory situations in the art classroom.



## **MOTIVATIONS OF STUDY**

### **Personal Motivations**

I was raised a conservative, Republican Catholic and, as such, frowned upon the idea of homosexuality and any variance from traditional gender roles. I believed that queer people became confused and acted on a choice out of that confusion. I believed that if I could love them enough, and share my faith with them in the right way, that eventually they would figure out that they could find happiness in my idea of sexuality and gender. I considered it my responsibility as a Christian to love them and convert them. It was always very easy for me to love the different people in my life. It was the converting part that became a challenge.

As I matured and went to art school I became immersed in cultures very different than the one with which I was accustomed. Slowly, my mind, and what it accepted as normal and acceptable, widened. In my sophomore year I grew closer to a friend we will call “Spencer” that went to my church. Although he at times had sexual inclinations towards males, we were both Catholic and were adamant that homosexuality was not an option if he wanted to remain Catholic and accepted by his family and friends at school. With great determination, Spencer decided he would be heterosexual. It seemed natural that if he were to date a female, that he pick his best friend: me. Ignoring every blatant warning sign, we started a romantic relationship.

I watched Spencer deny his thoughts, desires, and identity for two months, trying so hard to be what other people wanted. Spencer was a theatre major in school, but also was playing a character in his real life. I became an actor, too. I believed that if I could be

an ideal girlfriend, he would have fully realized romantic feelings for me. My beliefs about sexuality and gender roles began to shift during our relationship. I let go of what I thought sexuality and gender roles had to be and saw Spencer for who he was as a gay man; as my friend. Spencer and I ended our performance with a bow for our audience. He and I realized that the person he needed to be was his authentic self. He left town and discovered his true sexuality. The end of the relationship caused heartache, but also a change in my faith and long held opinions regarding same-sex love and gender. After my experience with Spencer, I no longer aimed to convert non-heteronormative individuals to my beliefs. I sought to make the world a place where people like Spencer did not feel the need to create a new identity to live his life.

### **Professional Motivations**

A professor that I know once described the field of art education as a triangle. Each apex carries a different possible focus for the teacher: society, student, or subject.

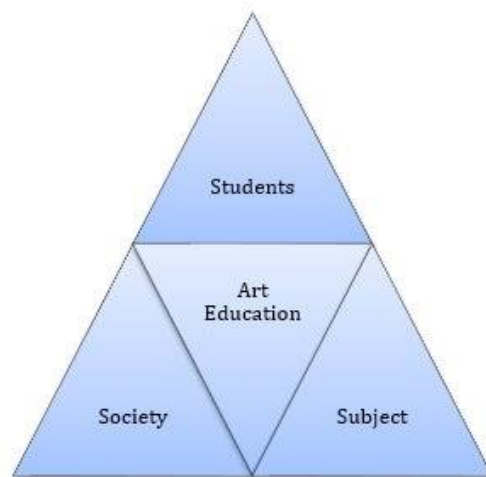


Figure 1: Art Education Foci Triangle

Although at times I may travel slightly, I typically land in the student-focused section. I am passionate about ensuring that each student feels safe, valued, respected, and capable in my learning environment. It is very difficult to concentrate on learning an impasto technique in painting when one is consumed with personal issues, like fear of being disowned by family members or concerned about bullying, as these are important and time-consuming issues.

It would be entirely unrealistic to assume that all students that I will ever teach will be the same ethnicity, from the same culture, with the same sexual orientation and gender identity. As an educator, I am compelled to make my classroom a safe haven for every student, not just those look, think, and act like me. A multitude of work has been done recently about reaching students of minority ethnicities as well as students with a lower socio-economic status. However, I have noticed a lack in publications about accommodating students in the LGBTQ community. The subject remains controversial and is often neglected by conservative schools, publishers and in many homes. Nonetheless, the fact remains that we as teachers will be educating LGBTQ youth whether or not the principals, editors or parents recognize it at this time. It is our duty to be prepared in that capacity. My goal is to help prepare art educators to create a safe place for all their students, specifically those within the LGBTQ community.

## **LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

This research examined just one slice of the issues LGBTQ individuals face within art education. I looked at the high school art classes of a teacher we will call Mrs. Potts<sup>2</sup> at a school we will call Sunny Vale High School. Mrs. Potts mainly teaches photography and glasswork. I observed her classes for one week, focusing on examining pedagogy, curriculum, physical environment and classroom management. Although Mrs. Potts likely made countless modifications for students with various needs, I looked specifically at the self-identified LGBTQ students' needs and accommodations.

The analysis was based on my field notes, artifacts from Mrs. Potts' classroom, photographs of the physical space, and interviews with her and interviews with four of her former students. Her former students shared their perspective of LGBTQ individuals before the art class, the experience of the art class, and the after effects of the art class. Due to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population.

## **SIGNIFICANCE TO THE FIELD**

This research deciphers realistic and feasible actions that one art educator performed to make a significant difference in the lives of her students. I contend that not only will students that identify as LGBTQ be positively affected by this type of support, but also the students that align with heteronormative sexuality and gender roles. The heteronormative students would receive an example of what a respectful and open person

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the participants in this study, as well as the location. More information on this is given Chapter Three.

looks like, and may model themselves in such a manner. With a better understanding of how to promote acceptance for LGBTQ students, I believe that teachers can create safer places for all students to create and feel capable of becoming creative individuals.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Acceptance:** In this thesis, acceptance refers the state of being welcomed and valued.

Acceptance is not mere social tolerance.

**Ally:** “A person who supports and honors sexual and gender diversity, challenges biased remark and behaviors, and who openly explores one’s own biases” (DeWitt, 2012. p. 137).

**Asexual:** “Having no sex or sex organs. In usage, it may refer to a person who is not sexually active, or sexually attracted to other people” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 137).

**Bisexual:** “A person that is attracted emotionally, romantically and relationally to both men and women, though not necessarily simultaneously. A bisexual person may not be attracted equally to both genders” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 137).

**Case Study:** “An in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2014, p. 40).

**Cisgender:** An individual assigned one sex and gender at birth and continues to identify as that sex and gender.

**Cisgenderism:** The assumption that everyone is cisgender and fits within the gender binary of male and female.

**Gay:** “A man or woman who is attracted emotionally, romantically and relationally to members of the same sex” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 139). This term is more commonly used to refer to men.

**Gender:** “The social construction of masculinity and femininity in a specific culture. It involves gender assignment, gender roles, gender attribution, gender expression, and gender identity” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 137).

**Hir/Hirs:** Gender neutral pronouns that equate to him and his or her and hers, respectively.

**Lesbian:** “A woman who is attracted emotionally, romantically and relationally to members of the same sex” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 141).

**LGBT:** An acronym that stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender. This acronym was a term used fairly early on in academia and faded in roughly the 1990s to be regularly replaced by LGBTQ.

**LGBTQ:** An acronym that stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer/Questioning. Initially the last letter stood for queer, a term here encompassing all thoughts and actions outside of heteronormativity. In the late 2000s there was a shift to have the 'Q' represent the word questioning. This labeled the individuals currently living a straight lifestyle but having thoughts and considerations that are outside the heterosexual norm.

**Haven:** A space that possesses or inspires physical and emotional safety.

**Heteronormative or cisgender:** “Social, familial, and legal rules that prefer conformity to hegemonic and heterosexuality standards for identity” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 142).

**Heterosexism:** The assumption that everyone is a heterosexual and that heterosexual relationships are natural, normal and worthy of support (Vaccaro, August & Kennedy, 2012, p. 9).

**Heterosexual:** An individual who experiences romantic and sexual attractions to members of the sex opposite to themselves.

**Intersex:** “Intersex, replacing the term hermaphrodite, refers to people born with sex characteristics that do not fit the standard of male or female sex categories” (DeWitt, 2012, 143).

**Queer:** “A formerly derogative term that has been reclaimed in a positive way that can include transgender, intersex, gay, lesbian, and questioning individuals” (DeWitt, 2012, 147).

**Safety:** In this thesis, safety refers not only to physical safety (i.e., not threatened with violent bullying), but also to emotional safety (i.e., not concerned with loss of friends or family support because of sexual orientation). When a student is physically and emotionally safe, he or she is able to focus on learning.

**Transgender:** “An umbrella term that includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers or otherwise gender non-conforming” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 149).

**Ze:** A gender neutral pronoun that equates to he or she.

## CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study as a whole. I offered my central research question and how it addresses a problem in art education. Additionally, this

chapter described my inspiration and motivations for studying LGBTQ issues in art education. The methodology is an interpretative case study that is bound by five days in the field. I explained the limitations of this study, as well as the possible benefits of the study to the field of art education. This chapter concluded with a list of terms and defines them based on leading authors' contributions.

In Chapter 2, I provided a congregation of literary works that enlightened and informed this research. It is divided into the following sections: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, constructivist theory, queer theory, queer culture in schools, and LGBTQ issues in art education.

Chapter 3 detailed the definition, design, and implementation of the methodology of this study. This chapter gave a contextual overview of the case study. It examined the town, school, students and teacher. This context helps readers understand the data presented and interpretations made in later chapters. Finally, it explained the process of data collection and data analysis.

Chapter 4 included a return visit to the central research question. It presented the data collected and illustrates the results. The themes and subthemes that emerged within the data were highlighted.

Chapter 5 interpreted the data collected, and gave meaning to the results. The chapter also provided the significance to the field of art education. Next, the chapter offered possible related research projects for future art educators. It concluded with a personal connection established in the study.



## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

I consider it entirely unrealistic to assume that all students that we will ever teach will be the same ethnicity, from the same culture, or with the same sexual orientation. It is vital that we make our classrooms a safe haven for every student, not just those similar to ourselves. Understandably, a multitude of work has been done recently about reaching students of minority ethnicities and students with a lower socio-economic status (Bennett, 2010; Gorski, 2013). However, despite the aforementioned research, I claim there is an underrepresentation of information for accommodating students in the LGBTQ community. Gender and sexuality remains controversial and is often neglected or even censored by conservative schools, publishers, and in many homes. The fact remains though that we as teachers will be educating LGBTQ youth whether or not the principals, editors, or parents wish to acknowledge this fact. It is our duty to be prepared to teach sensitive subject matter to a diverse student population.

What follows is a selective review of relevant works by authors writing in support of embracing all students and their rights. Research varies from overarching theory drawn from constructivist theory and queer theory, to how these frameworks play out in classrooms. First, I explore the underpinnings of the topic through reviewing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and its relation to constructivist theory. Second, I examine basic concepts of queer theory with influences of postmodernism and how it connects to my study. Third, I will examine queer culture in schools, describing daily life of LGBTQ

students in the public school system. Finally, I discuss LGBTQ issues in the art classroom, explaining how art education specifically addresses LGBTQ issues.

### MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

When considering student needs, educators often refer to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs from Maslow’s (1943) work, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (See Figure 2).

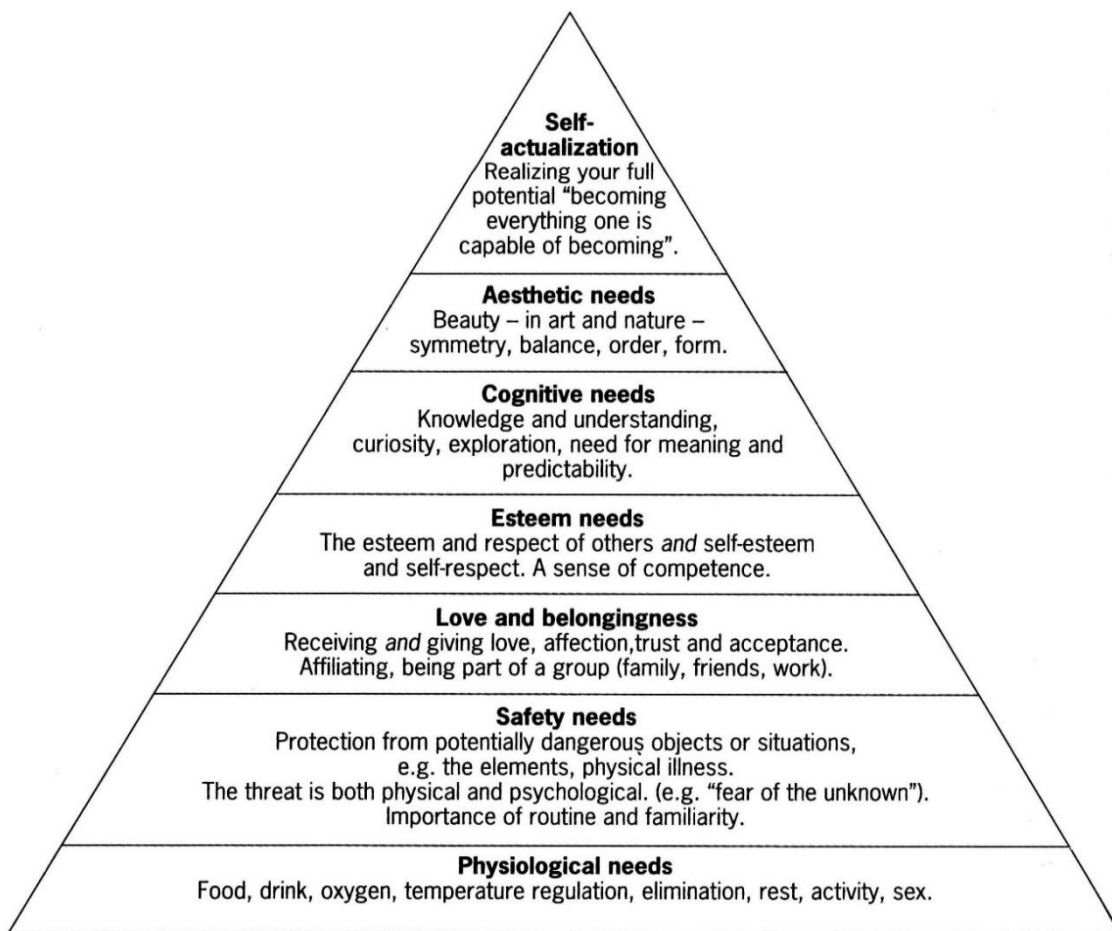


Figure 2: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. From “Gale Encyclopedia of Nursing and Allied Health” Ed. By B. Narins, 2013.

Maslow places the most basic and essential needs for survival at the bottom of the pyramid. Each level up lists progressively less tangible needs. For students to learn well, levels one and two are basic needs. Ideally, students would be on level five in the classroom, however, in most situations that only remains the ideal. When a student is hungry, cold, afraid of bullies, or thinks the teacher is harboring a vendetta against him/her/hir it is significantly harder to absorb information. During a recent workshop at The University of Texas at Austin, a presenter drew Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs on a dry erase board. Ze (for information about gender neutral pronouns, please refer to the list of defined terms in Chapter One) had the audience co-construct a list of ways that discrimination occurs towards LGBTQ persons. The list included gendered bathrooms in any public facility, insurance policies that do not account for long-term same-sex partners in spousal benefits, inability for same sex couples to marry in many states, verbal attacks, and even physical violence. Next, the presenter had the audience name which type of need was being denied by each discriminatory act. We were shocked at how many of the items denied basic survival needs or safety and security. Our eyes were opened to the awareness that simply living for LGBTQ individuals is often the goal, much less self-actualization. The presenter claimed that living every day in the bottom level is traumatic and can cause serious damage (McGabe, Rubinson, Dragowski, & Elizalde-Utnick, 2013). Due to this trauma it is tragic, but perhaps not surprising, that schools are reporting disproportionately high absentee rates and high suicide rates for LGBTQ students (Gay Lesbian Educational Network, 2013). How can we expect to challenge students on higher levels when they may still be concerned with basic needs? While

certainly Maslow's levels may intersect and may not be sequential and linear, it is only logical that we, as educators in the school system, can and should help fulfill student needs so that more learning can happen. The next section explains how constructivist theorists use this hierarchy to design curriculum and space that encourages student success.

### **CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY**

Constructivist theory is a buzzword in the education field. In my undergraduate career, all of my classmates and I had no actual idea of what it meant, but we knew that if we used it a sentence during class we would get an approving nod from the instructor. Contextual clues allowed me to decipher that it was useful in teaching, important to people I respected, and a relatively new concept. A few years later I swallowed my pride and actually researched the definition of the term. What is this theory?

Constructivist theory is a theory explaining how people learn that at its core states that learning means building, developing, inventing, and creating our own knowledge (Marlowe & Page, 1998). In the constructivist viewpoint, consuming knowledge, like reading a book or hearing a presentation, does not equate to learning. Learning happens when we integrate the new knowledge with our own prior knowledge and past experiences to create meaning. Marlowe and Page (1998) explain in their book, *Creating and Sustaining the Constructivist Classroom*,

Each of us constructs our own meaning and learning about issues, problems, and topics. Because none of us has had exactly the same experiences as any other person, our understandings, our interpretations, and our schemata of any concept cannot be exactly the same as anyone else's. Our prior experiences, knowledge, and learning affect how we interpret and experience new events; our

interpretations, in turn, affect construction of our knowledge structures and define our new learning. (p. 23)

Since each student learns by processing information differently, it makes sense that students learn at different rates and more efficiently with different approaches. Some learners might grasp material better when there is a visual, while some work better when they are doing an activity that is physical. I have noticed in my own learning that I learn more quickly through narratives. When learning math in my younger years, I experienced challenges with the subject. It was hard for me to understand how to solve the problem because I first needed to understand why there was a problem or why it needed to be solved. For me, there was no motivation to solve the problem since I was not connecting to the content and I frequently gave a wrong answer. Later, math classes incorporated word problems featuring a real life scenario. I almost always answered correctly, because I was used to solving problems in my day-to-day life. I had prior experiences and knowledge to link to the word problem. Currently, there are times in my real life where scenarios arise, such as splitting the check several ways at dinner and calculating a tip, where I can calmly remember math skills from the word problems.

Therefore, a constructivist approach using word problems met my desire to make real life connections so that I could succeed. The math curriculum utilized a variety of learning styles, such as visual learning and learning through narratives so that I was able participate. Gabler and Schroeder (2003) agree when they argue,

If you make efforts to relate your subject to your student's world, if you create a safe environment in which positive affect and self-esteem can thrive, any of your students will rediscover in learning the joy that they once knew in kindergarten and first grade. (p. 13)

Once the needs of students are met, a love of learning, that may have disappeared or never existed, is free to emerge. When the teacher attempts to connect the material to the student and his/her/hir interests the student is likely to become motivated to co-construct the supportive environment and meaningful learning (Gabler & Schroeder, 2013).

### **QUEER THEORY**

The term “queer” is one with a contentious and controversial past (Sullivan, 2003). Due to this past many people avoid the term altogether, even now. Before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, queer has been used as a terrible slur against individuals that fit outside the gender “norms.” As such, it has been used in hatred and often to incite violence (Wilchins, 2014). In the last twenty-seven years or so, the term queer was reclaimed by the LGBTQ community and takes on a positive connotation (Meyer, 2007). It is now common for individuals to self-identify as queer (Wilchins, 2014). In regards to its use in this thesis, the word queer shall only be used with positive connotations and used as an umbrella term to refer to any individual that identifies as LGBTQ.

In Sullivan’s *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003), she contends, “...queer theory, as a deconstructive strategy, aims to denaturalize heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them” (p. 81). Queer theory opposes the established norms of a heterosexist and often homophobic society. American culture has placed heterosexual and cisgender individuals in the mainstream for so long that we view these identities as “normal” and any other identity as “other.” This attitude may manifest itself in many ways ranging from blatant to subtle. A

blatant example can be the actions of organizations such as Focus on the Family that warn parents of the dangers of homosexuality for their children, proclaiming that anyone who ascribes to a gay or lesbian identity will go to hell. A more subtle way of perpetuating heteronormative ideals is asking a female friend if she has a special man in her life, rather than inquiring about a special person. Queer theory aims to point out how these current norms are exclusive of many identities and to advocate naturalizing new norms and customs to be more inclusive of sexual and gender minorities.

Rejecting the notion that one is born with an innate one of two natural genders, queer theorists argue that gender is a socially constructed concept. Butler (1993), a leader in the queer and gender studies field, explains in her work *Body Matters: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"*

The constructed character of sexuality has been invoked to counter the claim that sexuality has a natural and normative shape and movement, that is, one which approximates the normative phantasm of a compulsory heterosexuality. The efforts to denaturalize sexuality and gender have taken as their main enemy those normative frameworks of compulsory heterosexuality that operate through the naturalization and reification of heterosexist norms. (p. 93)

The “normative frameworks” that Butler names as enemy are prevalent in our school system. Many schools today do still not allow students to escort a person of the same-sex to school dances. If they are allowed, it is rarely considered an expression of a legitimate relationship. For my friends in a high school, if a male student is to bring a male date, they are typically either teased or taken as a joke. I have heard accounts of two females that arrived at a dance together, and were assumed to have no luck finding a male date or that they were perceived as overtly sexual and the topic of scandal. Another

example of normative framework lies within the gendered sports teams within the athletic departments of our schools. Students identifying outside of the gender binary often have nowhere to go to pursue sportsmanship. Even if an exception is made, or the student is misgendered and assigned a team, the locker rooms are sure to prove a challenging environment. Queer theorists, like Butler, view these customs as a socially constructed tradition rather than a natural, inevitable reality. Therefore, this social construct is not anymore correct than any other construct and can be replaced with another construct. The difficulty in social constructs is that we often hardly notice they are in place. As children, we begin to receive instructions from our families and our teachers what behaviors are desired and expected. We are told that girls play with dolls and not vehicles. We are reminded that boys should not cry. It is ignored, or condoned, if a boy plays roughly but it is deemed unfit and troublesome if a girl commits similar actions. Every day of our lives we learn through social interactions how we are “supposed to” behave.

Theorist Meyer (2007) urges educators to examine how schools reinforce heterosexism in her chapter, “But I’m Not Gay”,

This disruption and open discussion of previously taboo issues can be a very difficult one for teachers to navigate. A liberatory and queer pedagogy empowers educators to explore traditionally silenced discourses and create spaces for students to examine and challenge the hierarchy of binary identities that is created and supported by schools, such as jock-nerd, sciences-arts, male-female, white-black, rich-poor, and gay-straight. In order to move past this, teachers must learn to see schooling as a place to question, explore and seek alternative explanations rather than a place where knowledge means certainty, authority, and stability. (p. 27)

In an anti-oppressive pedagogical model such as this, the teacher and students work together to analyze and examine material and situations. Together, the textbooks for art



history can be looked at to see which artists are included within the text, and why this is so. How many of the artists are white males? Are any of them lesbians? Are any of them transgender? Such invisibility of marginalized societies cannot be ignored in the classroom, if we expect students to treat each other with respect. With the guidance of a teacher influenced by queer theory, students can become capable of interpreting and critically evaluating situations and stand up for inequality.

### **QUEER CULTURE IN SCHOOLS**

When I began my research, and people would ask about my topic, they were typically surprised when I described the topic. Some of the people were surprised because they were certain that every art classroom is a haven for diversity. Others were surprised that I had selected such a controversial topic. The disparity between reactions alone is a confirmation for me that this topic needs more research. It is apparent that after we graduate from high school we start to forget what it was like when we were students. If we were perceived as a cisgender straight person, then we might not have ever realized what it was like to be a student facing discrimination. With such a lack of awareness we do not realize the severity of problems students can experience.

The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) website (<http://www.glsen.org/>) is a wonderful resource for information on this topic. The website has a multitude of studies available for inquirers to gain an accurate view of what it is like in schools for a gay or lesbian student. One particular study that GLSEN sponsored and conducted, *The 2013 National School Climate Survey*, examined student perceptions in public middle and high schools. According to GLSEN, their sample consisted of “a

total of 7,898 students between the ages of 13 and 21 who were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and from 2,770 unique school districts” (p. xvi). Students were interviewed about words that they hear every day, and acts of discrimination that they witness. The study examines general safety of the students and how they view the climate of their school. The answers are reported in percentages and charts to allow the viewer to see the magnitude of the results. Sadly, “more than half of LGBT students (55.5%) reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation,” while “38.7% of students felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender” (p. 12). A self-identified gender queer student in the study confessed, “I have to take gym, and I don’t feel safe in the locker rooms. I know people will stare at me no matter which locker room I am in” (p.12). Due to the unsafe feelings experienced by the students in this study, the students showed signs of withdrawal in participation in their school activities and even avoided certain areas of the school campus altogether. Students avoided the bathrooms and gym for fear of danger or discomfort. Nearly one third of students (30.3%) reported missing an entire day of school because they feared lack of safety or comfort because of sexual identity or gender expression. An alarming amount of students (68.1%) avoided community organizations and events at school ranging from extra-curricular clubs and athletics to school dances, due to lack of acceptance by the school and its population. The study (2013) infers a problem within schools when it concludes, “These high rates of avoiding school activities indicate that LGBT students may be discouraged from participating in these important aspects of school communities” (p. 13).

One way students feel unwelcome involves the language being used in schools by other students and even faculty. GLSEN's study asked students about what type of biased vernacular is used and how often they hear offensive terms and phrases. A large number (64.5%) of students heard homophobic and transphobic slurs often. More horrifying yet, over half (53.4%) of students heard these remarks from teachers or other school staff. My initial reaction was to wonder how this has not been reported and resolved. One student reported, "Students use gay slurs all the time, and no one does anything about it. I talked to the counselor about the issue, and she shrugged it off" (p. 16). Is it any wonder students feel the need to avoid after-school activities? The students were unable to identify any allies to report to in these situations. There are times, unfortunately, when the discrimination goes beyond slurs and becomes more targeted: "Almost three quarters of LGBT students (74.1%) had been verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation; over a quarter (27.2%) experienced this harassment often to frequently" (p. 22). These students are targeted and bullied by students in the halls and insulted in front of their peers, simultaneously "outing" them to anyone who was unaware of that person's sexual and gender identity. Even more common in verbal discrimination was relational aggression, which GLSEN (2013) defines as "being purposefully excluded by peers and being the target of mean rumors or lies" (p. 24). A shocking majority of students (87.7%) had experienced this type of aggression. Often with relational aggression the abuse does not end when you leave the school campus. About half of the students in the study (49.0%) had experienced virtual harassment, commonly referred to as cyberbullying. Such social media as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, as well as emails, texts, and messages

offer bullies a less confrontational way to express their anger for the victim's identity and expression. While this should never happen, it often gets worse with physical abuse accompanying the verbal accost. Nearly a third (32.6%) of students had been physically attacked at school during the last academic year. One student in the study (2013) recounts, "I have been so hurt at that school I have gotten beat up, almost killed, and no one there would do anything about it, except one teacher" (p. 25). Who will stand up for our students? One teacher is not enough. Our students deserve a safe environment protected not only by every faculty member, but also every student, working together to create a positive learning environment. Fortunately, GLSEN offers resources to assist in transforming schools and classrooms into havens.

GLSEN's website contains an entire section dedicated to tips, articles, and programs specifically for schoolteachers. GLSEN promotes events that schools can participate in such as, Day of Silence, which raises awareness for derogatory terms used against LGBTQ individuals. Teachers are also able to join a network of educators that act as allies and advocates for equality. GLSEN mails resources to teachers and schools that commit to be allies. Other resources include advocacy materials for LGBTQ individuals, literature on current events, and statistics from research conducted by the organization.

DeWitt's book *Dignity for All* (2012) offers a litany of ways discrimination is affecting LGBTQ high school students, impressing on readers the importance of imminent action. The first two chapters paint the picture of what struggles LGBTQ youth face, including both physical and verbal abuse, increased risk of substance abuse, and increased risk for suicide. Though DeWitt's research is slightly older and less thorough

than GLSEN's (2013) study, it is useful to note that the issues and realities presented by the climate survey are pervasive and by no means new.

DeWitt (2012) illuminates the role of teacher and school in respect to the development to youth that identify as LGBTQ. *Dignity for All* offers strategies on how to incorporate LGBTQ awareness into the curriculum, such as inviting guest speakers in classes and studying LGBTQ key figures. DeWitt also recommends actions for principals, librarians, counselors, students, and parents for a school-wide transformation of acceptance for all students.

*Dignity for All* has been informative to this study in terms of seeing parallels with what an inclusive space is like in theory and seeing it in reality through the case study site. DeWitt's (2012) suggestions also surpass the GLSEN website in some areas, such as advice for Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs. DeWitt's writing would be beneficial for school administrators starting a shift in school climate to become more accepting of all students.

*Safe Spaces: Making Schools and Communities Welcoming to LGBT Youth* by Vaccaro, August, and Kennedy (2012) has a similar positive and encouraging perspective as *Dignity for All*. The main message in this text is how to be an ally. The authors explain the basics of being an ally, claiming that allies are people, and also that the term ally is an action word. They argue that,

In its simplest terms, allies are individuals (noun) who act (verb) on behalf of the LGBT community. They take sides. Allies interpret social settings and media messages differently from those whose vantage points are dictated by heteronormative attitudes or assumptions about gender binaries. They recognize veiled discriminations where others see only business as usual. (p. 47)

This definition poses a challenge to allies. Being an ally is not something comfortable, or something you do once to get a certificate. Being an ally is a consistent commitment to advocate equality for LGBTQ folks, even if that means facing discrimination yourself. In high school I allied myself with a gay male friend of mine. Since we spent a good deal of time together and often went as each other's "dates" to dances or parties, I earned the nickname of fag hag. Even though I identified as cisgender and as heterosexual, I violated social norms by association and was verbally punished by other students.

*Safe Spaces* (Vaccaro, August, and Kennedy, 2012) gives an additional definition of ally that goes one step further. The text considers an ally to be a "heterosexual person or non-transgender person who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexual privilege in themselves and others out of self-interest and a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people" (p. 48). Allies standing up to others is a commonly known trait, but looking for bias and privilege within oneself is a rare habit since it is so difficult. As allies, it is our duty to reflect within ourselves and work through our biases in order to lead by example.

How do we do all this? *Safe Spaces* (Vaccaro, August, and Kennedy, 2012) offers several steps or traits of being an ally, naming them Ally Indicators. These traits are:

- 1) Good Listener
- 2) Be Vocal
- 3) Gains and Shares Knowledge
- 4) Challenges Systemic Oppression (pp.56-62)

The first indicator is being a confidant who cares about the stories of LGBT people and listens without judgment, offering unconditional support. All conversations with a confidant are kept private. I feel that, unfortunately, most educators stop at this stage and never move on to stage two. Moving on from this stage can be very challenging as being outspoken can often lead to a similar, if milder, form of discrimination that an LGBTQ identified individual would experience. For educators that are committed to deepening and extending their allyship it might prove beneficial to coordinate with the school counselor for support.

Ally indicator two is where the rubber hits the road, so to speak, and acting in this way can cause negative side effects. Stage two allies confront oppression in day-to-day life. If an inappropriate joke is told, not only does the ally not laugh, but they will also explain to the joke teller why it is offensive and hurtful. Allies also reject derogatory terms and slurs about LGBTQ individuals that are often glossed over. In this stage, allies also participate in pro-LGBTQ activities, such as pride parades, without concern of what others may think. An ally in this stage also challenges those who assume that everyone is cisgender and heterosexual. The last key attribute of stage two allies is that they respond to oppression with grace. They do not use threats, sarcasm, or react over-defensively. Stage two seems fairly difficult to conquer, but stage three takes it up another notch. Ally indicator three involves educating oneself and others. Allies can be involved in education by consuming media made by or for LGBTQ individuals like books, magazines, film, music, and Internet venues. Local cultural events like parades, National Coming Out Day,

or Day of Silence can prove to be educational experiences and are easy to share with others.

Stage three allies are reflective people that assess strengths and places of growth in themselves. Allies in this stage would not only be attending LGBTQ or ally workshops, but they also may be facilitating them. They lead by example, and also encourage others to become allies.

The last Ally Indicator is to challenge oppressive systems, such as rules and policies in order to promote atmospheres of respect for LGBTQ folk. Challenging systems can be done by petitioning, protesting, and writing letters for positive legislation. Stage four allies also help train those in their place of business, community, or home to become allies.

These stages of being an ally are not always sequential, perhaps being reordered in some journeys. The stages may also overlap. Stage four allies are also performing attributes of stages one through three. Although the actions required for allyship may appear daunting, it is important to remember that any efforts are better than none. Within *Safe Spaces* (Vaccaro, August, & Kennedy, 2012), a student shares his view of allies and says,

I think allies play a role in letting the heterosexual society know that it's okay to support an issue, you know? It's okay to stand up for something that you believe in and rights for people in general. I think allies serve a huge purpose. I don't think the queer movement would be anywhere near as strong or as powerful without allies. (p. 64)



This is important information for teachers because we can act as allies at school. The authors recommend identifying three specific habits to adopt in daily life for a start so as not to be overwhelmed. The teacher would then decipher what kind of support is necessary from other allies, a counselor, and LGBTQ individuals in order to meet those goals.

### **LGBTQ REALITIES IN THE ART CLASSROOM**

At the National Art Education Association conference there is a session which has become a tradition conducted by LGBTQ educators called Big Gay Church. It is a place of reverence, yet also of humor, where educators gather to refocus, discuss issues in the classroom, shared experiences, and an activity. Occasionally, the attendees parade around the conference center to spread awareness of the group's intentions. Rhoades, Davenport, Wolfgang, Cosier, & Sanders (2013) collaborated to produce the article "Big Gay Church: Sermons to and for an Underserved Population in Art Education Settings". The authors explain the goals of the tradition,

By acknowledging, inserting, and celebrating LGBTQ contributions, we also have interrupted the "church" of NAEA's National Convention. Big Gay Church (BGC) has inhabited seeming contradictions—"gay" and "church"—within a traditional academic conference as an intentionally disruptive pedagogy, deploying established academic tactics like richly referenced PowerPoint presentations of LGBTQ contributions to religion and culture. BGC has contested anti-LGBTQ discourses— educationally, culturally, socioeconomically, and across faith communities. Embracing and enacting queer subjectivities in terms of fluid sexual, religious, academic, performative identities, we have challenged the status quo of exclusionary discourses on behalf of all underserved populations—reaching out to build community and create change. (p. 5)

Despite the progress America has made over the last several decades, the LGBTQ community of both students as educators remains underserved in terms of representation, equal treatment, and safety (Rhoades, Davenport, Wolfgang, Cosier, & Sanders, 2013).

Sexual minorities in high school often face bullying, invisibility in the curriculum, and discrimination. In response, Lampela (1995) calls upon all art educators to develop and cultivate empathy in her article on LGBTQ issues in education. In “A Challenge for Art Education: Including Lesbians and Gays”, Lampela (1995) makes a plea to her readers to be active in promoting acceptance for their students. Her challenge contains two tasks: to make the classroom fully inclusive and welcoming to LGBTQ students, and to also include self-identified LGBTQ artists within the curriculum. In order to meet this challenge, Lampela advocates the following four teacher ally steps. Firstly, the educator models respectful behavior by stopping any negative terminology or discrimination as it happens. The second teacher ally step is to accept responsibility for change. Lampela argues that ending oppression is the responsibility of the non-oppressed group. The third teacher ally step is to learn the history, culture, struggles, and triumphs of the oppressed population. The last teacher ally step is for the educator to be aware of the primary forms of discrimination perpetuated on the students. Following these instructions, teachers will create a safer place for their students. Lampela’s four guiding points served as a comparison guide for this case study site. For my planned observations of Mrs. Potts’ classes, I kept in mind Lampela’s recommendations for classrooms and made notes about the ways in which the site matched or did not match the steps in Lampela’s article.

Lampela (2007) adds to further suggestions for the art classroom in a later work, “Including Lesbians and Gays in Art Curricula: The Art of Jeanne Mammen”. Lampela insists that lesbian and gay artists be represented in the art classroom so that each student can have the opportunity to have a creative role model that also shares their sexual and gender identity. Lampela uses watercolorist Jeanne Mammen as an example in her article, “Including Lesbians and Gays in Art Curricula: The Art of Jeanne Mammen”.

Mammen’s scenes portray lesbian couples performing everyday activities that help viewers realize that same-sex couples are similar to heterosexual couples. For example, the images pictured in the article focus on lesbian couples dancing at parties in a casual and joyful manner. Typically, lesbian couples are portrayed as over-sexualized and performing for the attention of men. If we, as viewers, only see one perspective repeatedly every day, we begin to believe that is the only, or the true, perspective.

Including successful artists that identify as gay or lesbian offers alternative realistic and positive role models for students. The discussion of lesbian and gay artists can also assist in reforming the negative ideas students may have about people different than they are.

Lampela (2007) says, “In an LGBT-balanced curriculum, students would be introduced to positive portrayals of lesbians and gays to counteract biased curricula and to combat many negative and homophobic comments that students hear throughout the school day” (p. 6). The representation of diversity may also benefit students that do not identify as gay or lesbian by being able to discuss sexual divergence in a safe space with a moderator. Unfortunately, the media often portrays gay men as promiscuous and carrying diseases (Hawley, 2009). Lesbians are often thought of as merely angry women that hate

men instead of loving women who happen to love other women (Hawley, 2009). Showing art that counters these stereotypes is a way to combat discrimination. Art teachers can act as a facilitator to interpret messages in the media and understand the variety of views held by students and their parents in the classroom. If the curriculum, and the way it is presented is open and accepting it will assist students in cultivating empathy and acceptance for people that believe and act differently than themselves. Students with empathy can become allies that stand up for kindness for their peers. Sadly, students commonly hear their peers say, “That’s so gay,” about anything that is lesser, stupid, or passé. When students become allies they will be more careful with language and realize the implications of those messages. They may even rebuff their classmates for using hateful language. Check (2004) impresses the importance of action when he says, “I cannot keep on explaining to people, especially art teachers, why queers should count. A national response is called for” (p. 181). As art teachers, our response will start with our students in the art classroom.

#### **CURRICULUM: OVERT AND HIDDEN**

A key component of any classroom is the curriculum. Some curricula are immediately apparent, such as the content of a lecture. Other curricula are more subtle, like instructing students to add their name at the top of the paper.

Curriculum theorist, Walker (2002), defines curriculum as, “a particular way of ordering content and purposes for teaching and learning in schools” (p. 5). Curriculum encompasses the learning objectives, lectures, activities, and projects in a program of instruction. It is vast and defined in a multitude of ways with an equally great variety of

purposes. Depending on the theorist's view of the purpose of education, some recommend that the curriculum focus on the subject, some focus on the students, while others focus on society at large (Bruner, 1960, Counts, 1932, Eisner, 2004). Gay (2002), while promoting culturally responsive teaching, separates curriculum into three parts: formal plans, symbolic curriculum, and societal curriculum. The first, formal plans, include any instruction endorsed by governing bodies such as national standards, textbooks adopted by school districts, and curriculum guidelines from professional organizations. Symbolic curriculum encompasses the "images, symbols, icons, mottoes, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values" (2002, p. 108). These symbols might be seen in bulletin boards, class parties, and school rules. The final part, societal curriculum, is not taught inside a traditional classroom, but rather through mass media. Television, radio, the Internet, and literature "engage in ideological management and construct knowledge because their content reflects and conveys particular cultural, social, ethnic, and political values, knowledge, and advocacies" (2002, p. 109). Before students even walk in the classroom, they have absorbed the societal curriculum, whether or not that information is accurate, appropriate, or useful.

Apple who focuses on improving society through its students, adds the concept of hidden curriculum. Similar to symbolic curriculum, Apple defines the concept as "the teaching, through day-to-day school interaction, of moral, normative, and dispositional values, and about economic functionalism" (1990, p. 48). Each school and classroom has its own hidden curriculum. Apple (1990) finds that the hidden curriculum is based on

“hegemony,” which is comprised of a “set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming” (p. 5). When teachers are developing a curriculum, Apple recommends remaining aware of hegemony. He also encourages us to consider how the dominant culture affects students and to present alternative structures as well (Apple, 1990).

The dominant cultural values of the school, teacher and sometimes the body of students dictate what is praised, admonished, critiqued, or ignored. These interactions teach the learners how to act, treat others, and feel about themselves. A school’s stance on LGBTQ realities is often part of a hidden curriculum (Apple, 1990). Are lesbian artists represented in the art room? Is it known that students can bring a same-sex guest to the school dance? Are the gender-neutral bathrooms for students that are transitioning genders? Is there a Gay Straight Alliance on campus? If the answer is yes, then the hidden curriculum for LGBTQ students is one of acceptance and equality. If the answer is no, LGBTQ students may learn that the school is not a safe place (GLSEN, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter outlined a careful selection of resources that promote acceptance for LGBTQ identities, and awareness of LGBTQ realities. It began by discussing the theoretical underpinnings of the study, including Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and followed with a review of constructivist theory. Next, it examined the general concepts of queer theory as it relates to this study. Then, this chapter observed LGBTQ realities in schools. Lastly, the chapter described LGBTQ realities specifically in the art classroom.

The next chapter reports on the methodology of this study. It describes the design of the study and how that came to be. Next, it details how data was collected, as well as how it was analyzed.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter contains a detailed overview of the design of this study. It begins with an explanation of the research methodology and then enters into a description of the participants, location, and timeline of the study. Next, this chapter describes the process of conducting fieldwork and concludes with data collection and analysis methods.

When I first assumed the role of researcher, it was a shaky and intimidating venture. I had never before thought of myself as a researcher. To me, researchers were frighteningly smart people that were socially awkward and lived in labs tinkering with a cornucopia of colored liquids in vials. My definition of research and a researcher has been broadened by graduate school courses. The coursework taught me that we, as humans, research in daily life. For example, every time I put a new term in a search engine I am conducting research. I realized a few of my conversations were oddly similar to open-ended interviews. When planning potentially costly purchases, I collect reviews on the items, analyze my data, and form my conclusion. I am researching constantly! Still, I remained mildly nervous to conduct formal research.

There were several reasons that case study was the most appropriate methodology for this study. Case study methodology requires the researcher to gather data in the field, which was exactly the place where the answers to this study's research question lay. The second reason for choosing case study is well articulated by Merriam (2009) when she contends that case studies are more concrete and its knowledge "resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete, and sensory than abstract" (p. 44). The notes taken during a case study are not abstract thoughts and theory about what might



happen in a certain scenario, they are reports of what happened in an actual setting. This allows the data documented to be more relatable for readers and applicable in a variety of educational settings. Merriam (2009) discusses a third beneficial attribute of case study methodology when she claims that case studies are placed in the context of the study site. She continues, “Our experiences are rooted in context, as is knowledge in case studies. This knowledge is distinguishable from the abstract, formal design of research designs” (p. 45). Because this research study requires interactions with real students, observations of a real school environment, and the study a real art teacher, this methodology is ideal for readers to make connections that relate to these real life scenarios.

This idea of making personal connections to a research report is often referred to as transferability. Mertens (2014) describes transferability as “the parallel concept that enables readers of the research to make judgments based on similarities and differences when comparing the research situation to their own” (p. 271). According to Mertens (2014), it is the responsibility of the reader to find the similarities and make informed decisions. The researcher’s responsibility is to provide plentiful information so that the readers may fulfill their part. Mertens (2014) advises that researchers provide a “thick description,” which includes an “extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture” (p. 271). When readers are given a thick description of the case, they will be better equipped to relate to and apply the information given.

## **CASE STUDY**

The methodology of this study is case study research. Just what is a case study? Creswell (2007) explains,

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases), over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

These “bounded systems” can come in a multitude of varieties, but for this study the parameters lie around one set of classroom walls. The bounded system of this study was the art room of my teacher participant, who will be referred to by the pseudonym, “Mrs. Potts.” This study was also bounded by time, a length of five consecutive days. Creswell (2007) specifies that case studies have detailed data collection from multiple sources. Data for this study was collected through observations, field notes, photographs, and interviews.

With a basic understanding of this qualitative methodology we can now begin to differentiate the types of case studies. According to Merriam (2009) this study fits a heuristic case study: “Heuristic means the case study illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about discoveries of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (p. 44). This type of study aims to look at one specific event or entity to draw conclusions of what might be effective in similar situations. For instance, by looking at Mrs. Potts’ classroom and her success at creating a safe place for LGBTQ individuals, the results of this study may aid other teachers in having a better understanding of how to build safe havens for all their students.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Due to the sensitive nature of the content of this study, the privacy of the participants was taken into careful consideration. The school principal of the study site required the school, teacher, and every former student to be given a pseudonym to preserve the safety of all involved. Dodd (2006) also advocates using pseudonyms for studies involving LGBTQ youth, so that the study does not reveal the orientation or identity of the individual to unaware family members, friends, or co-workers. Thus, the name of the town, school, teacher, and former students in this study are not their actual names.

To select participants, this study utilized purposeful sampling. Merriam (2009) describes purposeful sampling as, “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Therefore, the sample for this study included a teacher who promoted acceptance for LGBTQ high school students in an art classroom, the students in classes that are currently taught by that teacher, and several former students that identified within the LGBTQ spectrum.

Through a professor, I learned of an art teacher that cared passionately for all her students, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. She also included LGBTQ artists within the curriculum and assigned projects that promoted empathy and diversity. After contacting Mrs. Potts, as well as receiving clearance from the high school and my university, I received approval to conduct this case study.

Since Mrs. Potts knows her former students well, she recommended several individuals to me. Four of the recommended individuals were interviewed for this study. This decision to have four interviews was informed by Stake (1995), who advises to collect data as long as there is time and money. Due to limited funds and only five days in the field, the schedule only allowed for four students and the teacher herself to be interviewed.

A reference table is provided below (see Table 1) to easily identify each interview subject with their general descriptors. A vignette on each interview subject follows the table.

Name (Pseudonym)	Role	Age	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity
Mrs. Potts	Art Teacher	50	Straight	Cisgender Female
Turnblad	Former Student	19	Gay	Cisgender Male
Leslie	Former Student	22	Lesbian	Cisgender Female
Ted	Former Student	24	Pansexual	Transgender Man
Stacey	Former Student	23	Lesbian	Cisgender Female

Table 1: Interview Subject Demographics

**Mrs. Potts**

Living in Nevada most of her life, Mrs. Potts married soon after high school graduation and is still married after more than thirty years. She is a mother of three adult children. Although Mrs. Potts entered the teaching field relatively late after her children were grown, she has always considered herself an educator. Even as a child, Mrs. Potts had a passion for knowledge; she worked as a teacher's aide or as a tutor to her classmates.

Mrs. Potts operates her classroom with a student-centered approach, going above the average contributions for them. During the case study, Mrs. Potts came early and stayed late, brought a birthday present to a student, and provided transportation to a student in need. She adamantly states that if it benefits the students, she will happily do it. Mrs. Potts manages her classroom mainly through humor. She gets the students' attention, holds it, and disciplines misbehavior all through biting wit, and personal rapport. The main goals of her curriculum are to develop students' critical thinking skills and capacity for empathy. In the future, Mrs. Potts hopes to pursue a doctoral degree in education and create a comprehensive teacher preparation program.

**Turnblad**

Turnblad's reputation certainly preceded him. At the very beginning of the case study, everyone at Sunny Vale High School asked me if I was going to meet Turnblad to receive his input. His vivacious, outspoken personality, and sense of humor make his presence in the room warm and noticeable. Turnblad attended four photography courses with Mrs. Potts at Sunny Vale High, and over that time gained enormous respect for her.

After graduating a year earlier, Turnblad now works in retail and attends a college in the Greenville area.

### **Leslie**

Similar to Turnblad, I had heard tales of Leslie's high school years even before I even met her. Mrs. Potts recalled a year where Leslie and her friends sat together in class and during studio time would tell stories about the discoveries made regarding their lesbian identities. The leader of the group was referred to, with affection, as Mama Dyke. The students would often have graphic discussions at a volume where Mrs. Potts and other students gained many new insights and occasionally had difficulty restraining laughter. Leslie's opinionated, honest, and authentic nature made her an excellent interview candidate. After attending college, Leslie now works in two positions in the service industry.

### **Ted**

Ted attended Sunny Vale art classes but with a different teacher than Mrs. Potts. Ted, at the time, was openly bisexual presenting as a woman, which is his assigned gender. Currently, Ted is exploring the evolution of his gender identity and uses male pronouns. After graduation from Sunny Vale, Ted continued on to college and is currently enrolled in a nearby graduate program.

### **Stacey**

Stacey is a mild-mannered, laid back individual with a peaceful presence. She attended four years of photography classes with Mrs. Potts. During that time, the two developed a mentor and mentee relationship. Stacey shared how during difficult family

struggles she would confide in Mrs. Potts for advice and support. Stacey advises all teachers to be as supportive to their students. Stacey graduated from Sunny Valley four years ago and currently works in the Greenville area in retail.

### **CURRENT STUDENTS**

In addition to the former students, the current students of Mrs. Potts also participated in this study by agreeing to my observations of their classroom. At the beginning of each class period I informed the students what my research entailed and offered the option to opt out of the study. No student took the opportunity, making all one hundred ninety-eight students eligible to be observed.

### **THE RESEARCHER**

For any valid study to occur, the role of the researcher must be examined and disclosed. In this study, I operated in an observer as participant role (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam, in this role “the researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer” (p. 101). The role of observer as participant was selected because I could “observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider’s identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership” (p. 101). For example, at the beginning of each class during the field work, I announced who I was, what I was researching, and to come to me with any questions. During the instruction, I sat in the back and recorded notes on a laptop and took no part in the content delivery or class discussions. Occasionally, during independent studio time, a student would start a conversation with me about the case. In such instances, I did

converse with students. Initially, when I circulated the room, students abruptly stopped their conversations when I approached. As they became more comfortable with me, they no longer noticed my presence and continued their conversations. In the role of observer as participant, I was able to have full access to information without having the influence that participation involves.

### **LOCATION OF STUDY**

In order for the data from this study to make proper sense, it is beneficial for the reader to have a general context of the case. Thus, this section paints a picture of the study, beginning with the city and suburb in which this study occurred and how different the two locations are from each other. Next, this section describes the high school that hosted this study.

Due to the sensitive nature of the content researched, all names in this chapter, whether of suburbs, schools, or people, are pseudonyms. This action was taken to protect the privacy of the individuals sharing parts of their identity and histories. In an effort to give readers some idea of the location of study, the school was located less than thirty minutes outside of Las Vegas, Nevada. At the request of the high school principal, which suburb outside of Las Vegas, the high school, and all names of people are hidden.

### **Juxtaposition of Place: The Morning Commute**

This study began at six o'clock on a Monday morning in October. I began my journey leaving my hotel on the strip in Las Vegas to travel to the case study site. On the way down to the hotel lobby, I shared the elevator with a bachelorette party of four wobbly women just returning to the hotel. To get to the lobby, I had to navigate through a



smoke-filled casino packed with gamblers, neon lights, and free cocktails delivered by women in mini-skirts. Next, I passed several shops selling merchandise and gifts advertising “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” two twenty-four hour cafes, and three buffet restaurants before finally being able to exit the door of the gigantic hotel. On the way to the parking lot, at least three people each day offered me flyers picturing topless women available for rent. Whether it was legal or not remains to be seen, but these types of advertisements were certainly commonplace.

After finally making it to the car, I drove to the highway. Even though I had left the main street of Las Vegas, billboards advertising burlesque shows, alcohol specials, casinos, and the newest nightclubs lined the highway. I wondered to myself how many high school students passed those billboards featuring scantily clad women on their commute to school.

Within ten minutes, I exited the highway and entered a quiet suburb. Instead of billboards and neon lights, there were trees and small shops. I also passed several churches, just outside of “sin city.” With a population of over 250,000, this suburban town seemed large enough to have its own distinct style and culture, even if Las Vegas was in such close proximity.

Within Greenville lies the school that hosted this study, Sunny Vale High School. Sunny Vale is a large school with a population of over three thousand students. Sunny Vale offers a choice of 19 Advanced Placement and 11 International Baccalaureate courses for students to be better prepared for college or other future plans. Although Sunny Vale performs well in academic measures, it is most known for its music, theatre,

and art departments. So far this high school has won two Grammy Signature School Gold Awards for the Performing Arts program. In addition, it was chosen by Disney and Music Theatre International as the first school in the country to present Mary Poppins the musical.

Besides the performing arts department, the school offers fifty-five other clubs from which students are able to choose. There are organizations ranging from engineering to the newspaper, and from animal lovers to the Bible club. For athletic students, there are eight sports teams available to join. It seems unlikely that any students at Sunny Vale High find themselves bored for any extended period of time.

Sunny Vale High School defines their goals and philosophies for the school in its mission statement. It states,

We believe that the purpose of education is to provide experiences that will encourage and assist students to achieve their potential and to assume their responsibilities as members of society. It is the obligation of the school to instill in students positive attitudes toward growth, learning, leadership, and creativity, as well as ensure their full intellectual and character development. The community in which we live must provide sufficient educational resources to meet the needs of all students. We are committed to the use of these resources to develop responsible citizens who have the courage and ability to bring about effective change in democratic society.

We believe that every child has an inherent right to an education and that all children are able to learn. The school's curriculum must be broad-based in order to prepare students for college and vocational objectives. We recognize that students have differences in academic abilities, culture, and physical skills. The school's curriculum must be designed to provide successful experiences for all students while accommodating these basic differences. The school must structure programs to meet the changing demands and needs of our world so that students and staff can be prepared to make sound decisions concerning their academic and social needs.

Due to the dedication of the school to accommodate diversity and social needs, Mrs. Potts' teaching philosophy clearly aligns with the mission to create an accommodating environment in her classroom.

### **TIMELINE OF STUDY**

In late October, 2014 I traveled to Sunny Vale High School where I observed six class periods daily for five consecutive days, for a total of 45 hours. I also stayed after school several times that week when Mrs. Potts hosted extra-curricular activities in her classroom. Three times after school that week, Mrs. Potts met with me for interview sessions that typically lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. Midweek I met with four former students of Sunny Vale High School to glean their perspectives through private, open-ended interviews. On the fifth day of the study, Mrs. Potts and I met for a final interview session.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

This study utilized several methods of data collection. The first method was observing the classroom for every class for five consecutive days. The second method occurred during observations and involved recording field notes. The third method was taking photographs of the physical environment of the classroom. The last method involved interviewing Potts and four former students.

### **Fieldwork**

In order to gain an authentic picture of the phenomenon, how one art teacher creates a physically and emotionally safe environment for LGBTQ students in her

classroom, it was necessary to conduct fieldwork at the source: Mrs. Potts' classroom. Patton (2002) argues that fieldwork has six advantages. The first is that, "through direct observations the inquirer is able to understand and capture the context within which people interact" (p. 262). Without context, aspects of site description may seem out of place or odd. Within context, it is likely to make more sense. Next, he explains, "firsthand experience with a setting and the people in the setting allows an inquirer to be open, discovery oriented, and inductive" (p. 262). In firsthand experiences, discovery is more easily attained as there is no need to rely on written documents or prior conceptualizations. Patton (2002) identifies a third "strength of observational field-work is that the inquirer has the opportunity to see things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting" (p. 262). As an outsider, the observer may recognize patterns, situations, or phrases that would seem commonplace to the participants, but may also be enlightening. A fourth "value of direct observation is the chance to learn things that people would be unwilling to talk about in an interview" (p. 263). Specifically within this study, there was a significant amount of sensitive material discussed with the teacher. By seeing a snapshot framed within a week of Potts' classes, the interview questions were designed to examine specific occurrences witnessed. The fifth advantage "is the opportunity to move beyond the selective perceptions of others" (p. 264). As useful as interviews were for this study, memory and bias can cloud that data. However, in direct observations, participants' bias is kept to a minimum. The last benefit of fieldwork outlined by Patton (2002) is "getting close to the people in a setting through firsthand experience permits the inquirer to draw on personal knowledge during the formal

interpretation stage of analysis” (p. 264). Patton points out that impressions and feelings an observer has can go beyond what detailed notes provides.

As this study utilized case study methodology, fieldwork was essential for finding primary sources (Saldana, 2011). To properly understand how a classroom full of students led by Mrs. Potts operated, I needed to be in that classroom. Saldana (2011) agrees when he says,

Within these sites are hundreds and often thousands of details that are part of human mental and physical extensions. Our entry into them is an opportunity to observe how space, environment, and objects reflect and affect the people within and around them. (p. 26)

Fieldwork for this study took place in the Sunny Vale High School photography classroom where I conducted observations of the teacher and classroom, took photographs, and recorded field notes.

### **Observations**

As humans, we observe countless details of our surroundings every day, but research observation is more intense and specific (Merriam, 2009). Observations become a research tool when they meet four criteria. Observations must be formulated for a “specific research purpose,” be “planned deliberately,” “recorded systematically,” and “subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 94-95). In this study, the research purpose was to answer the question of how one art teacher promotes acceptance in the art classroom. The field notes taken were planned to answer that question by looking at four main categories: curriculum, classroom management, teacher attitude, and student interactions with both the teacher as well as other students.

These notes were taken electronically with one report for each class period. These notes were subjected to a check by having them reviewed by Mrs. Potts to verify their accuracy.

A key aspect of the fieldwork of this study was the time spent as an observer participant. As an observer participant, my main focus was observing the teacher and current students and my secondary focus was to converse with participants or be involved in their activities (Merriam, 2009). Early each morning, I sat with my laptop in a supply-filled corner of the classroom, as an “outsider,” to observe as much as possible about the context of the classroom in Sunny Vale High School. I took copious field notes during my observations of classes. I sat with my laptop in a chair near Mrs. Potts’ desk and, more importantly, an electrical outlet, typing furiously as the events of each class unfolded. Frequently, I would also circulate around the room to gather information by interacting with the teacher and students. I recorded how the students listened to instructions, how they reacted to Mrs. Potts during the lesson, and what management strategies Potts employed to encourage student engagement. I documented what students discussed amongst themselves, and how they treated each other when they thought no one was listening. I made several notes of events to discuss with Mrs. Potts in a later interview to gain her insights as well. In between classes, I captured images of the classroom to visually convey what the environment was physically like for students.

This study followed Merriam’s (2009) observer guidelines on what to include in field notes. She first suggests the observer record details of the physical setting. The setting is crucial to describe for readers to understand the context and implications of

environment. A thorough description can paint the picture for readers to figuratively place themselves in the room with participants and relate more fully to what the participants are experiencing. Next, Merriam (2009) advises documenting information on the participants. This aspect of recording data presented challenges to this study due to the personal and private nature of the topic and the presence of minors. Many students in the classroom may not openly reveal his, her, or hir sexual orientation and gender identity or be fully prepared to share that information with others. A main goal of this study was to strike a balance of accuracy of data while also preserving privacy for participants. Merriam (2009) then recommends reporting on activities and interactions of and in the case site. In this case, the activities were six photography classes and one lunch break each lasting approximately one hour daily. In each class, the content, assignments, homework, lectures, routines, and reactions from students to these aspects of school were recorded in field notes. Similarly, I also detailed in field notes any potentially meaningful conversations, as Merriam (2009) suggests, that occurred inside those interactions. For instance, if a student made a comment or asked a question to Mrs. Potts in reaction to a given assignment and Potts utilized a classroom management strategy, I documented that entire conversation as close to verbatim as possible to provide insights into how students related to Potts. Often in conversations there are minute details in body language, or tone, eye contact that do not come across in direct quotes. I also made note of these “subtle factors,” which Merriam (2009, p. 120) describes. A different type of subtle factor is what is not happening that you might expect to happen. If the standard of the class is to talk quietly while working and the students are silent, then that is perhaps a subtle factor

worth documenting. The last item Merriam (2009) proposes recording is the researcher's own behavior. I made certain to document how I felt in the classroom, how I reacted to student behavior, and class activities.

Beyond observing classroom climate, I conducted observations in order to have particular events to describe for Mrs. Potts to gain her insights and perspectives. Merriam (2009) supports this plan when she argues, "Another reason to conduct observations is to provide knowledge of the context or to provide specific incidents, behaviors, and so on that can be used as reference points in subsequent interviews" (p. 119). During observations I made a list of specific events and quotes that I believed would benefit from additional information from Mrs. Potts. Before the final interview I reviewed the events and formulated the additional questions based on the observations. More details about the interviews are shared in the following section.

### **Interviews**

Interviews can be conducted in a variety of ways. Merriam (2009) places different styles on a continuum (See Figure 3) to identify various characteristics while giving the freedom to blend styles. The continuum is broken up into three main sections: highly structured/standardized, semi-structured, and unstructured/informal. Semi-structured style, the most popular in qualitative research, is halfway between the two extremes (Merriam, 2009). In this style, "the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the question is determined ahead of time" (p. 74). A significant advantage to semi-structured format is that the researcher can "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging



worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 74). Since many of the interview questions (See Appendix 1) were personal in nature, a semi-structured format was ideal to explore sensitive topics and allow ample time for narratives and tangential information, as well as follow up questions.

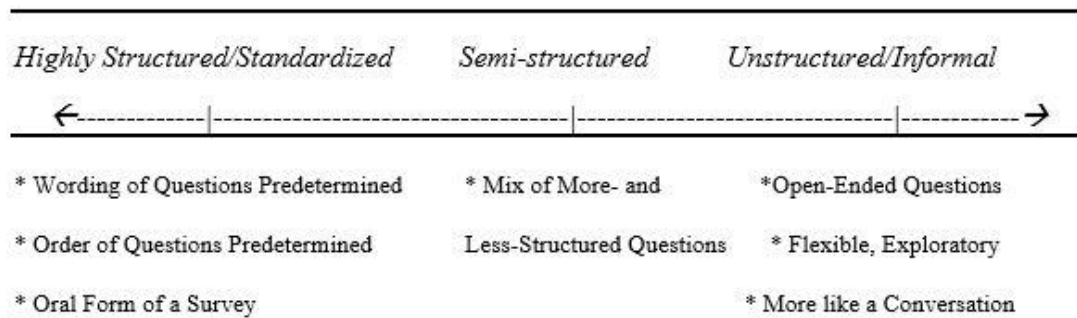


Figure 3: Interview Structure Spectrum (Merriam, 2009, p. 75)

In this study, there are several interview sessions with different sets of questions (See Appendices 1 & 2). All interviews were semi-structured and audio recorded for accuracy. This style of interview allowed me to have guideline questions, and a purpose of each session, but also to stray from the script when the subject shared interesting information or if they wished to offer tangential information. The semi-structured style also allowed the mood to be casual, making it easier for subjects to share personal information.

This section begins by discussing the interviews with Mrs. Potts and concludes by addressing the interviews with former students. Seidman (2006) advocates a three-interview model for in-depth interviews. The series of three sessions “allows the interviewer and participant to plumb the experience and place it in context” (p. 17). The

focus of the first interview is to “establish the context of the participant’s experience” (p. 17). The second interview “allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them” (p. 17). Seidman’s (2006) model suited this study in several ways. First, it enabled the researcher and participant to build a rapport due to the time spent together. Second, since there is a gap between each session, there is time for reflection, both for the participant and researcher. With reflection, both parties can reconsider the situation in new lights and construct better questions and answers. Third, the three sessions allowed the classroom’s events of each day or two of the study to be debriefed and discussed while they were recent and easily recalled.

Thus, Mrs. Potts underwent three interview sessions, each about an hour in length and with a different intent. The first mission was to establish a rapport with Mrs. Potts and allow her to feel comfortable sharing her story. The questions inquired about her past: where she was from, how she became a teacher, what her childhood was like, and similar questions. At first glance, the questions may seem like they remain on the surface, or are irrelevant to the central research question. However, my intent was to develop a connection with Mrs. Potts so she would feel comfortable with me, and also to provide contextual information about the participant. The second mission was to explore Mrs. Potts’ vision for her students and her activities in the classroom. The second set of questions inquired into her curriculum to find out which major projects she assigned, if the inspirational artists identified as LGBTQ, as well as what hidden curricula were nestled in her actions and curriculum. I asked about her classroom management routines and if she had a system to encourage accepting language. I invited her to share stories of her past students where LGBTQ issues arose. With this line of questioning the data

revealed information about the classroom beyond the five days that this study occurred. The third and final interview with Mrs. Potts was in regard to specific events that were recorded during observations. The questions referenced particular students that had expressed opinions on the LGBTQ community, a project that developed empathy, among other occurrences. In this session, Mrs. Potts was given an opportunity to provide her perspective about each event. There was also a period at the end of the session where Mrs. Potts was offered time to share concluding thoughts that interview questions had not addressed.

The fieldwork of this study contains one interview with each of four students: three that were former students of Mrs. Potts, and one that took art with a different art teacher at the same school. The student that was not enrolled with Mrs. Potts offered an alternative perspective of what Sunny Vale's climate is like without the influence of Mrs. Potts. Each participant was asked the same prepared questions (see Appendix 2), but may have been asked other questions, as is typical of semi-structured interviews. I asked the former students about how they felt in Mrs. Potts classes, about bullying at school, and what teachers could do to improve school climate. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. Similar to Mrs. Potts' interview, each former student had an opportunity to share concluding thoughts or discuss a topic the questions had not mentioned.

### **Photographs**

During the observations in Mrs. Potts' classroom, I took multiple photographs. The goal was to give the reader an idea of the visual and physical context of the study site. I took photographs from several angles in each section of the room to provide a rich picture of the classroom. The décor and organization of the classroom also offer clues into the classroom climate established by Potts.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

This study's analysis process began by conducting a member check to ensure credibility. According to Mertens (2015), the "recommended practice" of "member checks involve the researcher's seeking verification with the respondent groups about the constructions that are developing as a result of data collected and analyzed" (p. 269). Member checks range in formality level and thoroughness (Mertens, 2015). In the case of this study, the interview transcripts were offered to the participants for review. Four of the five interview subjects opted to perform a member check and each that did approved the content for accuracy. Once the members approved, the data underwent coding.

### **Coding Methods**

The first coding system applied to all collected data was in-vivo coding. Saldana (2011) describes in-vivo as a "code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, the terms used by participants themselves" (p.74). For this study, this process entailed reading the entire set of textual data, including interviews and observations, and writing down words or phrases that were striking or seemed like they could lead to an answer for the research question. After in-vivo coding, every interview transcript and field note had key phrases and words taken directly out of the text and written in the margins.

### **Description Coding**

Next, the textual data went through description coding, which Saldana (2011) explains as a coding system that "summarizes in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 70). For this study, those description words and phrases were compiled into themes and subthemes. For example, each recorded conversation between two or more students were described as "student to student interaction."

Similarly, notes on how each lesson was taught was described as “curriculum implementation.” Since both of those descriptions relate to the management of the classroom, student to student interactions and curriculum implementations became subthemes under the theme of classroom management.

### **Axial Coding**

The final method of coding the texts was axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain “the purpose of axial coding is to begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding” (p. 124). In this study, the fractures occurred in organizing the subthemes out of the major themes. Strauss and Corbin explain further, “In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena” (p. 124). The frequencies of these subthemes were tallied to determine the impact from each subtheme. The final tallies were translated into charts (See Figures 4-10).

### **Visual Analysis**

After the texts were coded, the coding of photographs of the classroom began. According to Saldana (2011), through the writing of “visual analytic memos...the researcher’s careful scrutiny of and reflection on images...generate language-based data that accompanies the visual data” (pp. 42-43). Adhering to the process of visual analytic memos, each photo was examined with the same themes that emerged in the textual data analysis: classroom management, climate, possibilities for improvement, perceptions of the LGBTQ community, and role of the teacher. With these themes, memos were written

about each photograph describing the contents of each image as well as the connections to field notes and interviews. The most popular themes that emerged from the photographs were classroom management and climate. Although minutely, perceptions of the LGBTQ community and role of the teacher appeared in the memos as well. However, possibilities for improvements made no appearance.

### **TRIANGULATION**

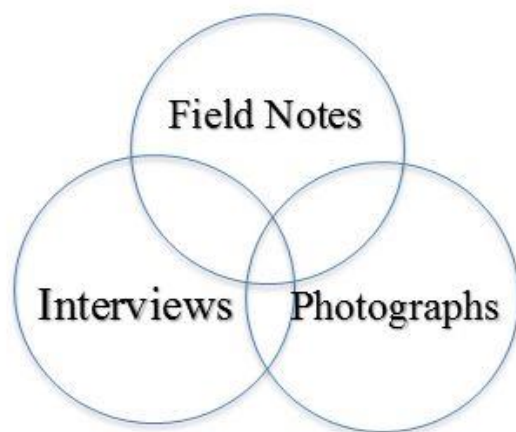


Figure 4: Triangulation of Data Collection

In order to insure the validity and reliability of the results from the analysis, this study used triangulation of data. According to Flick (2007), "...the concept of triangulation means that an issue of research is considered - or in a constructivist formulation is constituted - from (at least) two points" (p. 7). When all three points are conceptually congruent, the results are seen as reliable.

In this study, one point of the data triangle is the field notes from the observational period, another the interviews, and a third being the photographs from the classroom. These points were selected to gather information from different times as well

as different people. The observation period offers a first person, current perspective of an accepting classroom. The interviews give a glimpse of what that classroom was like several years ago. Lastly, the photographs present a visual representation of the classroom space. With these points aligned, the results are considered valid.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed the design and implementation of the case study. It explained why case study was best suited for this research. Next, it described the participants, location, and timeline of this study. Finally, this chapter explained the process of data collection and data analysis.

The next chapter revisits the central research question. It takes the analyzed data and share the results this case revealed. Lastly, the chapter highlights the themes and subthemes that permeated the data.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This study examined the collected data of interview transcripts, photographs, and field notes. The data underwent several steps of coding, enabling the themes to inductively emerge through in-vivo coding. In this chapter, the research question is revisited. Next, each of the five themes, (a) possibilities for improvement, (b) perceptions of the LGBTQ community, (c) role of the teacher, (d) classroom management, and (e) climate are described. Although this is a case study, charts are provided to demonstrate the frequencies of each theme for each participant. This approach shows how the data was interpreted to answer the research question. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief summary of its contents.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The aim of this study was to examine how one art teacher, namely, Mrs. Potts, promotes acceptance for LGBTQ students in her classroom. Mrs. Potts' classroom was examined due to her reputation for incorporating LGBTQ artists in her curriculum, exemplary classroom environment, and praise from her former students. The classroom environment was examined with emphasis on pedagogy, classroom management, climate, teacher attitude, and curriculum. With the information gleaned from this case, other art teachers may better understand how to employ similar methods in order to create safe places for their own students.



## THEMES

To aid in data analysis, the data collected for this study has been inductively coded and separated according to themes. Merriam (2009) offers three criteria to select appropriate themes, suggesting that they be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and conceptually congruent. Identifying themes for a study to be exhaustive means that every piece of data that was deemed important has a place inside the codes and there is no extraneous data. Merriam (2009) also suggests that each piece of data only fit into one theme, here referred to as mutually exclusive. The third criterion from Merriam (2009) is to that ensure themes are conceptually congruent, or that they are the same level of abstraction and specificity.

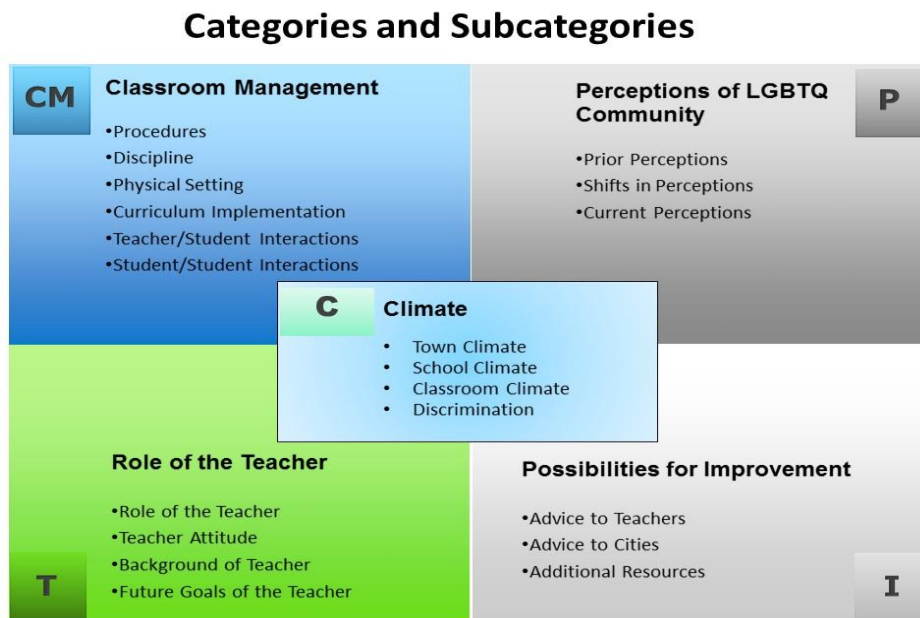


Figure 5: Categories and Subcategories

This study followed Merriam’s (2009) criteria in creating themes. The coding began with only four themes that emerged through in-vivo coding of the interviews, including (a) role of teacher (15%), (b) classroom management (23%), (c) perceptions of the LGBTQ community (12%), and (d) climate (44%), but found that themes were not exhaustive and several pieces of data remained without a category. In order to place this extraneous data, the (e) possibilities for improvement (6%) theme was created (See Figures 3-10). The five themes encompassed all data pieces. The themes are conceptually congruent as they are all fairly abstract, larger concepts that are then segmented into smaller, more specific subthemes. The following sections elaborate on each theme and its subthemes in order of least prevalent to most prevalent. Thus, possibilities for improvement are discussed first, followed by perceptions of the LGBTQ community, then the role of the teacher, classroom management, and finally climate.

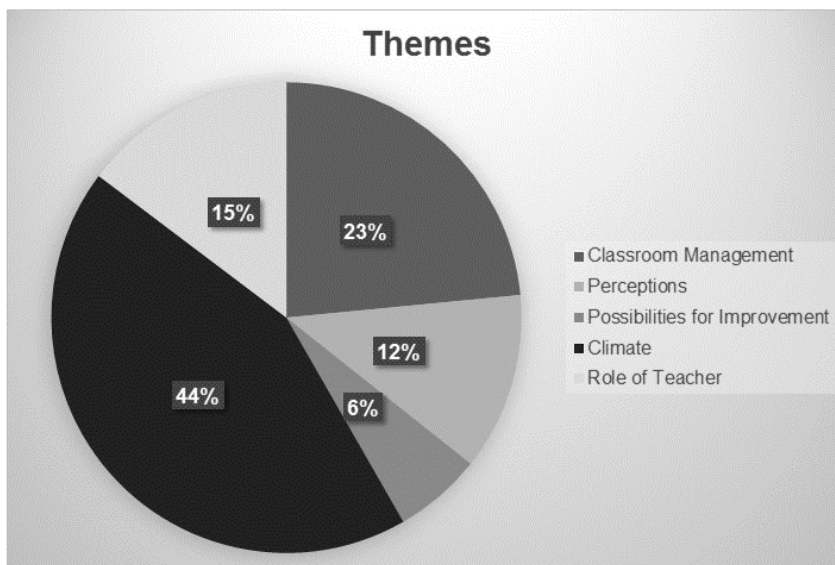


Figure 6: Frequency of Themes

## POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

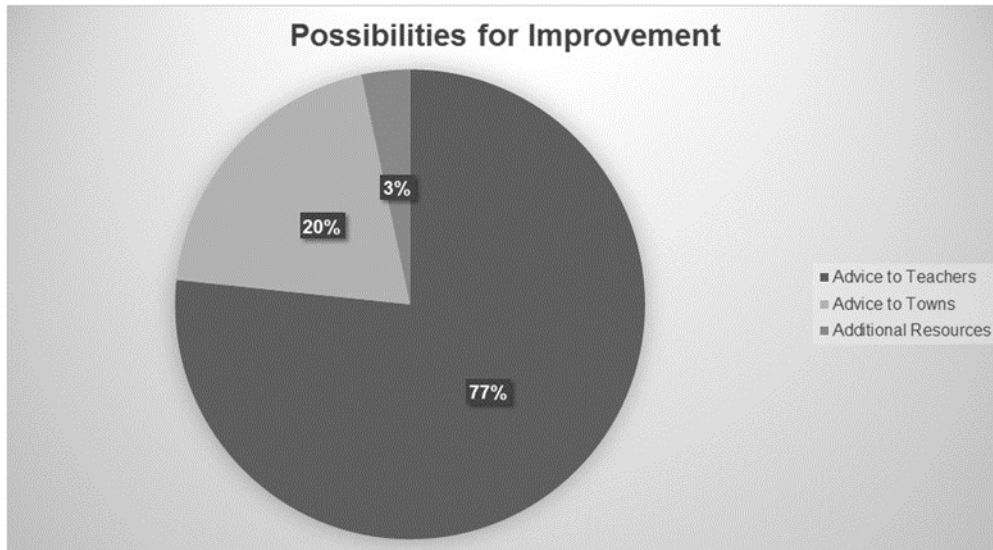


Figure 7: Subtheme Frequency in Possibilities for Improvement

This theme, possibilities for improvement, was the least prevalent, representing only 6% of the data. It emerged exclusively in interviews with Mrs. Potts and former students. Each participant offered advice to teachers on how to create a safe space in the classroom or the school. The subjects also offered advice to communities on how to be more accepting of LGBTQ residents. Since schools are part of a larger community, this information is relevant to the research question. Some participants offered additional resources for individuals to pursue in order to become more accepting, such as quality television programming and books. Likewise, these resources may be helpful for classroom art teachers.

### **Advice to Teachers**

In Mrs. Potts' interviews she advised all beginning teachers to remember one lesson: to not take anything students say personally. Potts explained that students often

make rude comments or are disruptive in class and that those tactics may be effective with other teachers or their parents. However, she suggested that teachers not allow this behavior to internally affect them. Mrs. Potts shared that a teacher at Sunny Vale High School recently left the field because students were testing their boundaries. Mrs. Potts lamented that a highly skilled and competent teacher would end his career so quickly due to lacking classroom management and difficulties with student interactions. She advised, rather than quitting, remaining calm and logical throughout difficult conversations.

Mrs. Potts also suggested that schools prepare teachers to be allies for their students. Many teachers may feel nervous, uncomfortable or simply unaware of how to create a safe space and advocate for students. The school might host a professional development workshop with a member of the LGBTQ community to guide teachers and school administration in sensitivity and ally training.

The former students advised teachers to tell students that they are able to talk before or after class, if needed. The students mentioned that most teachers say this on the first day of class, but as the school year progresses students forget about the support and need to be reminded often. The former students recognized the potential for a Gay Straight Alliance within the school as a safe place for LGBTQ students to meet as well as help develop allies.

### **Advice to Towns**

Within the town, the former students agreed that more resources were needed. Every participant mentioned that the closest LGBTQ center is located in Las Vegas, which is at times hard to access from Greenville, especially by public transit. The students suggested that a LGBTQ center be built for its residents within the city limits of Greenville. The former students over the age of twenty-one identified a possible improvement to Greenville would be the addition of gay bars. While there are many gay

bars in Las Vegas, there are none in Greenville. Stacy, Leslie, and Ted commented that even the existing gay bars in Las Vegas are targeted towards gay men and are not as inclusive of other identities such as bisexuals, lesbians, and transgender individuals. The former students stated while the bar situation in Greenville is not ideal, bars remain the main center of socialization for queer gatherings. The students commented that if you do not drink, or are not old enough to drink, there are very few activities within the LGBTQ community that are accessible to local teens. And so, two participants suggested the creation of a club for LGBTQ teens in Greenville.

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY FROM THE FORMER STUDENTS

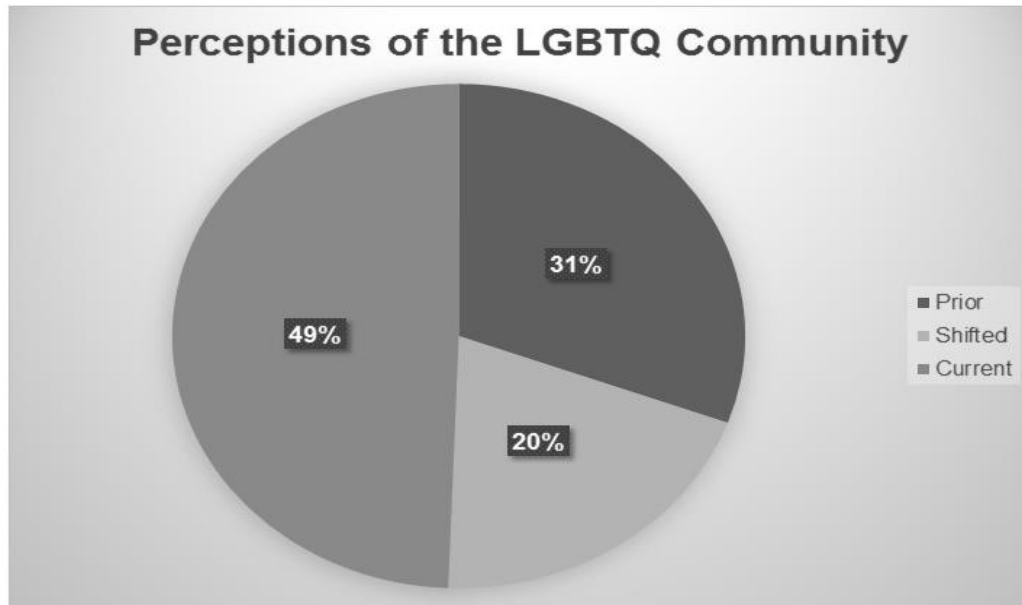


Figure 8: Subtheme Frequency in Perceptions of the LGBTQ Community

This theme, represented by 12% of the data overall, was supported exclusively in interviews with the former students. Each participant recounted that when growing up, they considered their families and friends generally accepting of LGBTQ identities. Some participants identified events or people that shaped the way they perceived themselves and other LGBTQ individuals. Every participant shared their current perception of the LGBTQ community. Figure 6 demonstrates that in this theme, 49% of the data focuses on shifted perceptions, 31% on prior perceptions, and 20% on current perceptions of the LGBTQ community. The following sections from Ted, Turnblad, Stacy, and Leslie combined all of these subthemes and provide a more complete picture of their perceptions of the LGBTQ community.

### **Perceptions from Ted**

Ted's perception of himself within the LGBTQ community has evolved over time. Ted explained that his mother was a showgirl and often performed with gay men, as well as befriending them. Ted's perceptions of LGBTQ realities shifted when he came out, initially, as a bisexual. At the time, Ted was still identifying as his assigned birth sex of female and dating a man. When Ted told his mother that gender was irrelevant to his sexual attraction to others, she revealed a bias towards bisexuality as an identity. She told Ted that Ted must be lesbian, or straight, but not both. Ted's father mocked his identity, calling him a "lies-bian" and accused him of making up the orientation for attention (personal communication, October 22, 2014). Ted's identity continued to evolve and he now identifies as a pansexual transgender man. Ted has yet to let his family know of his gender identity and shift in sexual orientation.

### **Perceptions from Turnblad**

Turnblad was raised by a conservative Roman Catholic family and did not have any perception of the LGBTQ community besides what was presented on television. When Turnblad first let his mother know he is gay, she was very upset and instructed him to not tell anyone else. Three days later, the two were able to discuss the situation. After the initial shock, Turnblad's family grew more accepting of his sexual orientation and currently supports him. Even still, Turnblad has hung on to the notion of being cautious in who knows about his sexuality. Turnblad said he would advise other emerging gay men to consider safety and one's surroundings before letting others know. Turnblad, once out at Sunny Vale High School, served as president for the Gay Straight Alliance club at his high school. He continues to be involved in Pride events post-graduation.

### **Perceptions from Stacy**

Stacy came out as a lesbian to family and friends in middle school and was initially accepted. Later, her father remarried a woman who was opposed to non-heterosexuality. The new wife shifted her father's perspectives on Stacy's sexual orientation resulting in a strained relationship with her father and step-mother. Stacy often asked Mrs. Potts for support during this difficult time. Although there is tension between Stacy and her father and step-mother, she remains in communication with her family. Stacy reports that she loves meeting new people at her local LGBTQ center, as well as learning more about her LGBTQ community.

### **Perceptions from Leslie**

Unlike Stacy's experience, Leslie's family alleges that they knew her sexual orientation early on in her childhood. They waited for Leslie to uncover her orientation and share it with them. She was accepted immediately upon coming out to them. Leslie's family took her to multiple Pride parades and festivals to celebrate. In high school, Leslie befriended a classmate she referred to as Mama Dyke. Mama Dyke taught Leslie how to dress and act in order to attract lesbians and be perceived as a lesbian. Currently, Leslie is not involved in Pride events, and finds them unnecessary and exploitive.



## ROLE OF THE TEACHER

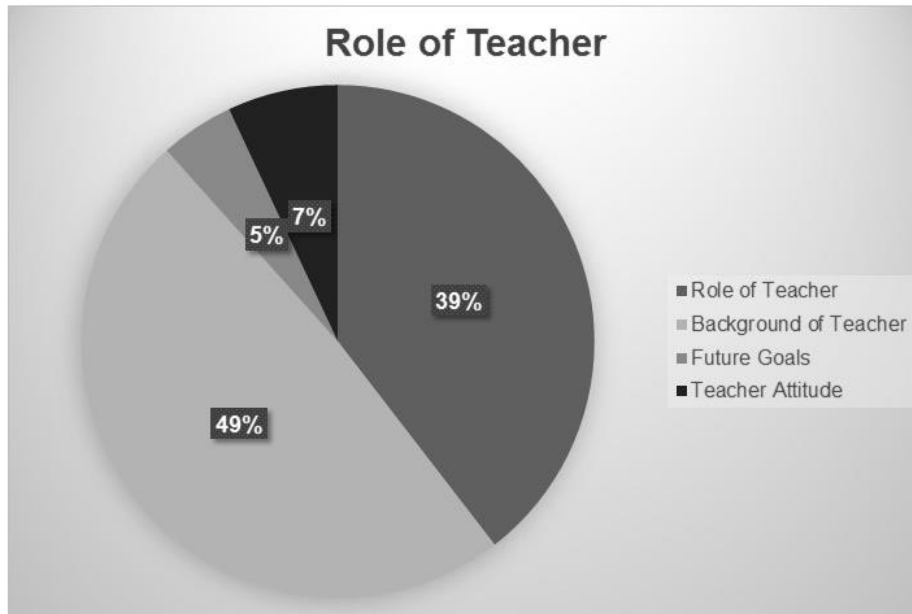


Figure 9: Subtheme Frequency of Role of the Teacher

At 15% of all the data, the role of the teacher came up exclusively in interviews; predominantly in interviews with Mrs. Potts. As a theme, this encompasses all job duties that are expected of teachers (even those duties outside of teaching) and the personal influences of teachers. This theme was separated into four subthemes: role of teacher, background of teacher, future goals, and teacher attitude<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The background of the teacher, as well as her future goals, created a context for the data collected, and was used to formulate the participant description in Chapter 3. However, since the background of the teacher did not actually help answer the research question, it will not be discussed in this chapter nor the next.

The role of the teacher as a subtheme contains mention of paper work, after school meetings, and overarching purposes of teaching. The background of the teacher includes past histories such as childhood location, upbringing, and education. Future goals refers to plans held by the teacher to be employed in life outside of teaching. Teacher attitude signifies personal philosophies and perceptions held by the teacher that influence student and teacher interactions as well as classroom management.

### **Defining the Role of the Teacher**

Mrs. Potts defined the role of the teacher in two ways. The first is the definition of what she feels schools expect of teachers. It involves “doing paper work, pontificating, and doing more paperwork” (personal communication, October 25, 2014). Her personal definition of a teacher’s role differs significantly when it requires teachers to operate as a mentor to students. Potts aims to “create a safe environment and provide opportunities for students to try new things and feel comfortable failing” (personal communication, October 25, 2014).

### **Teacher Attitude**

The former students commented mainly on teacher attitude exhibited by Mrs. Potts. The students repeatedly emphasized that Mrs. Potts “truly cared” about her students and was always there to talk when needed (personal communication, October 22, 2014). The students agreed that her attitude motivated her actions and made them feel special. For example, students explained that providing granola bars, staying after classes, and remaining in contact after graduation, were all supportive actions.

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

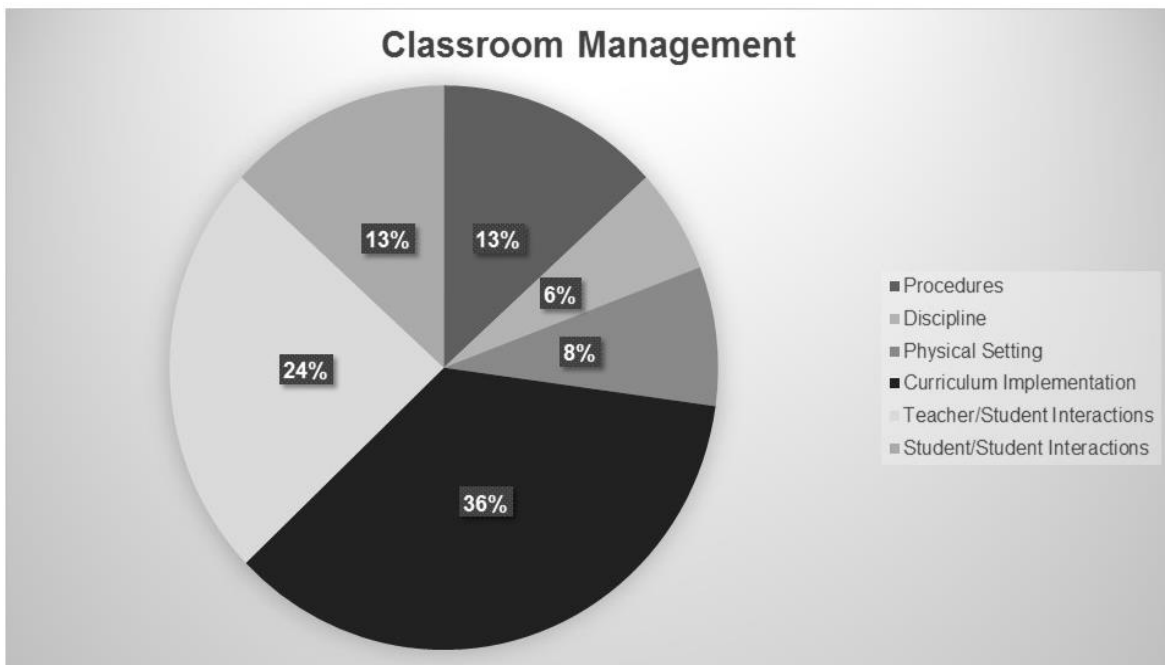


Figure 10: Subtheme Frequency in Classroom Management

Classroom management was the second most significant theme, represented by almost a quarter (23%) of the overall data. It is logical that this theme had such a significant impact when we consider the research question: how does one art teacher promote acceptance for LGBTQ students in her art classroom. Classroom management encompasses all of the philosophies and actions that Mrs. Potts employs in her classroom.

Six subthemes emerged from classroom management:

1. procedures (13%)
2. discipline (6%)
3. physical setting (13%)
4. curriculum implementation (36%)
5. interactions between the teacher and a student (24%)

#### 6. interactions between students (8%)

The term procedures encapsulates any routines that Mrs. Potts has in place, from how to get the class' attention, to how to distribute cameras to the students. Discipline, in this study, is teacher directed. It refers to any mention of redirecting behavior, whether that be by reprimanding misbehavior or praising correct behavior. Next, physical setting encompasses all references to the classroom structure including space, organization, décor, and so on. Curriculum implementation denotes all pedagogical strategies, whether that be the lesson plan or the way it is delivered. The last two subthemes are similar and somewhat self-explanatory: teacher/student interactions, and student to student interactions. These final themes contain any conversations, or reference to a conversation, between the indicated individuals in class and at school.

#### **Procedures**

The procedure, that Mrs. Potts called “her spot,” is instrumental to her classroom management. She explained in an interview that during the first class she introduces one floor tile as her spot. When she stands on that spot, every student must provide his/her/hir attention, and ensure that every other student does the same. She expounds by moving around the room, explaining when she stands on a different tile, she is merely visiting a table. On another tile, she is spying in the hallway. She then returns to her spot and has the students practice being attentive. The procedure proved to be effective during observations, when nearly every student was immediately attentive. Those students that continued talking to neighbors were promptly hushed by other students. In the instance that the class remained noisy for an extended period of time, Mrs. Potts would mime an exasperated look, or remind them that she was waiting.

Mrs. Potts enforces only three straightforward rules in the classroom. The first goes along with her spot, requiring that the students do not talk while she is talking. In an

interview she explained that this rule is crucial for all students to clearly understand assignments and important class information. The second rule is to never throw anything in the classroom. Mrs. Potts justified that with so much expensive equipment, such as laptops, cameras, and also the safety of the students at stake, throwing things was not an option. The final rule is simply to be a good human. Mrs. Potts elucidates that this encompasses so many smaller rules, that she does not need any others.

### **Discipline**

Observations showed that Mrs. Potts disciplines students in two main ways: humor and praise. For example, when one student arrived consistently late, Mrs. Potts told her that she would have to perform the song *I'm a Little Teapot* in front of the class the next time she arrived late. When she was punctual the following day, Mrs. Potts praised her and together they did a victory dance. Another example of humor occurred when one student was using her phone during class, which is against school policy. Mrs. Potts noticed and confiscated the device. The student complained that Mrs. Potts was ruining her day, to which Mrs. Potts replied that she was glad they had a reciprocal relationship. The following day, Mrs. Potts praised the same student for taking notes instead of texting.

## Physical Setting

Mrs. Potts' classroom was a spacious area with two rooms and a small hallway connecting the rooms (See Figures 11-19). The areas contained lots of storage, supplies, and artwork all along the walls. The physical setting of the classroom affected class in two main ways. The first is that since there were two rooms and one teacher, the students did not have constant monitoring from a teacher. When students had an issue, they would attempt to work it out independently or ask a classmate for assistance, before seeking the teacher's help.

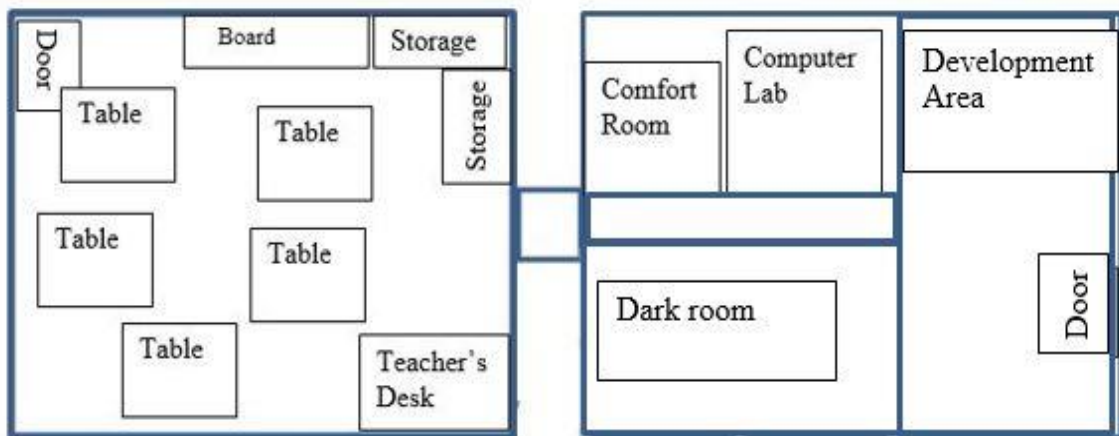


Figure 11: Classroom Map

Since the students were working without the constant presence of a teacher, several conversations typically happened at once. The behavior of the students demonstrated that there was a sense of community and friendship. For example, when a student would leave a table for an art supply they would ask their table mates if anything else was needed.

The second most influential factor of the setting was the comfort room and snack basket. Located near the darkroom was a closet with a coffee maker, refrigerator, and basic kitchen utensils (See Figure 18). Many students took advantage of the resource, storing lunches, drinking coffee, and borrowing the salt shaker. Atop Mrs. Potts' desk lay a basket containing an array of snacks ranging from apples to granola bars. The snack basket typically needed replenishing every other day. The students commented that they look forward to photography class for multiple reasons, but many told me how much they enjoyed the snack basket.



Figure 12: Main Classroom Area



Figure 13: Dry Erase Board



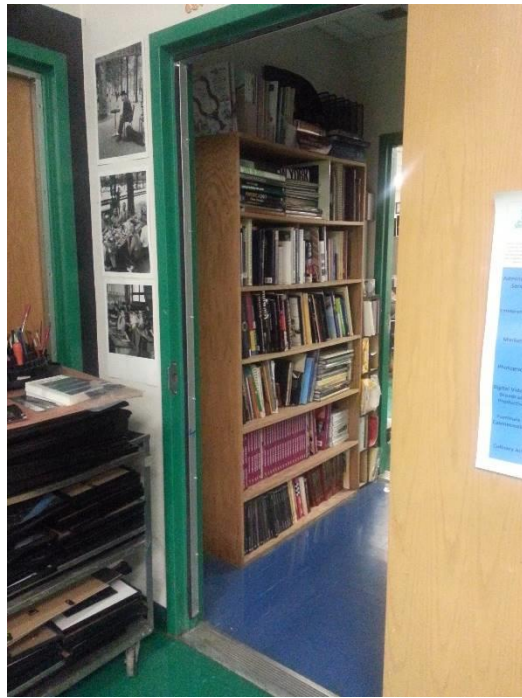


Figure 14: Entryway to Studio Area



Figure 15: Computer Lab Area



Figure 16: Storage and Entry into Dark Room



Figure 17: Detail of Classroom Decor



Figure 18: The Comfort Room



Figure 19: Development Area

## **Curriculum Implementation**

Field notes revealed two notable aspects of curriculum implementation. The first was that the focus of the assignments alternates between technical and creative, offering the students ample time to express personal meaning. For example, a project may be assigned that focuses on following instructions in the dark room. Then the following assignment might then focus on what message the photograph conveys.

The second aspect of curriculum implementation worth noting is the effort to develop empathy. This is done by assigning projects that ask the students to see from another viewpoint. One example was a project called the Red Couch, where students asked their photography subjects one of the fifteen given philosophical questions (i.e., what is love?). As students presented their photographs, they shared answers their subjects gave. The class discussed commonalities and differences between what each student had experienced.

Mrs. Potts identified attention grabbers as a key component in order for her classes to go smoothly. She emphasized that with teenagers there needs to not only be one hook to have them committed, but multiple hooks to keep them engaged. She added that once the attention is held, a teacher can put anything in their heads. Her strategy was to incorporate at the introduction of each lesson a personal connection, something to which the students can relate, in the project. She noticed that the students often connect personally with the artist presented. For example, when she teachers about artists such as Robert Maplethorpe or Annie Liebovitz, the gay and lesbian students can relate to the

artists, respectively. She also used contemporary media, such as news articles and YouTube videos, in addition to photographs of artworks when referencing an artist. Her goal was to get the students' attention, and hold it long enough to "do some good" (personal communication, October 20, 2014).

### **Teacher to Student Interactions**

Mrs. Potts has an open door policy enabling many teacher to student interactions. From the moment she arrives at school, through the last extracurricular club, students visit her classroom. Some students work on an assignment, or make up work, but many only socialize. Every lunch period at least seven students ate with Mrs. Potts, some not even currently enrolled in a class with her. The students would discuss current events in their lives, in the town, and nationally. They would ask Mrs. Potts her opinions on how to handle issues and what to do in the future. During these interactions, the common approach through almost all teacher to student interactions was humor. It was rare to witness a conversation that did not include a sarcastic remark from Mrs. Potts, or a giggle from a student. The students and Mrs. Potts had an active banter for nearly every issue discussed. For example, when one student claimed to be very sleepy and unable to stay awake in class, Potts joked that she would come to his house while he was sleeping and teach photography. In response, even the drowsy student laughed.

### **Student to Student Interactions**

Student to student interactions were by and large positive. There was usually friendly conversation between students during studio time. Pairs or trios of students shared lockers to store expensive photography equipment such as film and cameras. I observed one locker partner pair show consideration for each other by asking each other if the other needed supplies, or if they could be of help by returning supplies.

Turnblad, Stacy, and Leslie each spoke of a time when Mrs. Potts offered support, advice, or resources when they were feeling upset. Furthermore, each emphasized that her door was always open, and that she reminded the classes of that fact on a regular basis. According to the students, the student to student interactions within Mrs. Potts' class were friendly. Leslie recalled that she sat at a table with three self-identified lesbians who she shared stories, often of a lewd nature with, and Mrs. Potts often reminded the girls of where they were and at what volume they were speaking. Leslie jokingly added that her tablemates learned a good deal about lesbian realities that year.

## CLIMATE

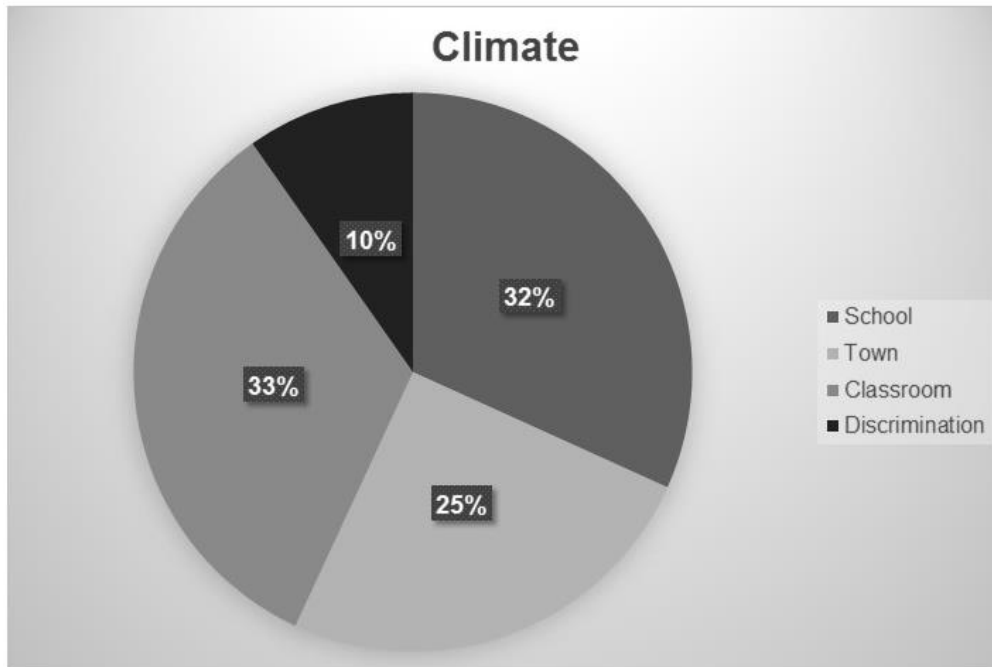


Figure 20: Subtheme Frequency for Climate

Climate, in this study, refers to quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations, social interactions, organizational processes and structures (<http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/faq.php>). Climate was divided into four subthemes: (a) school climate (32%), (b) town climate (25%), (c) classroom climate (33%), and (d) instances of discrimination (10%).

### School Climate

Mrs. Potts described the climate of Sunny Vale High School as fairly accepting, especially if the student is an upperclassman. She felt that students become more confident and less hormonal after the first two years of high school. The school is large

with over three thousand students and diverse in population with students from areas that are rural and urban, as well as students of divergent religious backgrounds. Potts remembered that Sunny Vale used to be colloquially called the Ken and Barbie school. Mrs. Potts shared that when she was first hired seven years ago, the school was “kind of white and elitist” (personal communication, October 20, 2014). In the last seven years, the school became “increasingly urban, racially diverse and diverse socio-economically” (personal communication, October 20, 2014). Due to the diversity in the population, Potts noticed a strong emphasis on multicultural experiences in the school with clubs, events, and celebrations. Adding to the diversity are the Mormon students at Sunny Vale. Potts describes the Mormon culture at Sunny Vale as “extremely conservative, and extremely dominant” (personal communication, October 20, 2014). Potts found that although the student population is fairly accepting, the main trigger of negative reactions towards non-heterosexual students is physical displays of affection. At Sunny Vale, the negative reactions occur not only to affections with same-sex couples, but also in heterosexual relationships as well. Potts emphasized that due to the arts and entertainment orientation of the community, the students are “pretty good at accepting people for who and whatever they are” (personal communication, October 20, 2014).

Students generally echoed Potts’ description of Sunny Vale High School as generally accepting of LGBTQ people. Turnblad said that although he had a few negative experiences, he felt lucky to be at Sunny Vale. Turnblad discussed the Gay Straight Alliance as a valuable resource for the school. He attested that the teachers were all open-minded towards sexual and gender diversity, even if they were not outwardly encouraging of acceptance.



On the other hand, Leslie found the perception of the climate of the school to be up to each student. She explained that how you act determines how people treat you, emphasizing that attitude affects more than your sexuality. Leslie shared,

I had people who didn't like me, and who bullied me. Then I had people who were completely accepting of me and would talk to me. I think it really all comes down to how a person of that statute feels in themselves. (personal communication, October 20, 2014)

Fortunately for Leslie, she found the school climate “fairly accepting for the most part” (personal communication, October 22, 2014).

### **Town Climate**

Like Sunny Vale, Greenville's climate was referred to as “pretty accepting” by the former students (personal communication, October 22, 2014). Due to its proximity to Las Vegas, there are many entertainers, dancers, casino workers, and showgirls that live in Greenville. There is also a high Mormon population considered to be notably conservative. This dichotomy causes the climate of Greenville to be varied. The students and Mrs. Potts agreed that it would depend on which area of town one was in to determine how one was treated. In certain areas, like the mall, public displays of affection between same sex couples would be safe and accepted. In other areas, like near elementary schools, it would likely cause a negative reaction. The former students noted that “all the queer stuff,” like Pride parades, LGBTQ support centers, and gay bars, are actually in Las Vegas (personal communication, October 22, 2014). Every former student

recommended an increase in queer visibility within Greenville, rather than solely in Las Vegas.

### **Classroom Climate**

In regards to classroom climate, the former students were once again in consensus. Each former student described Mrs. Potts' room as "super accepting" (personal communication, October 22, 2014). Stacy described Mrs. Potts as really easy to talk to about personal matters, as evidenced by several of her friends going to Mrs. Potts for advice as well as her own conversations with the instructor. Turnblad, in agreement, described the classes as "really pleasant," "really positive," and "the place where you could be yourself the most" (personal communication, October 22, 2014). Turnblad offered an example of when he felt more comfortable in Mrs. Potts' class than other classes. Turnblad came out as gay in June and had not seen any classmates until the first week of school three months later. Turnblad shared that he experienced trepidations wondering what his peers would think or say at school. He clarified that,

In her class, I didn't have any anxiety of who am I going to see, because I feel like if anything came up then Mrs. Potts would be the first to jump up and defend you. After coming out, walking into her class the first day after being open with you I was...it was a really good experience. I felt really comfortable. (personal communication, October 22, 2014)

Leslie concurred with Turnblad, describing the classroom as "feeling like a home, instead of an establishment" (personal communication, October 22, 2014).

## **Instances of Discrimination**

Sadly, outside of Potts' classroom, the students experienced unfair treatment and bullying at school. Turnblad explained that he never felt discriminated against by the faculty and staff, but has been by other students. In a group project for a geography class, one student refused to allow Turnblad to lead the project because of his sexuality, calling him a derogatory name. In the same class, another student informed Turnblad that because he identified as gay he was doomed for an eternity in hell. A fellow student defended Turnblad, but was also condemned to hell for associating with a gay person. Reflecting back, Turnblad seemed certain that if he had reported these instances, administration and teachers would have aided him. Concerned with his safety, Turnblad never told anyone at school about these events.

Leslie disclosed that throughout high school a common form of mistreatment for her occurred through rumor spreading. She mentioned several occasions where a girl at school that she tried to be friends with would tell others that Leslie was in love with her and stalking her. Leslie shared another traumatic experience where several male students pinned her against a wall and sprayed men's cologne near her genital area in order to give the impression that she had relations with men rather than women.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter detailed each of the five themes that emerged within the data collected. The themes were (a) possibilities for improvement, (b) perceptions of the LGBTQ community, (c) role of the teacher, (d) classroom management, and (e) climate.

For each theme, the subthemes contained within it were addressed and analyzed. Inside the theme of possibilities for improvement, the subthemes of advice to teachers, advice to schools, and additional resources were recorded. Within perceptions of LGBTQ community, the subthemes of prior perceptions, shifted perceptions, and current perceptions occurred. Classroom management included the six subthemes of procedures, discipline, physical setting, curriculum implementation, teacher to student interactions, and student to student interactions. Finally, climate contained the four subthemes of school climate, town climate, classroom climate, and instances of discrimination. The chapter outlined the experiences of the former students documenting the evolution of their perceptions of themselves within the LGBTQ community. This chapter also featured multiple charts reporting the frequency of which themes and subthemes occurred to illuminate the impact of each. The next chapter explains the meaning of each theme and how they answered the research question.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This chapter revisits the central research question and summarizes the findings of the study. The findings are then interpreted to make meaning out of the data to answer the central research question. This chapter then describes the significance of this study in relation to the field of art education. Finally, this chapter concludes with possibilities for additional studies that would extend this research further.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question for this study asked how one art teacher promotes acceptance for LGBTQ students in the art classroom. The study focused on how the teacher implemented the curriculum, managed the classroom, and interacted with students, and defined the role of a teacher.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Throughout the interviews, field notes, and photographs, climate was the most significant theme by a wide margin of 44% of the complete data. Climate encompassed the environments of the classroom, school, and town, as well as descriptions of instances of discrimination toward the students. The data described the climate of the town, Greenville, as fairly accepting of LGBTQ individuals, even if very conservative in its overall tenor. The town is an atypical juxtaposition between a population of Las Vegas entertainers and show girls versus a conservative Mormon population. Due to Greenville's close proximity to Las Vegas, most areas of the town are safe to show same-sex public displays of affection. However, all LGBTQ support centers and most social gatherings occur exclusively in Las Vegas rather than within Greenville. The interview subjects described Sunny Vale High School as fairly accepting of non-heteronormative behavior. As the school population consists of the children of both Mormon churchgoers

and Las Vegas entertainers, the school possesses a climate that varies in acceptance of LGBTQ identities, depending on the circumstances. The faculty and staff were reported to be accepting and encouraging, while some students of Sunny Vale bullied LGBTQ identified students. Despite the occasional bullying, the former students said they felt comfortable showing affection to their partners at school. Mrs. Potts' classroom was considered the most positive and accepting climate. Each former student attested that they were able to feel comfortable being authentic, reaching out for support, and showing affection in public. However, outside of the art classroom, each former student had experienced discrimination through verbal harassment, rumor spreading, and even physical abuse.

The next most popular theme was classroom management (23%). This theme involved six factors: procedures, physical setting, discipline, curriculum implementation, teacher to student interactions, and student to student interactions. Mrs. Potts' central procedure was known as her spot. When she stands on a certain floor tile, the students know to give her full attention. The physical setting was a large classroom divided into two main sections: a traditional classroom and a studio area featuring a dark room, film development area, and a computer lab. Discipline in Mrs. Potts' room was mainly handled through humor. Most inappropriate behavior was handled through banter between teacher and student. If needed, Mrs. Potts facilitates a private, serious conversation. To implement her curriculum, Potts employs an attention grabber at the beginning of each project and aims to hold the students' attention by using contemporary media and a theme that is relevant to the students. The interactions between students and teacher consisted mainly of humorous banter, whether it be a question regarding assignments, praise for a job well done, or discipline. The interactions between students were for the most part friendly and supportive towards one another.

The next most frequently appearing theme was role of the teacher (15%), containing teacher background, role of the teacher, teacher attitude, and future goals of the teacher. In this theme, Potts defined the role of a teacher as an enabler, an encourager, and a facilitator. She argued that some administrators consider a teacher's role to consist of processing paperwork and enforcing rules. The former students defined the role of a teacher as a mentor and friend, supporting students through hard times, and encouraging good work.

Next in popularity was the theme of perceptions of the LGBTQ community (12%), which occurred exclusively in the former student interviews. Perceptions were separated into those held prior to Mrs. Potts' class, perceptions that shifted since then, and current perceptions of the LGBTQ community. For most students, there was some initial discomfort with then becoming part of the LGBTQ community, but shifted to become more accepting of themselves as they received support from others. All former students are currently proud to be a part of the LGBTQ community.

The theme that occurred least frequently was possibilities for improvement (6%). This theme, occurring only in interviews, contained the advice that interview subjects gave to teachers, schools, and towns in order to be more accepting of LGBTQ individuals. The most popular possibility for improvement includes adding more local resources, such as LGBTQ centers, gay bars, and Pride festivals for Greenville.

## **MEANING**

After careful analysis of the data, this study concludes that Mrs. Potts promotes acceptance for LGBTQ students in several ways. The first method of promoting acceptance is through her curriculum choices. Mrs. Potts supports diversity of sexuality

and gender by showing students work by LGBTQ identified artists. By showing students artistic role models, it normalizes the LGBTQ identities. Students are then able to see people like themselves as positive role models. Potts carefully selects the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and Annie Liebovitz, among other LGBTQ-identified artists, which serves as inspiration in photography projects. The presentation of LGBTQ-identified artists may also educate students that are straight and cisgender about diversity.

The second method of promoting acceptance was through humor. Both field notes and former student interviews emphasized repeatedly the successful use of humor by Potts, primarily in instructional delivery, demonstrations, and teacher to student interactions. Humor in instructional delivery operated as an attention grabber for the students so they could better engage with the lesson. Due to humor in teacher to student interactions, a level of friendship was reached beyond a typical teacher and student relationship. Turnblad clarified that he and other students still respected the teacher and completed work, but also felt a special kinship to Potts. They also felt like Potts cared not only about the subject matter or their grades, but she also cared about the individual students, establishing a sense of friendship with each of them. Since the students felt a camaraderie, they felt comfortable seeking support from Potts like they would a friend. Because of the camaraderie, the students looked to Potts for support during especially difficult times.

The third method of promoting acceptance occurred through treating the students with respect. Mrs. Potts treats her high school aged students like fully grown adults as often and consistently as possible, respecting their wishes, voices, and holding them accountable for their responsibilities and actions. For example, her classroom management strategy of standing in her spot in the room, silently informing the students it is time to listen, gives the students the respect to finish their last sentence to their friend



rather than demanding instant quiet. Another example of treating students like adults can be found in studio time. Students are given the guidelines and deadlines of the project, but for the most part manage their own time and design their plan of action for the project. Mrs. Potts typically operates as a facilitator, a guide, and an encourager during studio time, rather than a micromanager or a disciplinarian. Students are aware that they are responsible for the quality and punctuality of their work, as well as their behavior during class. Because the students were responsible for their studio time, they treated others well stemming from a desire to preserve the safety of the space rather than following rules to please the teacher. This shift demonstrated a change from actions that are based on extrinsic motivation to an intrinsic motivation. When the students were intrinsically motivated to take care of their space, they took care of their studio mates as well.

The last method of promoting acceptance for LGBTQ students was to promote acceptance for all students. A key component to note of Mrs. Potts' class is that she is not only an advocate for students that identify as LGBTQ. She also advocates for the students that identify as conservative and Mormon. By promoting equality, she, by definition, did not favor one group. Equality benefits all the students. Mrs. Potts, the self-named Bully Avenger, would rise to defend any student being discriminated against, no matter the root of the mistreatment.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE TO THE FIELD**

This study serves to diversify the field of art education by examining the stories of several students who self-identify a LGBTQ. This is important because the field of art education is made up of a diverse population, including self-identified LGBTQ individuals, and they deserve to see themselves represented. This research also operates

as an extension of the multiculturalism movement in education that became prominent in the 1990s (Au, 2014; Banks, McGee Banks, 2012; Gorski, 2013). Smith (2014) describes the multicultural movement as,

...an inevitable feature of future school curricula in America. Dramatic changes in the makeup of the school population alone-to say nothing of equity policies-will make this undeniable even to those who resist change most vehemently. Sooner or later, practices of the schools must reflect the will of a changing population. (p. 13)

When Smith (2014) made this argument, the main focus of multiculturalism was looking at different races and geographical regions. However, I contend that multiculturalism should be extended to include the cultures of non-heteronormative individuals. This study expands the viewpoint of the field to see the stories of this minority.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

A future study would be beneficial to examine the effect of a safe environment on cisgender and heterosexual students. Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall (2009) argue that,

You don't even have to be gay or lesbian to experience homophobic bullying, you simply have to look weird or be seen as homosexual. Students begin policing their own behavior and that of others, on the lookout for indications of gender transgression. (p. 280)

Students can often be picked on for living even minutely outside gender norms, such as a male student liking the Disney animated feature, *Frozen*, or a female student who only wears pants and never skirts. When students receive reactions they may "begin to bend and twist, to create themselves differently, to hide, to enforce" (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009, p. 280). It would be interesting to see what affect creating a safe environment for LGBTQ students would have on these non-conforming students.

It would also be beneficial to explore the effect on students that fit gender and sexuality norms. Ayers, Quinn and Stovall (2009) report,

The good news is that this is not a zero-sum game. Making life better for LGBTQ youth will not make things worse for students who identify as heterosexual or for those with other identities related to race, ethnicity, religion, or language. Indeed, if we don't make it right for everyone, then we've made it wrong for everyone, even those who don't know it! (p. 282)

A future study should also focus on and interview heteronormative students on their experience of contributing to an accepting environment for all students.

Another possible study would follow the same methodology as this study but would look at elementary students rather than high school students. As younger students are at an earlier developmental stage according to Piaget (1955), it would be fascinating to see how students would react to accepting LGBTQ realities.

Finally, a future study could be conducted to examine the role of administration on creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students. The research could explore what policies, trainings, campaigns, and other strategies are successful at promoting acceptance for gender and sexual diversity.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined one week in the life of an art teacher promoting acceptance for LGBTQ students. The results from this case study showed that one teacher, by creating a safe learning environment, actually can make a difference in the lives of students. Through modeling respect, establishing relationships, and defending students

against bullying and discrimination, teachers can support students as they discover and develop their sexual and gender identity.

This case focused on what strategies the teacher used to create a haven for LGBTQ students, so that other teachers may better understand those strategies and become better allies. DeWitt (2012) calls for action from teachers when he argues,

This fragile student population needs support from teachers and administrators because of the discrimination they often feel when they are coming out to peers and family. LGBT students who are supported by teachers and administration feel a sense of safety in their school environment, and that sense of safety allows them to take healthy and positive risks, which builds their engagement in the school community. Students who are engaged in school are more inclined to succeed academically. (p. 10)

With support from the school, the student can focus on the content of classes, rather than concentrating on safety.

Since teachers' days are filled with tasks, questions, duties, and planning, it can seem like there is hardly room for adding new goals. Yet, even a slight change in classroom climate can affect the life of a student. Considering the heightened suicide rate for LGBTQ youth (DeWitt, 2012), an accepting school climate could literally be a matter of life and death. One student in DeWitt's *Dignity for All* commented, "You don't have to do everything. You just have to do something" (2012, p. 11). With small steps to adjust the climate of a classroom, one teacher can make a difference.

Designing and implementing this study has been a profound experience. I learned the effects a teacher can have on, and thus the responsibility a teacher has for, their students. When the students discussed the discrimination and difficult times they had experienced, they sought out support from their teacher. Their stories reminded me that

the role of a teacher is not only to impart knowledge, or provide opportunities to learn, but also to care for each student and work for their well-being. Because of performing this study, I will make sure that my art classroom is a haven for all my students.

## Appendix 1

### Mrs. Potts' First Interview Questions

- 1) Where did you grow up?
- 2) What was your childhood like?
- 3) When did you know wanted to be a teacher? How did you reach that conclusion?
- 4) How would you define the role of an educator?
- 5) Describe your process of creating and selecting lessons. Describe your planning and implementing process.
- 6) What is your biggest challenge as an educator?
- 7) What is your greatest reward as an educator?
- 8) Hidden curriculum is often used to describe what teachers convey to their students that never are on lesson plans, and are not apparent to the students. If your students were to learn one "hidden curriculum," what would that be?
- 9) Do you think your personal identity comes into your classroom? If so, how?
- 10) Describe your classroom management plan.
- 11) If you could give beginning teachers any advice, what would that be?

## Appendix 2

### Mrs. Potts' Second Interview Questions

- 1) How would you describe your school?
- 2) How would you describe the climate of your school for a LGBTQ student? What do you think they would face?
- 3) Is there a GSA on this campus?
- 4) How does this school handle bullying?
- 5) Do you think cyber-bullying is an issue here?
- 6) What resources are there on campus for the students?
- 7) How would you describe this town?
- 8) How would you describe the climate of your town for a LGBTQ student? What do you think they would face?
- 9) What, if anything, do you think could make this school a more supportive place for its LGBTQ students?
- 10) What, if anything, do you think could make this town a more supportive place for its LGBTQ residents?

## Appendix 3

### Former Student Interview Questions

- 1) Describe your experience in art classes with “Mrs. Potts”?
- 2) What would you say you learned, if anything, in her class?
- 3) Did you feel like you could be yourself in the classroom?
- 4) What was your perception of the LGBTQ community before walking in her class on the first day?
- 5) What is your perception of the LGBTQ community now?
- 6) If there are changes in your perception, what do you believe caused that change?
- 7) If someone were to come out to right now, what would you say to that person?
- 8) Would you always have said that? Or do you think your perceptions and knowledge has changed in some way?
- 9) School climate can be defined as “the quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes and structures. “ With that in mind, how would you describe the school climate at “Sunnyvale High”?
- 10) How has that climate affected you personally?
- 11) What do you think the school could do better to improve its climate for the LGBTQ community?



- 12) How would you describe the climate of your town?
- 13) How has that climate affected you personally?
- 14) What do you think your town could do better to improve its climate for the  
LGBTQ community?
- 15) If you could give any advice to teachers, what would it be?

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