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STUDENTS AS POLICY ACTORS:

THE TDSB EQUITY FOUNDATION STATEMENT

AND COMMITMENTS TO EQUITY POLICY

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Discrimination on the basis of homophobia/transphobia in many schools is an internationally recognised problem. The Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) Equity Foundation Statement and Commitments to Equity Policy (EFS) provides an explicit mandate to schools in its jurisdiction to address such discrimination and educate about sexual and gendered diversity. This research, which draws on the work of Ball et al. (2012), examines how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) equity work was being implemented in two TDSB high schools. In particular, it illustrates how some students were more than subjectively produced by policy, but were agentic policy actors who were integral to the enactments of LGBTQ equity work undertaken in the schools.

Introduction

Despite increasing awareness and acceptance of sexual diversity in many western, industrialized nations, discrimination in schools based on sexual or gender non-conformity remains a concern. The international literature illustrates that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals experience discrimination through a range of negative behaviours which serve to regulate and police sexual and gendered subjectivities. This discrimination is often compounded through LGBTQ silences and omissions in school curriculum and policy (Ferfolja, 2013; Bellini, 2012; Callaghan, 2007, 2009; Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Although addressing homo/transphobia in schools and educating about sexual and gendered diversities is crucial for the creation of teaching and learning spaces that are

safe, socially-just, and equitable, few education systems proactively encourage through their curricula or policies visible and explicit measures that enhance knowledge about this area of (in)equity. Rarer is any active encouragement for schools to position LGBTQ subjects in affirmative and celebratory discourse.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is one of few exceptions. Its "Equity Foundation Statement and Commitments to Equity Policy Implementation"[1] (hereafter EFS) marks the TDSB as a policy front-runner in terms of embracing the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirited, transsexual, and transgender equitable practices in schools, building relationships with these communities, and reducing discrimination against those who are gender and sexually diverse. Its educationally progressive approach renders its implementation in schools worthy of study. Thus, this paper stems from research that examined how anti-homophobia education and education about sexually and gender diverse subjects was being addressed in two TDSB high schools. Although findings from the research acknowledge the clear commitment of the participating school administrators, teachers, and TDSB equity personnel in implementing the EFS in relation to sexual and gender diversity, of significant interest was how those with lesser institutional power, that is, the students were key policy actors who through their activism contributed to peer education and school cultural change.

Literature Review

Discrimination related to sexual or gender non-conformity is an ongoing problem in schools in many countries. International research demonstrates that LGBTQ individuals in schools (or those perceived to be) are frequently objects of bullying, harassment, verbal and

[1] For more information on this policy's development and history, see Bellini (2012); Goldstein et al (2008); MacCaskell (2005).

physical violence, cyber abuse, and sexual harassment (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2009; Guasp, 2012; Hillier, Jones, Monagle, Overton, Gahan, Blackman, & Mitchell, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Hunt & Jensen, 2007; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Schneider & Dimito, 2008; Takács, 2006; Takács, Mocsonaki, & Tóth, 2008; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Despite growing "acceptability" in Canada, recent research entitled, *Every Class in Every School: The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools* supported by EGALE (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere), identified that homo/transphobia is a common phenomenon in schools (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Of all participants, 70% reported hearing phrases such as "that's so gay" daily (Taylor & Peter, 2011, p. 6); "68% of trans students, 55% of female sexual minority students, and 42% of male sexual minority students reported being verbally harassed about their perceived gender or sexual orientation" (p. 6); and "20% of LGBTQ students and almost 10% of non-LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted about their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity" (p. 7). Additionally, approximately two thirds of LGBTQ students and students whose parents were LGBTQ-identified felt vulnerable at school.

Similar findings are reported elsewhere. For example, an Australian national study (Hillier et al. 2010, p. ix) found that 61% of participating same-sex-attracted and gender questioning youth had experienced homophobic verbal abuse in 2010 and 18% had experienced physical abuse. Eighty percent of this discrimination occurred at school. Moreover, the research team noted an increase in school-based homophobic abuse since the first iteration of the study conducted in the late 1990s. Research from the United Kingdom found that 55% of LGB youth participants had experienced homophobic bullying. In the USA, 82% of LGBT student participants reported being verbally harassed in the past year and nearly 40% were physically

harassed (Kosciw et al., 2012, p. xiv). Studies also illustrate that teachers may be culpable of LGBTQ harassment and many others fail to support or protect LGBTQ students (Haskell & Burtch, 2010). Furthermore, LGBTQ subjectivities and issues are frequently omitted from, or silenced in, the curriculum or are pathologised (if mentioned at all) in policy (Ferfolja, 2013; Ferfolja & Ullman, forthcoming; Bellini, 2012; Callaghan, 2007, 2009; Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Peter, 2011). LGBTQ teachers (or those perceived to be) also experience homo/transphobic discrimination in their place of work (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013).

Such discrimination and omission serves to regulate and police sexual and gendered subjectivities. Many LGBTQ students and teachers do not feel safe or comfortable within their own school community and may endeavor to hide or "manage" their non-conforming subjectivities (Bellini, 2012; Holmes, 2001; Kendall & Sidebotham, 2004). Witnessing or experiencing discrimination and social derision mean that LGBTQ youth are at greater risk of suicide and suicide ideation, homelessness, school drop-out and disengagement, poor academic performance, substance abuse, and mental illness (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Bontempo, 2002; Hillier et al., 2005; Dyson, Mitchell, Smith, Dowsett, Pitts, & Hillier, 2003; Milkulsy, 2006). Thus, homo/transphobia is a problem and its nature of surveillance impacts the behaviours, opportunities, and choices of all individuals in the school community.

Despite the need to address this form of discrimination, many teachers feel ill-equipped to provide support for, or teach about, sexual and gender diversity (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012), commonly fearing potential parental or community backlash (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). Although the existence of policy does not of itself necessarily result in changing culture or behaviour, the provision of institutional support remains a critical foundation from which a school can work towards change. In terms of the EFS, its institutional authority and explicit

approach bestows upon schools license to actively promote LGBTQ equity and calls on all school community members to be involved in its implementation.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on the work of Ball et al. (2012) who position policies as complex sites of "contestation or struggle" (p.2) that are, in terms of their application, ambiguous, messy, and fragmented (Ball, 1993). Despite its inherently nebulous nature, policy is critical to initiate or support change, illuminate expectations, increase equality, highlight future directions, and address problems. "Policies rarely tell you exactly what to do, they rarely dictate or determine practice, but some more than others narrow the range of creative responses" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). Policy enactment in school is affected by a range of factors such as the school's history, population and location, the values and philosophies of the staff, its physical traits, and the external pressures related to legislation and broader policy (Ball et al., 2012).

Ball et al. (2012) posit that each site has a range of different policy actors who undertake, support, challenge, or resist policy directives, shaping the work of enactment (Ball et al., 2012). These various roles are dynamic, intersecting, and interactive; when combined with contextual factors they highlight the complexities associated with the policy enterprise. Taking these features into consideration, it is clear that the implementation of policy is not necessarily "top down," a case in point in this research; neither are policy actors passive recipients or automatons of policy directives. All actors in the policy landscape possess power and may activate it (or not). As Foucault argues, power operates on all levels and is "everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). Hence students, commonly positioned at the base of the institutional hierarchy in schools,

considered less powerful because of their child/student subjectivities, and often positioned as objects on which school policy acts to produce particular subjectivities, can also be influential policy actors.

As highlighted above, policy implementation is messy business. Arguably, this messiness is more apparent in the interpretation and enactment of policies related to equity and diversity, which are highly emotional and contested areas. Human subjects are positioned in, or take up multifarious discourses in relation to, equity, social justice, human rights, and so forth. These subject positions are unstable, complex, and contradictory and intersect with other aspects of an individual's subjectivity (Weedon, 1987). For example, as Goldstein et al. (2008) illustrate in their discussion of the tensions involved for teachers implementing aspects of the EFS, one's position in religious discourse may impinge on teacher comfort around, or commitment to, effecting such policy particularly in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity. Thus, policy that explicitly addresses issues concerning LGBTQ subjects is critical to validate and enable such (historically contentious) work to be carried out in schools to support progress in relation to equity. This work may otherwise face more effective resistance from administrative, parental, religious, or other parties who may (or may not) possess a narrow, conservative, or homophobic position on the topic (Ferfolja, 2013).

Methodology

Research Sites and Selection

This research was undertaken with the assistance of the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada/avec l'appui d'Affaires etrangeres et Commerce international Canada. In 2012, TDSB stakeholders identified a number of schools in the board's jurisdiction

deemed to be actively implementing the EFS in terms of anti-homophobia or sexual and gender identity equity education. Eight schools were informed about the study via email and invited to participate; two agreed. Although another two schools showed initial interest, they withdrew at the early stages of organization. It is surmised that this was the result of the protracted job action and disruption occurring in TDSB schools at the time of the fieldwork.

The two schools that participated had long-standing histories of academic and extra-curricular excellence and were well resourced, offering a range of educational and leadership programs and sporting and special interest clubs. Students in these schools were, in the main, contenders for tertiary education upon secondary school completion. The school populations had a high number of “white” students and the dominant home-language was English. Both sites were located in conservative, high socio-economic areas of Toronto where reportedly homes were “passed down from one generation to another.” Parent participation in these schools was relatively high and teaching workforces were stable. It should be noted that these schools do not reflect the diversity or multiculturalism present in schools in the TDSB and are not intended to be representative.

The teacher participants provided a historical perspective on the “situated context” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 21) of each school including its “micro-culture” (Connell, 2009) in relation to LGBTQ acceptance/celebration or discrimination. Both schools had histories of discrimination in relation to difference with LGBTQ teacher participants claiming that they did not feel safe or comfortable in the early years of their employment in the mid-2000s due to the prevailing heterosexist and homophobic climate of the school. Proactive school-based engagement in equity coupled with changes in Canadian society and provincial initiatives undoubtedly contributed to, and coincided with, what a participating teacher described as a “big shift” in the school’s micro-

culture. This perception of increased acceptance was reinforced by a parent/guardian of a lesbian-identified student who, despite feeling anxious for her daughter prior to her beginning Grade 9 at one of the high schools, expressed that "it's more positive than I thought . . . if she wants to walk down the hallway holding a girl's hand, there's no issue." This was reinforced by another parent/caregiver who asserted: "There is a move to increase tolerance towards others and decrease tolerance towards homophobic behaviour."

Participants, Methods, and Analysis

The research involved semi-structured interviews with school-based executive staff (2), teachers (4), and parents/guardians (6), as well as two TDSB stakeholders who had been involved in equity work for the board. Semi-structured interviews were used as they lend themselves to a more natural dialogue between researcher and participant allowing for the exploration of emerging ideas whilst maintaining a focus on the questions under investigation (Richards, 2009). Five focus group interviews were conducted with students from years 9–12 involving 23 students, 16 of whom identified as female and 7 as male. Information about the sexual orientation of the students was not sought, although during the focus group interviews four students indicated that they were gay or lesbian and a few publicly confirmed their heterosexual status. Focus groups were selected as the method of data collection from students as they may be less intimidating for teenagers than one-on-one interviews, providing "concentrated and detailed information on an area of group life" (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001, p. 6). Participants were asked questions that broadly related to the school culture in relation to gendered and sexually diverse subjects; the prevalence (if any) of trans/homophobia; the degree

and manner of inclusion of anti-homophobia education or education addressing sexual/gendered diversity; and its perceived importance.

It should be noted that all of the participants who volunteered to partake in the research were in some way active in terms of equity in their respective schools. For example, the students who volunteered to participate in the focus groups were predominantly (but not only) members of the school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), involved in the Equity Club or a similar social justice initiative, or had allies in these clubs. Although it could be argued that the homogeneity of these participants in terms of their investment in equity and sexual diversity created bias, their connection to, and awareness of, school practices and dynamics in relation to LGBTQ issues and subjectivities produced rich and informative data that may not have been available from individuals who were less aware of, or lacked connection to, these issues.

The data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis (Saldana, 2009). It is important to note that this analysis is interpretative and does not endeavor to identify a "right" or "correct" response, or even the most commonly articulated position among the interviewees; rather, through participant voice it provides a range of responses raised in the data. To maintain participant and site anonymity neither individual nor school names are used in this discussion nor are pseudonyms applied. Additionally, the individual schools in terms of responses have not been distinguished from each other. These decisions have been made strategically to protect participant identity through the reduction of narrative continuity; an approach often applied in research of a sensitive nature (Khayatt, 1992).

Description of the EFS and Support for Sexuality and Gender Equity

Schools within the jurisdiction of the TDSB are required to implement the EFS which identifies, “anti-homophobia, sexual orientation and equity” as one of its five pillars of equity. The inclusion of this equity area reflects a protracted historical struggle to include ethnocultural parity in Toronto area school boards (see McCaskell, 2005). The EFS, approved in 1999 (Goldstein et al., 2008), draws on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and provides all those working and learning under the authority of the TDSB with protections from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender diversity. It “requires that ideals related to antihomophobia and sexual orientation equity be reflected in all aspects of organizational structures, policies, guidelines, procedures, classroom practices, day-to-day operations, and communication practices” (Toronto District School Board, 2000, p. 13). Providing an inclusive curriculum in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity, removing biases and stereotypes in learning materials, ensuring equity in employment, providing counseling support and career guidance to LGBTQ students, providing teaching resources, committing to staff training, and developing productive partnerships with the “lesbian and gay communities and other communities who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity to enhance educational opportunities for all” (TDSB 2000) are all pledged in the document. Thus, the EFS is relatively comprehensive in its approach, serious in its intent, and “appears to cover a broad range of systemic and individual practices” (Goldstein et al., 2008, pp. 53–54) while demonstrating the TDSB’s “leadership role in equity and inclusive education policies and practices” (Segeren 2012, p. 19). A review of the TDSB website publicly attests to the institution’s pursuit of equity in relation to sexual orientation and gender diversity (as well as other forms of socio-cultural difference) through the provision of supportive LGBTQ messages,

resources, newsletters, advertising of professional development and educational opportunities for staff and students respectively, and the promotion of LGBTQ special events such as Pride Week. Thus, the TDSB articulates an explicitly supportive position for LGBTQ employees and students, as well as the LGBTQ community more broadly.

This position has been further strengthened by two recent amendments to legislation in Ontario. The first, the Education Amendment Act (Keeping our Kids Safe at School), 2009, mandates that all schools address and report any student behaviour that contributes to a negative school climate. As Kitchen and Bellini (2012, p. 448) highlight, "failure to do so, could have consequences for teachers, principals and school boards." The second, the Accepting Schools Act, 2012, amends "the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters." Importantly, it defines bullying to include "power imbalances between the pupil and the individual" in relation to sexual orientation and gender expression (among other factors), and defines bullying as inclusive of behaviour that may be "physical, verbal, electronic, written or other means." As Ball et al. (2011, p. 6) point out, legislation "increasingly impinge(s) upon school behaviour policies, with the effect of a juridification of practice." Educational policy is not developed in, nor does it occur within, a vacuum; it and its readers have histories (Ball, 1993) and it is enacted (or not) within socio-cultural, political, and temporal moments.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from the research illustrated the criticality of TDSB equity workers, administrators, and teachers in progressing initiatives that reflect the EFS in relation to LGBTQ equity in schools; however, one of the most striking policy dynamics was the work undertaken by *students*. The EFS goes beyond positioning student subjectivities as not only the object and

subject of policy, but also as policy actors; this is clearly outlined under the category of "leadership" (Toronto District School Board, 2000, p. 13). Ball et al. (2012) point out that, "policy is written onto bodies and produces particular subject positions" (p. 3), which may be variously taken up or resisted. The student participants who embraced the EFS equity position agentically assumed policy actor roles of "enthusiasts" and "translators." Enthusiasts and translators "recruit others to the possibilities of policy, they 'speak' policy directly to practice, and join up between specialist roles and responsibilities, to make enactment into a collective process" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 60). As such, they personified the policy and applied it to their everyday actions, through formal and informal activism. It is to a discussion about how students enacted policy that this paper now turns.

Policy Enactment Through Students' Formal and Informal Activism

The GSAs (or their equivalent) possessed high profiles within the school communities and student members were the driving force behind much of their activity. The groups originated historically in these schools in order to provide a "safe zone" and "positive space" for LGBTQ students where they could "tell [teachers] . . . their needs." Over time, with the support of administrators and committed teachers, the GSAs had become integral to the equity work undertaken. Typically, they were an important site for student activism and education (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Collins, 2004), and reflected the EFS principle of "supporting student leadership programs in antihomophobia education and equity" (Toronto District School Board, 2000, p. 15). The GSAs in these schools provided a combination of social, activist, and educative roles, and helped to build a more inclusive school climate. As a teacher explained:

> It depends a lot on the character of the students in the club that year. Are they activist driven? Are they more looking for that social kind of space? Are they

> trying to connect out to the broader society? . . . The key thing though is they know the mission is really to focus in on the school . . . the local is most important, but again it's student driven. (teacher)

The GSA members had the responsibility for running "a lot of major school events like Pink day2 where [the GSA] is very visible," and these clubs made a significant contribution to school events such as bullying prevention and awareness week and similar activities. The students organized school-wide conferences and assemblies around social justice and LGBTQ equity, which students from the broader school population attended, and also organized inter-school events. Other grassroots activities enhanced visibility and promoted understanding about, and support for, LGBTQ communities. These involved "making buttons to sell" and other merchandise that had positive LGBTQ messaging and raised awareness; painting other students' "nails and faces for anti-bullying week"; creating posters that portrayed a range of diverse identities; organizing a planned "food fair to raise money"; and organizing and hosting film viewings, among other things. These visual and material artifacts both underpin and reinscribe the EFS within the school context, working to challenge the dominant power relations inherent in the constructed normality and supremacy of heterosexuality. Interestingly, those students who responded to these artifacts by, for example, purchasing buttons to wear, or having their nails painted for anti-bullying week, were more than docile bodies; these events gave them a space in which to agentically participate in the enactment of the EFS.

The schools actively educated these student leaders, a principle stipulated in the EFS (see Toronto District School Board, 2000, p. 13) both "in-house" and by drawing on the expertise of TDSB equity workers. This provided them with the language and understandings

[2] "Day of Pink is a day of action, created when a youth in a high school in Cambridge, Nova Scotia was bullied because he wore a pink shirt to school. His fellow peers decided to stand up to this bullying, and hundreds of students came to school wearing pink to show support for diversity and stopping discrimination, gender-bullying and homophobia" (Toronto District School Board, 2013).

with which to discuss, and inform others about, LGBTQ issues. As one female student participant stated:

> The . . . committee is pretty much where a group of students get together and we talk about equity, the five pillars of equity, anti-homophobia, anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-ableism, anti-classism. . . . So we'd talk about it and do some activities. (student)

GSA members and other committed students also assumed responsibility for the education of younger students in the feeder schools new to the school. This activity was strategic, as, reportedly, many grade 9 students routinely use homophobic language and behaviours. This approach provided student audiences "with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours needed to live in a complex and diverse world" (Toronto District School Board, 2000, p. 14). Thus, implementing this education early in students' high school careers was an attempt to outline the school rules and ethos, to curb homophobic behaviour from the start, and to nurture the foundation of a more positive and inclusive culture beneficial to all students. Additionally, external parties were invited to support this peer-education, reflecting the "school-community partnership" principle of the EFS (Toronto District School Board, 2000, p. 14). As one participant explained:

> [The GSA members] present on their work and why they do it as volunteers and the clubs typically present it to Grade 9 cos we want the younger students to get into this equity type headspace. We target the younger students. . . . They're [the GSA members] setting what they think is the agenda on a social level . . . and we support them with NGOs [non-government organisations] and experts from non-profit organisations. (teacher)

The benefits of peer-education cannot be underestimated (Collins, 2004). Most of the student participants agreed that learning about equity from peers had a significant impact and was more effective than teachers' or other adults' efforts to challenge stereotypes, misinformation, and homophobic ways of thinking and behaving. As a male student commented,

"When teachers and the administration people go up there [on stage], the kids treat it like it's a joke . . . They make stupid comments . . . It's more effective when the students go up." Although there were no guarantees as to the effect of their presentations as highlighted by a male student who stated, ". . . we go into classrooms and try to talk to them and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't," the GSA students were actively engaged in policy enactment regardless of the fact that other student subjects also had agency and could challenge or resist the equity discourse in the EFS.

Particularly noteworthy was the fact that some participants, of their own volition, assumed the role of unofficial peer educators:

> I've talked a lot to my guy friends, and they're starting to understand more, over the last couple of years, they've understood about what they say, like now, not to say those sorts of things [homophobic language]. Some of them say something and then realize I'm there, and then I go don't [not] do it because I'm here, just don't say it at all cos it's a bad thing to say at any time under any circumstance. So I think a lot of them are starting to understand that now. (male student)

These informal interruptions and challenges to the homophobic language of friends provided an interpersonal component to what would normally have been considered simply another school rule or expectation. Similarly, a female student who openly identified as lesbian articulated how she too addressed offensive language with her peers, although sometimes it went unheeded. Despite a seeming lack of impact, it illustrated an informal means by which she tried to subtly enact principles of the EFS.

> *Female student*: I'll be walking with my friends and they'll say, oh you're so gay right? And it doesn't click to them that that might be offensive to me because they're your friends, you want to tell them that it's wrong, but you don't want to be the bad guy in the group to start an argument over it. So you have to let them know really sensitively at first, and if they insist, which has happened before—

> *Researcher*: So even thought you might say something to your friends, they keep saying it?
>
> *Student*: That's right.

Another student stated how she detested homophobic language and also addressed it with students with whom she was not necessarily closely associated.

> I'll address it in the hallway, especially if I know the person. Like . . . they were picking on this kid and I was like how could you say that? First of all you don't know [their sexuality]; secondly, it's not a thing to be ashamed of. It's nothing bad but you're making it a bad thing and it's really not. (female student)

Although the visible consequences of their activism were varied, and the educative outcomes were not always as explicitly effective as hoped, the fact that the student participants were consciously aware of the EFS and challenged "all forms of stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, homophobia, and violence against these communities" (Toronto District School Board, 2000, pp. 13–14) illustrated their role as policy actors. Their role was buttressed by the "professional cultures" (Ball et al. 2012, p. 21) of the schools which were proud of their explicit equity philosophy.

It was not only peers who seemingly engaged with LGBTQ equity education more when it was student driven; one administrator expressed how *teachers* were more likely to acknowledge the reality of homo/transphobic discrimination in the classroom when they were educated by the students rather than colleagues or external educators. In this way, the students provided teachers with insight into the reality and effects of homophobia. They could offer a more emotionally charged rationale for teachers to challenge homo/transphobia than yet another district-driven mandate that stipulated the promotion or policing of particular student behaviours.

> One of the best things that happens is when the students themselves come into a staff meeting and do a little skit about what it's like when someone says, "That's so gay" and when staff don't address it, how they feel. Those are so

> much more effective to have the voice of a student verses the voice of a colleague. (administrator)

Although many of the student participants felt that homophobia, particularly in the form of epithets and verbal put-downs was still widespread, nearly all participants suggested ways that the issues could be further addressed to promote cultural change. For example, some participants articulated how younger students admired older students and felt that this would be an effective method for potentially creating change if older students demonstrated socially just and equitable behaviours. There was a belief that, in this way, senior students could potentially shift the expectations of the student body. Others felt that teachers needed to address LGBTQ-negative language more or address LGBTQ issues more pointedly in curriculum. Critically, these student policy actors were aware of the dynamics of LGBTQ equity "on the ground" in their schools, and actively considered ways to address inequities and discrimination.

Implications

To build cultural change in respect of LGBTQ diversity requires activism and education that can be instigated by policy actors who have influence and who can contribute to a whole-school approach. The implications of the findings of this research are that students were, and can be, effectual policy actors for many reasons. First, they were embedded within the student body and were therefore "one of them" (in the teacher/student binary); this at times enhanced their credibility and power of voice enabling them to "teach" their peers and younger students both formally and informally about LGBTQ equity.

Second, they were privy to student conversations, actions, and attitudes and were more frequent observers (or victims!) of homo/transphobia than teachers who may have only witnessed these behaviours sporadically. This qualified the student policy actors with

understandings of the subtle ways that other students take up, resist, or challenge LGBTQ equity discourse, as they were, in effect, "insiders." It also enabled them to perhaps see pedagogical, curriculum, and social/interpersonal omissions and options of which teachers or administrators were unaware.

Third, these student policy actors were spectators of classroom interactions, including the dynamics between teachers and students. This enabled them to understand if and how the EFS was being enacted in classrooms via curricula and pedagogy and the extent to which teachers implemented the EFS behind closed classroom doors (a discussion beyond the scope of this paper). Ultimately, the immersion of these student policy actors in schooling dynamics rendered them powerful policy actors in the endeavour to create cultural change in respect of LGBTQ equity.

Despite the non-representative nature of this research, these findings have implications for all teachers, administrators, and TDSB workers interested in establishing or refining a LGBTQ-equity agenda based on the EFS in schools. It illustrates that, as part of a whole-school approach, students who are committed to LGBTQ equity issues and who have the relevant training and support can provide important additions to school-based equity teams. It is critical to note that adults are not the only powerful actors within schools; students can be equally as powerful, or more so, in educating their peers, juniors, and even teachers in meaningful and important ways to address LGBTQ in/equity.

Conclusion

In terms of gender and sexual diversity, it is critical that schools create safe spaces for LGBTQ students and teachers. This is a difficult area for some due to their moral or religious

convictions, their personal prejudices, their lack of understanding, or their beliefs about appropriate content. Incredibly, historically prevailing discourses of linking sexual diversity to abnormality, deviance, immorality, perversion, mental illness, and recruitment still linger in schools justifying negative cultures and serving to reify the constructed supremacy of heterosexuality. Thus, policy such as the EFS is critical to initiate change, although it is only the point of departure for enactment.

Although both schools via the broader study demonstrated ways in which the EFS was enacted, including the importance and resourcefulness of the student policy actors reported herein, it is critical to note that the data on which this research is based arises from two proactive and well-resourced schools in the TDSB; a larger study is required to examine the extent to which the EFS is being actively implemented across all schools and the ways by which this is done for best effect. As outlined in the beginning of this paper, LGBTQ equity in schools is a critical issue on which the educational experiences and outcomes for many young people depends. LGBTQ discrimination remains a significant problem which may only be curtailed if policies such as the EFS are consciously promoted and enacted by all school members, including students.

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