

Addressing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Issues in Teacher Education: Teacher Candidates' Perceptions

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Homophobic harassment and bullying are persistent issues in Canadian schools despite recent initiatives to improve school climate. Among the reasons is that educators feel reluctant or ill-prepared to address these issues. The purpose of this paper is to examine how teacher education can help make schools safer by addressing LGBTQ issues and homophobic bullying. After examining the issues, with a particular focus on the Ontario context, the authors report on a workshop titled "Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools" that they conducted with teacher candidates. The findings suggest a two-hour workshop can help teacher candidates develop better understandings of how to address LGBTQ issues in schools. Recommendations are offered for creating safe spaces in schools by developing ethical knowledge among beginning teachers.

Le harcèlement et l'intimidation homophobes constituent des préoccupations persistantes dans les écoles au Canada et ce, malgré des initiatives récentes visant à améliorer le climat à l'école. Une des raisons qui expliquent cette situation est le fait que les enseignants hésitent ou se sentent mal préparés pour s'attaquer à ces problèmes. L'objectif de cet article est d'étudier dans quelle mesure la formation des enseignants peut aider à rendre les écoles plus sûres en abordant les thèmes d'orientation sexuelle, d'identité sexuelle et d'intimidation homophobe et transphobe. Après avoir examiné les questions (et en mettant l'accent sur l'Ontario), les auteurs décrivent un atelier intitulé « La diversité sexuelle dans les écoles secondaires » qu'ils ont présenté à des étudiants au programme de formation à l'enseignement. Les résultats portent à croire qu'un atelier de deux heures peut aider les étudiants au programme de formation à l'enseignement mieux comprendre comment aborder les questions relatives à la diversité sexuelle dans les écoles. On propose des recommandations qui visent la création de lieux sûrs dans les écoles en développant des connaissances éthiques chez les nouveaux enseignants.

Jamie Huble, an openly gay adolescent in Ottawa, committed suicide on October 15, 2011. "I don't want to wait three years, this hurts too much," he explained in a message posted on Facebook (Boesveld, 2011). His father, a city councillor, recalled the torment that Jamie experienced at school, including having batteries stuffed down his throat (Boesveld, 2011). Jamie's story awakened Canadians to the daily dilemma of many gay teenagers; whether to continue attending a school that does not protect them or to escape, perhaps by dropping out, taking drugs, or attempting suicide. This incident prompted a public outcry, notably Rick Mercer's rant on the *Rick Mercer Report* challenging "every teacher, every student, every adult" to act now to "make it better now" (Canadian Broadcasting Commission, 2011).

Many were surprised given recent efforts to enhance school safety and reduce bullying. In Ontario, amendments to the *Education Act* (such as Bill 157 and Bill 13,) and multiple Ministry of Education documents have addressed these issues. School boards have embraced policies and initiatives designed to improve school climate, including character education, restorative justice, and peer support programs. If, as research demonstrates, the actions of teachers and administrators determine the success of anti-bullying initiatives (Colorosso, 2003; Safe Schools Action Team, 2008), then school climate should be getting better for all students. Yet homophobia and homophobic bullying remain persistent issues in most schools. The *First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools* revealed staggering levels of homophobia in Canadian schools (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere [EGALE], 2011). Sixty-four percent of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students did not feel safe in school (EGALE, 2011). Seventy percent of all students reported hearing, “that’s so gay” everyday in school (Center for Addiction and Mental Health, 2004). These results are consistent with Canadian (Center for Addiction and Mental Health, 2004; McGill University, 2010) and American studies (Gay Lesbian Straight Educators Network [GLSEN], 2007) indicating that suicides related to homophobic bullying have been on the rise in North America for the past decade.

Educators can make a positive difference, but only if they take the initiative to address the problem. Clearly they are not when 75% of LGBTQ students stated that teachers and administrators did nothing to stop homophobic comments and bullying when it was reported (EGALE, 2011). More surprising, 58% of straight students surveyed were upset because they witnessed teachers doing nothing to stop homophobic comments and bullying occurring before their eyes. (EGALE, 2011). Teachers often appear to be bystanders silently abetting the homophobia and homophobic bullying that pervades secondary schools. One reason may be that educators often think they are not knowledgeable enough about LGBTQ issues to address them properly (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001). Another may be that preservice teachers are uncomfortable addressing LGBTQ issues and perceive them to be controversial issues that may result in repercussions from parents, administrators, and the community (Dimito & Schneider, 2008).

Educators’ passivity towards homophobia needs to be addressed directly because it is crucial to developing a safe environment for sexual minority youth. Homophobic harassment, assault and bullying are strong predictors of developmental problems and risk behaviours among LGBT youth (Saewyc, 2011). School connectedness and feeling safe at school have been identified as protective factors for these youth (Saewyc, 2011). Recent American research (Swearer & Espelage, 2011) suggests that anti-bullying programs most successful when they are supported by parents and teachers.

LGBTQ issues, however, are seldom addressed in initial teacher education or ongoing professional development. One study revealed numerous prejudiced statements preservice teachers made about LGBTQ issues (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001). Many believed that sexuality was an issue for parents not schools; that there was no need to learn about LGBTQ issues as all teenagers and educators in schools are straight; and that LGBTQ students often had mental health problems.

Teachers already working in education receive professional development. This can range from self-selected workshops courses and degrees to mandatory inservice training provided by school boards. Some school boards offer effective professional development on LGBTQ issues, but training elsewhere appears sporadic at best (Bellini, 2012).

The purpose of this paper is to examine how teacher education can better address LGBTQ issues. After examining Canada's legal treatment of LGBTQ citizens, including two significant education cases, we report on a workshop titled "Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools" that we conducted with teacher candidates. The findings suggest a two hour workshop can help teacher candidates develop better understandings of how to address LGBTQ issues in schools.

LGBTQ Rights in Schools: A Legal and Policy Context

The emergence of LGBTQ rights is a relatively recent phenomenon in Canada. In 1967, Pierre Trudeau, then Minister of Justice, presented *Bill C-150* decriminalizing same-sex activity. Trudeau's statement that "there is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation" (Canadian Broadcasting Commission, 1967) signalled a significant shift in the attitude of Canadians towards gay people. According to Rayside (2008), this reduced an impediment to the recognition of same-sex relationships, even as "discriminatory elements remained" (p. 93). The decades that followed saw significant mobilization efforts by LGBTQ activists that contributed to slow yet incremental progress towards civil equality. For example, Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* did not grant human rights protection based on sexual orientation. It was not until 1995, in the case of *Egan v. Canada*, that the Supreme Court unanimously held that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was unconstitutional. Today, all provinces in Canada have some version of a human rights code or act that protects gay rights. Same-sex marriage was recognized in 2003 and was legalized across Canada with the enactment of the *Civil Marriage Act* in 2005.

Legal Battles in Education

The legal rights of LGBTQ students have been tested in cases brought forward by Azmi Jubran and Marc Hall.

In *Jubran v. North Vancouver School District No. 44*, Azmi Jubran claimed that he was repeatedly taunted, assaulted, kicked, spit on, and called a "faggot" and "homosexual" from 1993 to 1998. In 1996, he filed a complaint with the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal arguing that his school had failed to protect him despite twelve documented incidents of harassment in one year alone. During the proceeding, school administrators admitted that the school's Code of Conduct did not include sexual orientation and that their progressive discipline approach had not worked. As they did nothing else to stop the bullying or protect Jubran, the board was found negligent and Jubran was awarded \$4,500 in damages. The tribunal ruled, "There was evidence that resources were available to the school board to assist in dealing with homophobia and heterosexism in educational settings since at least 1992." On appeal, the board successfully argued that this incident did not involve sexual harassment as Jubran was heterosexual. Ultimately, the B.C. Court of Appeal upheld the original decision and Jubran's twelve year ordeal came to an end.

There are three significant points to consider in the Jubran case. First, it is absurd to suggest that harassment did not occur because the words proved to have inaccurately described the victim's sexual orientation. As Justice Levine of the B.C. Court of Appeal wrote, "The effect of [the harassers'] conduct was the same whether or not they perceive Jubran as homosexual." The board's defence ignored the four markers of bullying evident in this case: imbalance of power, intent to harm, threat of further aggression, and the striking of terror to maintain dominance

(Coloroso, 2003). Second, the resistance of the school board reflected a poor understanding of homophobic bullying by educators. The use of intimidation to perpetuate myths and stereotypes about homosexuality, while directed at Jubran, would have caused LGBTQ students to be afraid of revealing their sexual orientations. Third, while the educators adhered to their duty to report, the passive response of the school may have served to allow further harassment and bullying. As bullying is characterized by contempt more than anger (Coloroso, 2003), the inaction of educators may have increased the sense of entitlement and intolerance of differences among the harassers (Coloroso, 2003) by effectively reinforcing heterosexist social norms (Meyer, 2009). Educators became bystanders who abetted homophobic bullying by refusing to accept responsibility and actively seek excuses for inaction (Coloroso, 2003). While the Jubran ruling did not stop homophobic bullying in schools, it did signal to educational leaders that failing to address homophobic discrimination was contrary to the law and could lead to penalties under civil law (Brown & Zuker, 2007).

In *Hall (Litigation guardian of) v. Powers*, Justice McKinnon ruled in favour of Marc Hall's request for an interlocutory injunction restraining Durham Catholic High School from preventing him attending the school dance with his boyfriend. While McKinnon affirmed the religious rights of Catholic schools in the area of curriculum, his application of a general definition of the role of school under the *Education Act* led him to conclude that school dances were "not part of the religious education component of the Board's activity" and that the "restriction on Mr. Hall's activities is not proportionate." As a result, there was no reasonable basis for denying Hall access to "a fundamental [social] institution in the lives of young people." In effect, McKinnon had found "a way to allow an application that is in direct contrast to Catholic doctrine" (Oliverio & Manley-Casimir, 2009).

Both Jubran and Hall's cases illustrate heterosexism and homophobia and the impact they have on students in schools. In *Jubran*, the school board denied its obligation to do more in response to homophobic bullying, even resorting to focussing on the fact that Jubran was heterosexual. In Hall's case, the Catholic school board attempted to treat this as an isolated incident, as if Hall were the only LGBTQ student in their schools. Grace and Wells refer to this as, "the pedagogy of negation that is meant to demean, dismiss, or fail to protect LGBTQ youth" (Grace & Wells, 2005, p. 240). Both young men gained public attention as activists for greater rights under the Charter and human rights codes. Both cases alerted educators and school boards to the importance of respecting the human rights of all students, as the decisions suggest that the courts may be inclined to protect the rights of LGBTQ students in future cases.

Safe Schools Legislation

LGBTQ students have largely been absent from education legislation in Ontario, and much of the country. They were not mentioned in Ontario's *Education Act* until 2009. Under the leadership of Premier Dalton McGuinty, greater efforts have been made to recognize their rights and need for protection. *Shaping A Culture of Respect in our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships* (Safe Schools Action Team, 2008) gave voice to gay and lesbian students who did not feel safe, comfortable, or respected by their teachers and administrators. This report, in addition to being highly critical of school board inaction, revealed that educators were poorly trained in promoting the safety of LGBTQ students. It acknowledged that the issue of safety was complex, for both victims and perpetrators, and that minority students existed across the educational spectrum. The report recommended that safe schools training, including the

prevention of homophobia, be provided by boards of education, the Ontario College of Teachers, faculties of education, principals' associations and school boards.

In response to this report, the *Education Act* was amended in 2009 to address gender-based violence issues such as homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behavior. Secondly, Bill 157 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a) emphasized the duty of educators to respond, report, and record all incidents of gender-based violence in a timely manner. Failure to do so could have consequences for teachers, principals and school boards. *Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) further discussed the importance of creating a safe schools action team, anti-bullying groups, or a Gay Straight Alliance.

A Role for Teacher Education

There are indications that many faculties of education in Canada (Dimito & Schneider, 2008; Eyre, 1997; Grace & Wells, 2006) and the United States (Lugg, 2003; McGillivray & Jennings, 2008) do not address making schools safe for LGBTQ students in their course outlines, although it is hard to determine how much this is addressed by individual instructors. As the rights of LGBTQ people become increasingly entrenched in law and educational policy, teachers and administrators have an obligation to address LGBTQ issues and homophobic bullying in schools with sensitivity and seriousness.

In light of Ontario's Bill 157, which makes educators legally responsible to respond and report all incidents of bullying, it is essential that teacher education do a better job of addressing LGBTQ issues. This research study examines the impact of a two-hour workshop had on 150 teacher candidates.

Research Methodology

Context

The "Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools" workshop was developed by the authors to address a perceived gap in the university's secondary teacher education. In the absence of a discrete course on issues of equity, diversity and social justice, it was noted that many teacher candidates received little or no preparation in working with gay youth or with homophobia in schools. We developed this workshop and proposed it to the teacher educators conducting "Instructional Strategies." These instructors agreed to let us run this 2-hour workshop in their classes.

The workshop was introductory in nature, with a focus on increasing awareness and encouraging practical responses to everyday homophobia and heteronormativity. The first part of the session, on LGBTQ definitions, involved participants in a paper-and-pen activity of matching terms to definitions. Taking up the results was a means of clarifying understandings and dispelling myths. During this time and immediately afterwards, as facilitators we shared our personal and professional stories in order to put a human face to the issues. Julian shared stories of being a gay student and teacher, while Christine recalled how the experiences of her gay brother prompted her to become a GSA advisor. This was followed by lecture and class discussion on the ethical and legal duties of teachers to respond to homophobic harassment and bullying. This included suggestion about how teachers might handle comments such as "That's SO gay!" and incidents of teasing and taunting in class and elsewhere in school. Christine then

described the activities of the GSA in her school, and how GSAs can make a difference to school climate. Afterwards, teacher candidates in groups analyzed cases based on real experiences and presented proposed response to the class. We offered insights into legal and practical dimensions of the cases, with a focus on interventions that most teachers could be realistically expected to use.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was a survey in which participants responded to a series of unbiased questions (Lauer, 2006) at the end of the “Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools” workshop. The “Workshop Evaluation” consisted of 6 open-ended questions or prompts:

1. What I liked about the workshop:
2. What did not work for me:
3. One thing I will do differently as a result of the workshop:
4. How comfortable were you during the workshop? Explain.
5. Do you have any suggestions for the facilitators? How might they improve facilitation of your learning?
6. Please comment on the effectiveness of the following aspects:
 - a. LGBTQ Definitions Explain:
 - b. Sharing of Personal Stories Explain:
 - c. Responsibility of Teachers to Address/Report Homophobia Explain:
 - d. Gay Straight Alliances Explain:
 - e. Case Studies Explain:

For #6, participants were asked to use a five-point Likert ordinal scale to rate their perception of the effectiveness of the five components of the workshop, with 1 being “Not Effective” and 5 “Highly Effective.”

This data was then compiled electronically and sorted by question.

Participants

One hundred and thirty-four of the 150 teacher candidates in the six classes—a response rate of 89%; very high for the survey method (Berends, 2006). Generally, we address the six classes as one group. At times, we draw attention to differences between the three classes of secondary education teacher candidates and those in technological education.

Of the 90 secondary school teacher candidates in the three classes, 85 completed the survey, for response rate of 94%. As demographic information was not collected from participants, we made anecdotal notes on their characteristics after the workshops. Most appeared to be in their mid 20's, with approximately 60% being female. There was little racial diversity, with at least 90% being Caucasian. 40 of the 90 were enrolled in an optional course on Catholic education, which indicates that they were likely to be Catholic and likely to be applying for positions in Catholic schools. In Ontario, approximately 659, 392 students (32%) attend publicly funded Catholic schools rather than secular public schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

Of the 60 teacher candidates in the three technological education classes, 49 completed the survey, representing a response rate of 82%. Teacher candidates were preparing to be teachers of subjects such as building trades, cosmetology, hospitality, and computer studies. They were older than teacher candidates in other programs as they arrived with job experience in their fields. They were largely male (over 70%) and appeared to be predominantly in the 30's and 40's. There was little racial diversity, with at least 80% being Caucasian. 25 of the 60 were enrolled in an optional course on Catholic education, which indicates that they were probably Catholic and would likely be applying for positions in Catholic schools.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the research team borrowed tenets of grounded theory to provide “a procedure for developing categories of information, interconnecting the categories, building a “story” that connects the categories, and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Members of the team independently identified emerging patterns in the data while considering individual responses. Anecdotal responses were analyzed through coding and categorizing of key idea units as described by Creswell (2009). Two researchers and a research assistant independently reviewed the qualitative data. Following this process the key overall findings and broad themes were identified.

Likert scales (Lauer, 2006) were used for several questions in order to give participants a means for indicating the intensity of their choice. These results, presented in Table 1, showed a high level of consistency across participants.

In presenting our findings we include overall pattern of response together with supportive quotes that illustrate the themes identified through analysis of participants' anecdotal responses. This research design and format of presentation contextualizes the saliency of participants' responses, while also giving voice to their perceptions of the factors that affected the quantitative results (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

Limitations

While this research provides a broad overview of teacher candidate perceptions concerning a workshop on LGBTQ issues, the nature of the survey meant that responses were short. Also, the survey did not ask for demographic information such as age, gender, sexual orientation, which may have been factors relevant for considering participants' responses. In addition, while the satisfaction survey results suggest a high level of satisfaction, the questions were not tested for content validity (Berends, 2006) and the limited time to completed the survey limited deep probing into the attitudes of teacher candidates. These limitations are partly offset by the number of participants and the consistency of the results. A further limitation is that this research does not follow-up to check on the degree to which teacher candidates incorporated the lessons learned into their future practice.

Survey Results

The survey results revealed teacher candidate perceptions about their comfort with LGBTQ issues and what they liked about the “Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools” workshop we presented. The themes below emerged from our coding and analysis of the data.

Level of Comfort

One of the questions asked participants about how comfortable they were during the workshop. The responses, which indicated a very high level of comfort overall, were mixed between those who addressed the topic (28%), those who addressed the workshop (46%), and those who made generic comments that could apply to either (24%). Nobody indicated being less than comfortable with the workshop and only a few expressed discomfort with the subject matter, so it is safe to conclude that respondents felt a very high level of comfort overall. In the sections below, comfort with the subject matter and the project are examined separately, as both types of responses are revealing.

Comfort with LGBTQ Issues. These responses, combined with the general tone of comments overall, indicate that most teacher candidates were comfortable with the topic. Nineteen of the twenty-four who addressed the issues expressed very high levels of comfort, with two being reasonably comfortable and three being uncomfortable.

Those who volunteered that they were very comfortable generally broke down into three sub-categories.

One group focussed on their approval that this topic was being addressed. For example, one wrote, "I think there should be more workshops like this."

A second cluster discussed their educational experiences. One secondary candidate wrote, "I took sexuality in university, so it is not a new topic." Another explained, "I've taken many cultural studies and gender studies classes so I was pretty familiar with everything." No technology candidates mentioned educational experiences prior to entering the teacher education program. Three respondents noted that this topic was examined in other classes, particularly through presentations by other teacher candidates. Perhaps of greater significance, though it was only mentioned in one response, was the presence of 3 openly gay students in the technology program so that "dealing and working with them gave us a better understanding."

A large number focussed on personal experiences. Secondary candidates focused on openness and acceptance; e.g., "I've grown up in a very open environment, so discussing sexuality is no issue for me." Others focussed on their friendships with gay people; e.g., "I have several gay friends from university so I am very comfortable and open with this topic." While technology candidates expressed similar sentiments, several had very strong family connections, including one who was the "child of gay parents" and two who had an uncle/aunt who was gay.

Several respondents experienced discomfort for religious reasons. One teacher candidate, who self-identified as a devout Christian, was "not too comfortable," yet appreciated the information on LGBTQ issues and felt that facilitators kept her/his attention. A second, who indicated medium comfort as "Sex Ed overall is not my favourite thing to discuss," indicated that s/he was familiar with the terms, liked the cases and personal stories, positive responses to the workshop elements. A third wrote, "I am tolerant of the issue, understanding and against bullying for any reason, but the subject matter makes me uncomfortable to discuss in depth." A fourth teacher candidate wrote, "It was a little uncomfortable to hear that Prof Kitchen is gay; maybe this was because of my unawareness of people in this country openly talk about sexual orientation." Although this individual, who appears to be an immigrant, was initially uncomfortable, s/he ranked all but one workshop component at 4 or 5 out of 5 and appreciated the case studies for considering multiple aspects of how to handle situations. Three of the four were least comfortable with the discussion of Gay Straight Alliances in schools.

Comfort with the Workshop Presentation. The only people who expressed any discomfort with the workshop were the few who struggled with the subject matter. Otherwise, the responses to this item were highly favourable, with the vast majority expressing a high level of comfort. The comments below, from people who expressed being very comfortable, are representative of the group:

Extremely comfortable due to John’s and Carol’s personal stories.

The presenters had a great way of expressing themselves without being angry or frustrated about “going ons” in schools.

I was very comfortable as I felt the environment was accepting and understanding should I use the wrong terminology.

Very comfortable; the environment was casual so there were no rigid subjects being stressed, but there was still seriousness presented about the topic which I think is important.

I think that speaking about the issues directly rather than skirting around them is important and the atmosphere was open to different experiences.

Overall, teacher candidates felt comfortable with both the topic and the delivery of the workshop.

Feedback on Components of the Presentation

In addition to feeling comfortable, teacher candidates were also very satisfied with the five components of the workshop, as indicated in Table 1. In this section, responses concerning each component are reviewed, including suggestions for the future.

Table 1

Teacher Candidate Rating of the Program Components (by Percentage)

Components	Not	2	3	4	Very
	Effective				Effective
	1				5
Definitions	0.5%	0.5%	5%	22%	72%
Personal Stories	0	0	6%	21%	73%
Responsibilities of Teachers to Address/Report Homophobia	0	0	3%	27%	70%
GSA's	1%	0	7%	24%	68%
Cases	0	0	5%	28%	67%
OVERALL	0.3%	0.1%	5.2%	24.4%	70%

LGBTQ Definitions. Most teacher candidates (94%) were satisfied with the activity that involved matching terms with definitions, then taking up the terms in class. They appreciated the clarity of the terms, the opportunity to clarify misconceptions, the value of being up-to-date, and the differentiation between similar terms. On the other hand, a few were largely familiar with the terminology beforehand.

Sharing of Personal Stories. During the presentation, we shared our personal stories with teacher candidates. John briefly shared his experiences growing up gay and why he has chosen to be “out” as a professor. Carol about the homophobia her brother experienced in school and how this had motivated her to support LGBTQ youth in her school. Teacher candidates expressed appreciation for these personal connections. Typical of many others were comments such as “Appreciated stories from first hand point of view,” and “Put a *human perspective* on academic material.” For others the sharing of personal stories made us as presenters “even more credible” and “made the class a safe, comfortable learning environment.” Another highlighted the power of stories as pedagogy: “I respond best to storytelling. I learn better and remain interested.”

Responsibilities of Teachers to Address/Report Homophobia. Teachers in Ontario have a legal duty to address and report homophobia and bullying under Bill 157. This was an important topic for most teacher candidates, many of whom were pleased and surprised that this has been mandated, “We as teachers are definitely responsible...we should show support and help the students.” While the ratings were very high, one respondent “disagreed slightly” with our principled yet nuanced handling of this topic. S/he believed that we should have made clear that homophobic language is “completely unacceptable” and that any students using such language should be reprimanded.

Gay Straight Alliances. 92% found the presentation on Gay Straight Alliances (GSA), particularly at Carol’s school, to be effective. One teacher candidate appreciated the “clarity in explaining structure and how it contributes to school community.” Many expressed surprise and satisfaction that GSA’s were present and active in many schools. For example, one wrote, “I wish every school had this!” A couple wished for more information about GSA’s. One indicated that s/he now planned to get involved with a GSA.

Among the secondary candidates, a few were uncomfortable with GSA’s. One teacher candidate was “lukewarm in this area because it only puts you in the line of fire to assumptions (unwarranted).” This is consistent with the reluctance to become involved that is expressed by many teachers in the school system (EGALE, 2011). Another was uncomfortable because this issue is “still in the works” in many boards. Second, others viewed this as an important topic, but wished to have more information on the history and activities of GSA’s.

Case Studies. The culminating component of the workshop was group work on case studies. There were five case studies dealing with situations involving LGBTQ issues or homophobia in schools. Each case was based on experiences Carol had in schools. Groups of five to six teacher candidates considered the issues in a particular case and, at the end of the session, made recommendations on how to handle the case. As they discussed their cases, we acted as consultants and facilitators.

The case studies were very well received. They were seen as “application of knowledge that “provided information in context” and,” shed some light on particular scenarios we may encounter.” Participants also appreciated the opportunity to puzzle over their thoughts and feelings about authentic situations.

The main reason the scores were not higher was that they wished for more time to explore the cases. One teacher candidate wrote, “It was useful to talk about ours. It would have been nice to go over them all but it was still helpful that we could read all of them.” This comment conveys that, in addition to wishing more time for group discussion, they would have liked a more thorough debriefing of all the cases. Due to limited time, and the other components of the workshop, teacher candidates were rushed to present their findings; some groups in one class had a minute to present. Another liked the cases but said that it “felt like there were right and wrong answers.” The time constraints may have created this impression, or caused us to be more directive than we intended.

Suggestions for Improving the Workshop

While the comments were largely positive, there were also suggestions for improvement. Suggestions typically came from the secondary candidates, who wished the workshop was longer. Others wished for more resources or a slower pace. Others wished for more resources on “what to do” and “what to expect.” Among technology candidates, several people expressed concern that the 2-hour workshop was long, and that there needed to be a break.

Below are some of the main themes that emerged from the suggestions.

Case Studies and Stories. There was strong support for more cases and stories. Stories of practice were seen as informative and guides for practice. Some suggested more stories and cases in place of terms and definitions. A self-identified gay participant wished for more information on how he might deal with sensitive topics such as coaching extra-curricular sports. Generally, the sentiment was a desire for more time to explore cases.

Classroom Instruction. While the activities were viewed positively, a few suggested that there could be more variety in activities. In particular, a couple wondered if video clips could have been used to illustrate issues and offer other perspectives.

Learning into Action

The goal of teacher educators is to provide learning opportunities that will inform practice and lead to better student experiences. While it is not possible for us to know how this workshop will influence how teacher candidates will address LGBTQ issues or homophobic bullying, responses to “One thing I will do differently as a result of this workshop” offer room for hope. The answers for these open-ended questions can generally be divided into three categories.

School and School Board Policies, Resources and Supports. The workshop raised awareness of issues and highlighted the importance of becoming more educated about school board policies and initiatives in this area. One teacher candidate planned to “look into GSA initiatives at my practicum schools.” Others planned to learn more about Bill 157, investigate school boards policies, learn more about student services support, and learn more about how to handle inappropriate behaviours with school administrators.

Language Sensitivity. While new teachers have limited involvement at the policy level, we impressed on teacher candidates that each of them could make a positive difference by being sensitive to appropriate language. This message resonated, with 20% specifically addressing this issue in their answer. For example:

Do not let comments slide (i.e., that's so gay) not afraid to approach student to let them know that's unacceptable.

Be careful with the language or slang I may use inside or outside of school.

Focus more on gender neutral/inclusive language.

Practice in the Classroom and School. Over 40% of teacher candidates identified ways in which they can create more positive spaces in their classrooms. This included comments about the importance of creating safe classroom environments to addressing bullying in the hallways to explicitly addressing LGBTQ issues in the curriculum. While technology candidates focussed on classroom dynamics, some secondary candidates focused on curriculum. Some examples are listed below:

I like to think of myself as an open and inclusive person, but I now realize the importance of incorporating equity into my classes directly.

Do my best to make a point of addressing or incorporating LGBTQ subject matter and encouraging acceptance and instilling tolerance in my students.

Discussion and Recommendations

John Dewey writes in *Experience and Education*, “Teachers discriminate between experiences that are worthwhile educationally and those that are not” (Dewey, 1938, p. 33). They select “experiences that lead to growth” (Dewey, 1938, p. 40). These principles guided us as we designed the “Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools” workshop. First, we were careful to create a safe space for teacher candidates so that they would be receptive to learning about the issues that might be unfamiliar and challenging. Second, we sought to provide them with understandings that would contribute to the development of ethical knowledge in response to LGBTQ issues and homophobic bullying in schools. In this section, we review the findings in relation to these two principles that guided our workshop.

Creating a Safe Space for Learning

Educational philosopher Nel Noddings places caring at the centre of education. Ensuring that teacher candidates felt comfortable was a priority in our design and delivery of the workshop. Caring teachers are attentive to the needs of their students, even as they push them towards greater understanding (Noddings, 2001). Workshop feedback suggests that we were successful in putting teacher candidates at ease and helping them feel cared-for. They liked the straightforward presentation, factual information provided, “tangible and structured advice.” More importantly, they never felt personally under attack, which meant that even those who were uncomfortable with the material felt safe in the workshop environment. Caring also entails a balance between professionalism and “relations intimate enough for personal understanding” (Noddings, 2001, p. 101). While there is little scope for intimacy in a two-hour workshop, comments indicate that they appreciated our willingness to share from our own stories and experiences. We were conscious of the balance we needed to achieve that involves sharing

personal stories, but not to the point where they became the main focus. As several participants observed, sharing personal stories added a human dimension to the presentation and our willingness to be authentic made the environment safer for them. We took care to remain relaxed and congenial, as we did not want our emotional reactions to get in the way of their learning. The care we took with them was also intended to model the care they should give to vulnerable students in their classes.

On the other hand, we must consider the possibility that the workshop was too safe a space for teacher candidates. The generally positive comments on the topic, combined with the lack of animosity among those who felt some discomfort is interesting. Perhaps this suggests that incoming teachers are generally accepting in their attitudes towards LGBTQ people and open to learning more. Perhaps, there is a cultural shift in attitudes across both groups. If so, we will need to recognize this attitudinal shift and revise the workshop content so that the content and strategies are more challenging, even as the space remains safe. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that broad comfort and familiarity with the topic does not necessarily mean that they are knowledgeable about LGBTQ rights in schools. All of them need to receive ethical and legal information regarding their professional obligations in this area.

Developing Ethical Knowledge

Ethical knowledge is critical to the development of professionalism in teaching. As Elizabeth Campbell (2003), in *The Ethical Teacher*, argues:

ethical knowledge is fostered not by means of formalized codes and standards alone, but through a collective mission in which teachers become fully aware of their moral agency and of how their actions and beliefs have a profound ethical influence on students. (p. 114)

In this section, we consider the effectiveness of the workshop in developing ethical knowledge in response to LGBTQ issues and homophobic bullying in schools.

An Integrated Approach to LGBTQ Issues in Schools. While harrassment and bullying are safety issues, school violence is best understood when it is situated in a broader understanding of schools as part of an ecological system that also involves family, school, media, friends, and neighborhoods in the development of children's awareness of the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One of the limitations of many anti-bullying initiatives is that they address only one aspect of students' lives, for example school. An ecological understanding situates individual acts of violence within a broader system of oppression and discrimination. Research by Estevez, Jimenez and Musitu (2008) reveals that the success of anti-bullying programs depends on teacher commitment and a holistic approach that recognizes other factors.

The workshop, by situating safety issues within a larger ecological system, promoted a good number of participants to express an interest in grappling with the larger issues. For them, as aspiring teachers, this tended to be framed in terms of how they could better incorporate equity and inclusion in curriculum and classroom practice. Their comments on classroom and school practice suggest a commitment among many to modelling respect and raising awareness in order to influence the understandings of their students. They appreciated our suggestions of modest ways to make a difference, such as displaying positive space posters, and of broader initiatives, such as a school-wide Day of Silence. These are important first steps in developing ecological perspectives and may, in time, lead to more engagement with school and community.

Gay Straight Alliances. Teacher candidates were largely unaware of Gay Straight Alliances. This suggests a need for more information and more examples of how GSA's contribute to making schools safer places for LGBTQ youth. GSA's can break the emotional and physical isolation for LGBTQ teens, while also building a culture of greater acceptance. In Canada, the formation of GSA's lagged significantly behind the United States until the early 2000's (Rayside, 2008). Large urban boards in the Toronto area now provide strong support to GSA's, with several running workshops for educators on anti-homophobia. They also provide training for their staff on how to create and support a successful Gay Straight Alliance. Also, several of these boards host conferences for LGBTQ students, allies and educators.

One of the best ways to address teacher candidate unfamiliarity is to have teachers who supervise GSA's present in teacher education classes. This would help provide accurate information and dispel common misconceptions gleaned from the media. Carol's involvement in this workshop ensured that teacher candidates were provided with basic information, though GSA's were only examined during ten minutes of the presentation. Bill 13 requires all public and Catholic secondary schools to support the development and operation of GSA's. A case can be made that information about GSA's should be included in all teacher education programs. Certainly, it is important that resources be developed for teacher candidates and teacher educators.

Religious Issues. One of the important issues that emerged in the workshops concerned how to deal with tensions between freedom of religion and the rights of LGBTQ people. This issue manifested itself in relation to teachers' beliefs and the beliefs of students and parents. It was raised in the planned presentation, questions during the session, and on workshop feedback forms.

As noted in the findings, several participants disclosed a level of personal discomfort due to religious convictions. This discomfort was acknowledged in the workshop and it was made clear that they were entitled to their religious beliefs. We navigated through these issues with care so as not to appear biased. It was noted, however, they are also obliged as professionals to treat all students with respect. Whatever one's personal beliefs, a teacher has a moral and legal obligation to respect every student and prevent harrassment and bullying. Legislation such as Bill 157 was cited to reinforce this ethical obligation, while stories from schools were used to put a human face on the issue. One of the case studies involved a religious teacher who was uncomfortable meeting the lesbian parents of a student. The discussion of this case highlighted the ethical and legal obligations of the teacher. Throughout, it was emphasized that the toleration of homophobic bullying was also not acceptable based on the golden rule as practiced by most religions. While the workshop could not reconcile religion and LGBTQ issues, it did offer ways in which teacher candidates could respect gay rights without undermining religious beliefs.

In Ontario, the Catholic Schools are fully funded and run parallel to the public education system. Almost a third of students attend Catholic schools, which exist in a curious space that is both religious and public. On the one hand, these schools have a constitutional right to inculcate religious values through the curriculum. On the other hand, Catholic educators are obliged under Bill 157 to address gender-based violence in a timely manner and may be required to permit students to form Gay Straight Alliances. As a quarter of participants were Catholic, many sought ethical knowledge about how to navigate between values that appear to be in conflict. The workshop was helpful in distinguishing between different elements of the issue. Participants came to understand their legal obligations concerning harrassment and bullying, as well as that Catholic educators view homophobia and homophobic bullying as inconsistent with Catholic

commitments to respect and love. Efforts were made to distinguish between religious protection in the curricular domain and the need to abide by human rights law in other domains of experience in a Catholic school. Teacher candidates were advised that they could safely resist homophobia but that they were wise not to challenge the official Church position concerning homosexuality. They were also encouraged to learn more about the range of opinions within the Catholic Church. This balance was not satisfactory to all, but it is a useful guide for ethical judgment in a time of turmoil and transition.

In June 2012, after the workshops were conducted, the Ministry of Education passed *Bill 13: Accepting Schools Act*, against resistance from the religious right and Catholic bishops (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Nanato, 2012). Under Bill 13, all public and Catholic funded schools in Ontario must permit the establishment of Gay Straight Alliances in every school, students have the right to have their groups labeled as GSAs, and that school staff and administration must support students in the GSA. While it is difficult to predict exactly how this law will affect Catholic schools, enshrining GSAs in legislation makes clear to preservice teachers that their role is to support all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Conclusion

LGBTQ people in Canada today experience a much higher degree of social acceptance and human rights protection than fifty years ago. While teachers and students are increasingly accepting, schools remain places in which LGBTQ identified students experience considerable homophobia and bullying. Teachers play a vital role in making schools safer for LGBTQ students. Faculties of Education have an important role in fostering the understandings and competencies needed to address LGBTQ issues in school (EGALE, 2011).

The two-hour “Sexual Diversity in Secondary Schools” workshop we presented in a Bachelor of Education program is one example of how LGBTQ issues might be presented to teacher candidates. Our analysis of the results suggests that teacher candidates are receptive to discussion of LGBTQ issues, particularly when presented in a manner that is respectful and open. Such presentations, we suggest, should build basic knowledge, examine implications for safety and school climate, and consider how they as teachers can address this issues in both modest and significant ways in the classroom and in school. Teacher educators need to engage this topic themselves. They also need access to resources to support this work, which might include curricular resources and guest speakers. By addressing LGBTQ issues with teacher candidates, teacher educators contribute to help make schools safe and supportive spaces for all students.

“An inclusive education that incorporates queer ... and queerness” (Grace & Wells, 2006, p. 260) requires more than a two-hour workshop. For teacher education to be inclusive, LGBTQ students and curriculum need to be present across all courses. This would include, for example, explicit attention in areas such as equity and diversity, education law, psychology, and classroom management, as well as the inclusion of queer content in all subject areas. Many inclusive and innovative teacher educators are incorporating these perspectives into their courses. Workshops, such as the one we presented, ensure a level of exposure and engagement for current teacher candidates, while also providing teacher educators with assurances of teacher candidate receptivity and encouragement to advance LGBTQ inclusion in their courses. Over time, as universities reform their teacher education reform, we are hopeful of greater inclusion across programs.

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