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Queering Education: Creating Inclusive and Affirming Learning Environments for Sexually Diverse Students

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Abstract

This inquiry draws upon a variety of theoretical perspectives and leadership approaches, including critical and queer theories, and the transformative leadership approach, for the purposes of identifying an appropriate solution to creating inclusive and identity affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students. This inquiry provides insight that will help to further understand the experiences of sexually diverse students in the education system, while exploring strategies for creating learning environments that affords these students value, dignity, and respect. It is proposed that a transformative leadership approach, as it is grounded in social justice efforts, may serve to stimulate the conversation amongst stakeholders, including school leaders, with the goal of transforming the organization into one that responds to the needs of marginalized students, including the sexually diverse. The relevant literature and reflections suggest that schools are categorically heterosexist institutions that exclude sexually diverse students, rendering them inferior, while inflicting significant harm. The findings of this inquiry project have serious implications for the urgency of educational institutions to address the harmful heteronormative and heterosexist practices that are rampant in the school system, while holding such institutions to account.

Keywords: sexually diverse, heteronormativity, heterosexism, identity affirming, queer, equity, inclusion, leadership, curriculum.

N.B. This document has been anonymized to protect the institution of focus.

Executive Summary

While Organization Z is composed of diverse students, families, and communities that hold various identities and social backgrounds, heteronormativity and heterosexism continue to run rampant throughout the organization. The legacy of heterosexism and heteronormativity continue to permeate through current social, economic, and political institutions, including that of the education system. The research is rife with data that highlights the lack of inclusion and affirmation of sexually diverse identities and the amount of harm that is committed unto the sexually diverse community. This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) concerns a large school board in Ontario, Canada. The Problem of Practice (PoP) that will be addressed is the lack of positive inclusion, representation, and affirmation of sexually diverse identities within the organization. Recent data illustrates that the education system, which is colonial in nature, has failed sexually diverse students, as these pupils report and experience decreased engagement, lack of safety, fear, anxiety, depression, isolation, dismissal of hateful incidents, and differential treatment from educators and school leaders alike (Kosciw et al.,2020). This OIP examines data related to the outcomes and experiences of sexually diverse students and provides a framework that will assist school leaders in recognizing the urgent need to support this population of students by creating affirming and inclusive learning environments.

Chapter one describes the PoP in more detail, by providing a history of the experiences of sexually diverse students in schools, coupled with current literature that highlights the urgent need to address this problem. It is vitally important to be transparent regarding my own identity and positionality as a scholar-practitioner, as this has played a significant role in the creation of this OIP. The PoP is viewed through the lens of both the critical and queer theories, which views the system of education as inequitable, serving only the needs of dominant identities (i.e., the heterosexual). The guiding questions about leadership capacity and identity affirmation include:

1. In what ways are our current practices harming queer students?
2. What knowledge and skills do school-level leaders need to engage in the meaningful and critical work that will champion inclusive learning spaces for sexually diverse students?
3. What challenges are school leaders presented with as they work to create inclusive and affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students?
4. How can we reimagine the existing leadership approaches/practices and curriculum to be more inclusive and identity affirming for sexually diverse students?

These questions, along with an examination of the current structure and change readiness of the organization, will help to inform strategic implementation and communication of the OIP.

Chapter two identifies transformative leadership as the main approach in addressing the PoP, which is complemented by aspects of the authentic, inclusive, and culturally responsive leadership approaches. These leadership approaches will aid in improving the school experience of sexually diverse pupils by ensuring that the capacity of leaders and the culture of schools is not only improved but transformed. This chapter also explores the change readiness of the organization and its respective leaders, while also exploring robust solutions that will make the most impact for sexually diverse students. The preferred solution encompasses both professional learning and capacity building through a learning network with like-minded school and system leaders who will champion change. A combined approach that includes Kotter's eight stage change model (XLR8), Kumashiro's anti-oppressive framework (AOF), and Gentile's giving voice to values (GVV) model will guide the implementation process and change trajectory.

Chapter three outlines the change implementation plan, the monitoring and evaluation tools and methods, the communication strategy, and the knowledge mobilization plan. The change implementation plan is founded in the tenets of queer theory, transformative leadership (TL), and Kotter's (XLR8) eight step change model (XLR8). With stakeholders at the forefront

of the change plan, the implementation plan will involve ongoing communication, engagement, and collaboration with stakeholders throughout the process at the various stages of implementation. The monitoring and evaluation stage of the plan will also be executed with the same level of transparency and collaboration amongst stakeholders as we work towards improving the educational experience and outcomes of sexually diverse students. Furthermore, the communication strategy and knowledge mobilization plan will be an extremely valuable piece of the implementation plan, as the urgent need for change, along with building and communicating a shared vision, will empower leaders to invoke change within the organization.

This OIP presents an initial framework and plan which will serve as the blueprint as we work towards building school leaders' capacity and efficacy that will help them in fostering truly inclusive and identity affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students. Working to dismantle the institutional and systemic heteronormativity and heterosexism that exists in schools is an ongoing journey that will require time, patience, and a skill set that will help leaders as they encounter resistance that is met along the way. For this work to be not only impactful, but sustainable, all school leaders and educators must be held to account, as it is their ethical and professional obligation to ensure that schools are inclusive and affirming learning spaces that are reflective and responsive to the unique needs of queer students and their families.

Acknowledgements

This doctoral journey would have never been possible without the continued support and encouragement of my family and friends. To my family, who always believed in me, motivating, and encouraging me over the last three years of this journey, thank you. Thank you for your unwavering love and support. Becoming a parent during this undertaking has had a profound impact on how I viewed and engaged with my PoP. To my daughter, Paris, my hope for you is that you get to experience a school system that not only encourages high expectations of you and challenges you intellectually, but also one that affirms your unique identities, making you feel seen, heard, and valued.

While the last three years have been challenging, both mentally and physically, I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in this work and to help improve the educational experience of sexually diverse youth. This undertaking has not only challenged me intellectually, but emotionally as well, and I have grown both professionally and personally because of this endeavor. As I near the end of this journey, I remain humbled by how my own assumptions, biases, and world views have been challenged, questioned, and transformed. The experience of interrogating my positionality within the diverse, complex systems and structures that I operate within has been a powerful and life-changing experience. To all my former students, families, and colleagues that I have had the pleasure of working and learning with over the years, thank you for inspiring me to continue to advocate for an education system that sees the value of all students, especially the most marginalized.

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Acronyms

AL (Appreciative Learning)

AOF (Anti-Oppressive Framework)

CRL (Culturally Responsive Leadership)

EAP (Equity Action Plan)

GVV (Giving Voice to Values)

OIP (Organizational Improvement Plan)

OME (Ontario Ministry of Education)

PLN (Professional Learning Network)

PoP (Problem of Practice)

TL (Transformative Leadership)

XLR8 (Eight Step Change Plan)

Glossary

2SLGBTQI+: An acronym for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex people (PFLAG, 2022).

Culture: The norms, values, practices, patterns of communication, language, laws, customs, and meanings shared by a group of people (i.e., gay culture) (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Heteronormativity: The assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. This includes the idea that heterosexuality is the norm and that other sexualities are different, abnormal, or inferior (PFLAG, 2022).

Heterosexism: Enforced by institutions and the creation of laws, policies, and everyday practices that maintain heterosexuality as the norm for human intimacy. Heterosexism rests on the assumption that male-female relations are superior to any other form of intimacy, and anything other than heterosexuality is deviant or problematic (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Homophobia: The prejudice, fear, contempt, and hatred of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Homophobia includes misinformation about and prejudice against people who do not perform the expected gender/sex roles assigned to them at birth (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Identity Affirming: The feeling that one's unique identity and existence matter, is openly welcomed, and positively represented in their learning environment. One's identity is an integral part of the learning community and the words they speak are acknowledged as a gift. Stakeholders can bring their whole selves to the learning space, where joy and connection are fostered (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022).

Marginalized/Minoritized: A social group that is devalued and often denigrated in society. This devaluing encompasses how the group is represented, what degree of access to resources it is granted, and how the unequal access is rationalized (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Oppression: The discrimination of one social group against another which is backed by institutional power. Oppression occurs when one group can enforce its prejudice throughout society because it controls the institutions. Oppression occurs at the both the macro and micro level. Sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism are forms of oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Othered: Refers to those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society (i.e., that are other than the norm...such as students are male but not stereotypically masculine, and students who are, or are perceived to be queer). Othering allows dominant groups to uphold their own identity as superior and more valuable (Kumashiro, 2002).

Positionality: The recognition that where you stand in relation to others in society shapes your outlook and understanding of the world (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Queer: An umbrella term for a wide variety of people across a spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities. The term Queer was originally used in a derogatory way but has been reclaimed by people within the community. Many people embrace the term enthusiastically and use it to identify that they are not heterosexual or cisgender, without using specific labels (PFLAG, 2022).

Sexually Diverse: a term referring to those whose sexual identity is anything other than heterosexual (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, questioning). Sexually diverse individuals can experience emotional, romantic, spiritual, or sexual attraction to members of the same sex (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem of Practice

While educational institutions have aimed to increase their attempts in attending to matters regarding anti-bullying and equity, there is far too little effort aimed at creating and implementing practices that are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of sexually diverse populations. For many sexually diverse students, the school experience is rife with stigma, discrimination, and exclusion, as there remains a lack of meaningful learning and the absence of identity affirming practices (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022).

As an emancipatory project, my Problem of Practice (PoP) will systematically examine the experiences of sexually diverse students and how school leaders can foster more inclusive, identity affirming learning environments for these pupils. Furthermore, my PoP and Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) will address the importance of developing and supporting inclusive minded leaders, and the implementation of identity affirming curriculum practices.

The goal in addressing my PoP is to develop an OIP that will equip school leaders with the requisite tools necessary to create truly inclusive learning environments that afford sexually diverse students an educational experience that is rooted in dignity and respect.

Positionality and Lens

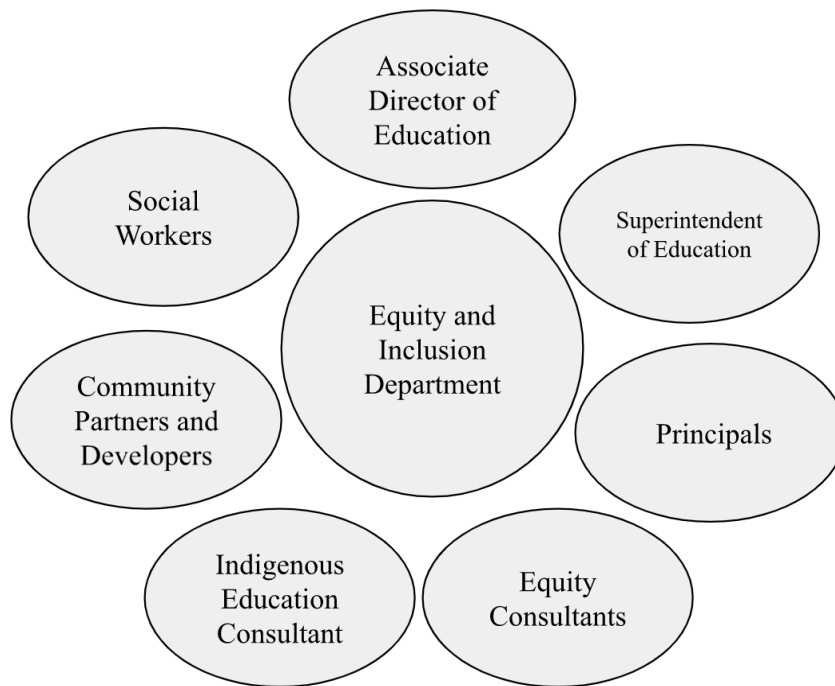
As a long-standing employee of Organization Z (a pseudonym), I will leverage my position as an equity and inclusive education consultant within the organization to invoke meaningful and positive change for sexually diverse students.

Role and Agency

The equity and inclusive education department is composed of several individuals, including administrative staff, community partners, equity consultants, and social workers.

Figure one illustrates the equity and inclusive education department structure in the organization.

This department provides support across the entire school district to implement equity and inclusive education policies, procedures, and effective practices that encourage and promote student success, academic achievement, and human development. As a department, we support schools in developing a learning and working environment that is respectful, supportive, and inclusive. Part of this important work includes building and maintaining strong relationships with students, staff, families, community members, social service agencies, and community partners to ensure that the diverse needs of students are met. This is particularly important as Fish et al. (2019) have found that when sexually diverse individuals are supported by various stakeholders in the community, they are more likely to experience better levels of mental health and are much less likely to engage in harmful activities.

Figure 1*Equity and Inclusive Education Department Structure*

My role as an equity consultant is quite robust, as it specifically includes: a) supporting the implementation of the equity and inclusive education strategy that has been created by the Ontario Ministry of Education (OMOE), as well as the equity and inclusion priorities of the organization; b) working with classroom teachers on instruction and assessment practices that are equitable and ethical; c) working with students to address the concerns and challenges that they experience as a result of their social identities; d) building the capacity of the organization to effectively serve the increasingly diverse student and school communities; e) facilitating training, professional development, and resource development for the system; f) building strong relationships with all stakeholders to meet the myriad needs of our school communities; and g) assisting families in navigating the complex system of education (Organization Z, 2022).

As an equity consultant, I have a fair amount of influence and agency in my organization when it comes to moving our equity, inclusion, and social justice efforts forward. Having the unique opportunity to work with several key stakeholders in the organization allows me to be an agent of change and ensure that the heterosexual matrix that permeates throughout our education system is troubled and ultimately dismantled (Butler, 1990; Cannon, 2012).

Identity

As someone who identifies as sexually diverse, many of my experiences regarding my sexual identity, both within and outside of education, have been extremely oppressive and harmful. The erasure of my identity and that of diverse sexualities in school settings is largely in part to school leaders expressing that they do not feel the need to intentionally create inclusive and affirming environments when diverse identities are not visible (Lumby, 2009; Payne & Smith, 2011). This is extremely problematic, as the identities of sexually diverse individuals are often invisible when compared to other identities, such as race.

I would also like to acknowledge that due to the intersectionality of my various identities (i.e., White, male, able-bodied, and cisgender), I have been afforded the opportunity to have many privileged experiences as well (Crenshaw, 2018). It is important to note that it is not my intention to speak on behalf of the entire sexually diverse population, as my lived experience is unique to me and does not encompass the very diverse and complex identities that exist within the 2SLGBTQI+ community. As a reflexive practitioner, drawing on my own background and positionality allows me to consider the implications that my personal experience brings to the OIP, and how this undertaking may be received, while also deepening my understanding for how knowledge is constructed (Cox, 2012; Finlay, 2002).

Philosophy of Leadership and Lens

As an educator, I feel a deep moral responsibility to ensure that the needs of marginalized students are met, and that their educational experiences are positive and affirming. With that said, I view the education system through a critical lens, which implores me to question the existing practices and structures that operate within the system (Freire, 2000). My leadership philosophy is firmly grounded in the critical worldview/paradigm, which claims that the system of education and that of other societal institutions are founded in oppression and discrimination (Scotland, 2012). When viewed through the critical lens, it is very clear that educational institutions, such as Organization Z, are discriminatory and harmful spaces for sexually diverse students. Kosciw et al. (2020) reported that 98.8% of 2SLGBTQI+ students were exposed to hearing negative language and sentiments about diverse sexual identities, causing a tremendous amount of distress and harm.

Those who operate from a critical perspective value social justice and understand that the institution of education is dangerously inequitable, as it privileges some and oppresses others because of the identities in which they occupy (Ryan & Rottman, 2007). Furthermore, viewing the world from a critical lens allows one to understand that the unique identities (i.e., sexuality, race, gender, ability) that individuals occupy, are in fact the strongest determining factors that contribute to success or failure at school (Ryan & Rottman, 2007).

Stemming from a robust and expansive theory of scholarly critical thought, my leadership philosophy is also significantly influenced by queer theory. Falling under the umbrella of critical theory, queer theory offers a critical approach that seeks to expose the historical, institutional, structural, cultural, and systemic pervasiveness of heteronormativity and the heterosexual hierarchy that exists (Capper, 2019; Meyer, 2007). Queer theorists argue that the heterosexual culture of most organizations, such as schools, control the behaviour of all individuals, regardless

of sexual identity, in both explicit and implicit ways (McDonald, 2015; Capper, 2019). Queer theorists are also focused on illustrating how all educators can and should become interested in the complex relationships that organize sexualities and the many ways in which knowledge is produced and represented (Meyer, 2007; Sumara & Davis, 2015).

While the critical and queer theories guide my work as a leader, the transformative leadership approach will also be referred to and referenced throughout this OIP. The transformative leadership approach encourages school leaders to act and foster learning environments where minoritized students (including sexually diverse populations) can thrive and be successful (Shields, 2010). Transformative leaders not only acknowledge the myriad identities in which students occupy, but they also commit, through their leadership practices, to eradicating the impediments that continuously stymie the most vulnerable pupils (Lewis, 2011; Ryan, 2006). My leadership approach is driven by the ethic of care and is firmly rooted in equity, inclusion, and social justice efforts, as I work towards dismantling the systems and structures that have repeatedly harmed and disparaged sexually diverse students in our schools (Ciulla, 2005; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Vogel, 2012; Martinez, 2014).

Organizational Context

Organization Z is a large school board in the province of Ontario that serves over 100,000 students, employs over 10,000 staff members, and operates over 200 schools (Organization Z, 2022). Organization Z is home to a diverse body of students and families who occupy numerous racial, religious, familial, socio-economic, gender, sexual, and other identities. In 2009, the OMOE introduced the equity and inclusive education strategy, with the intention of helping educators and school leaders intentionally identify, disrupt, and eliminate the biases, barriers, and power dynamics that harm underserved and underperforming students. As a result of the

strategy, all school boards in the province were required to develop an equity and inclusive education policy that would meet the needs of its diverse stakeholders.

Organization Z responded to this mandate, creating its own equity policy and strategic plan that would focus on the priority areas of mental health, equity and inclusion, collaborative relationships, and ethical leadership. The strategic plan is aligned with the mission of the organization, focused on advancing student achievement and well-being, by encouraging high expectations of learners, fostering an inclusive learning environment, and building relationships (Organization Z, 2022). While the goals and priorities of Organization Z have been updated to ensure that equity is a priority, the daily operation of the organization is seemingly ill equipped to effectively implement the given priorities. With that said, there is also misalignment and incongruence between the priorities of the organization and what is taking place at the grassroots level in schools and classrooms (Nadler & Tushman, 1999).

Upon further investigation of the various contexts of the organization, the political, economic, social/cultural, and policy dynamics are worth examining.

Political

At the macro level, the political landscape plays a significant role in decision making for many organizations and their respective school leaders, especially regarding matters about diverse sexualities and gender identities. To avoid public outrage and controversy, many leaders and educators are reluctant to move forward with the explicit inclusion and instruction of diverse sexualities in their schools (Macgillivray, 2000; Payne & Smith, 2011). To make matters worse, when current government mandates do not align with the goals and objectives of the organization, fear is often instilled in stakeholders to not challenge or deviate from the status quo, even when it is for the greater good of the organization (Payne & Smith, 2011).

Economic

In terms of fiscal resources, Organization Z has yet to provide sufficient funding to support equity and inclusion initiatives, especially regarding diverse sexualities. Additional funds are needed to provide system and school leaders with professional learning/training, for more staff to be hired in the equity and inclusive education department, to purchase inclusive resources and learning materials that can be used in classrooms, and for more research to be conducted on the needs of sexually diverse students (Kosciw et al., 2020). Furthermore, the organization must also intentionally work with vendors that provide identity affirming and culturally relevant resources and learning materials.

Social/Cultural

At the micro level, the cultural and religious beliefs of school leaders continue to be a significant barrier to the inclusion of diverse sexualities in schools, as they often contradict equity and inclusion priorities (Goldstein et al., 2008). Nonetheless, the culture of the organization does not provide educators with the requisite support that is needed to engage with content that may be challenged. Consequently, many leaders and administrators engage in discreet social justice leadership practices for fear of reprisal (Ryan & Tuters, 2017).

Equity/Policy

While the organization has created equity and inclusion goals, they are yet to be realized in part to the lack of funding, support, and resources that are allocated to achieving these priorities. Oftentimes, certain inclusion efforts and initiatives are prioritized over others within the organization, which while extremely important, seemingly diminishes the focus on the needs of sexually diverse students. Furthermore, the equity and inclusion policies that are in place are extremely vague and general, relying heavily on ambiguous language that does not explicitly

name and address the identities that are listed as protected grounds of discrimination (Ontario Human Rights Code, 1962). Russell et al. (2010) explains that creating inclusive and supportive learning environments is best achieved through specific policies and strategies that specifically identify categories of students most likely to experience bullying and harassment. Furthermore, the organization currently lacks a clear plan of action or strategy that supports and empowers sexually diverse students, which is what my OIP plans to address.

Frameworks and Worldview

Despite equity, inclusion, collaboration, and building relationships being identified as priorities of the school board, Organization Z operates under the guidance of the transactional bureaucratic, and political leadership approaches, alongside the structural functionalist worldview. These above approaches are in stark contrast to how an educational organization should seek to build a community that is grounded in building relationships, collaboration, and social justice.

Bureaucratic Approach

As a leadership style that adheres to hierarchical structures, the bureaucratic approach expects employees to be compliant, by following strict rules and lines of authority (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). By emphasizing speed, reliability, and regulation, this approach often ignores dynamic human responses to the organization, eroding and stifling forms of positive organizational behaviours that may address inequities (Morgan, 2006). While individuals within the organization may strive to implement change, such as creating more inclusive learning environments, professional bureaucracies are slow when responding to change, frustrating the efforts of critically minded leaders who are engaged in emancipatory social justice work (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Morgan, 2006).

Political Approach

Much like the bureaucratic leadership approach, the political approach is also grounded in hierarchical structures that are entrenched in authority and power (Bryson & Kelley, 1978). The political leadership approach ensures that the goals, structure, and policies of an organization emerge from an ongoing process of bargaining and negotiation, which is quite problematic since the human rights and well-being of students is not something that should have to be bargained or negotiated for (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Within the organization, stakeholder input is rarely ever sought after, and decisions are largely made in the absence of any consultations with stakeholders. This is especially true as it pertains to marginalized stakeholders whose voices are often excluded from policy development and strategic directions that directly impact them and their respective communities (Cawsey et al., 2020).

Transactional Approach

Organization Z is also heavily influenced by the transactional leadership approach, which focuses on exchanges between stakeholders. Through two levels of exchanges, contingent reward and management-by-exception, transactional leaders are motivated by rewarding and punishing stakeholders, as they prioritize maintaining the status quo (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013; Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Contingent reward has been the most used type of exchange amongst stakeholders within Organization Z, as system leaders inform staff of their expectations, and more importantly, that their performance will result in either reward or punishment (Avci, 2015).

The bureaucratic, political, and transactional leadership approaches are contrary to how my PoP must be addressed, as it must be centered around building relationships, collaboration, leveraging marginalized voices, and understanding the lived experience of students. It is quite

apparent that in an environment that is grounded in bureaucracy, politics, and compliance, school leaders would be reluctant to engage in equity work that is challenging both for the organization and the communities it serves.

Structural Functionalist Worldview

Organization Z is influenced by a structural functionalist worldview, which is precisely grounded in bureaucracy, positivism, and top-down tiered leadership (Capper, 2019). Structural functionalists argue that bureaucracy is in the best interests of the organization and its stakeholders, which is also understood as social regulation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hartley, 2010). Structural functionalist organizations are concerned with retaining the status quo, and achieving consensus, cohesion, and solidarity (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This worldview also neglects the idea that inequity is a problem within organizations and society, undermining the significance of equity and inclusion (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Furthermore, structural functionalist organizations, such as Organization Z, treat everyone the same, regardless of need, rather than treating students differently based on their lived experience. To improve the school experience of all students, leaders must move beyond merely providing students with equal opportunity, and instead acknowledge and support the unique identities and needs of pupils (Capper, 2019). Educational institutions, such as Organization Z, are culpable in perpetuating the myth of meritocracy, which places a great deal of importance on individual initiative, innovation, and merit (Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2017). The idea of meritocracy is extremely flawed, as it ignores the fact that the systems and structures of society have been designed to benefit some populations, at the expense of others (Guttek, 2013).

For far too long, Organization Z has remained silent on issues and topics that pertain to equity and sexual identity, which has caused a tremendous amount of harm for many students.

DePalma and Atkinson (2006) explain that the structures in schools that support heterosexuality as normal and other sexualities as deviant, maintain not only the existing practices and culture, but also exclude narratives of sexual diversity from official discourse. While leaders within Organization Z have claimed to ensure that the rights of all students are to be respected and upheld, many leaders exercise no sense of urgency or responsibility in doing so, especially when it comes to eliminating the systemic impediments that continue to wreak havoc in the lives of sexually diverse and other marginalized populations (Gutek, 2013). My leadership philosophy and OIP goals are inspired by the current state of my organization when it comes to actualizing the equity and inclusion goals and priorities set forth by the director of education.

Leadership Problem of Practice

From its inception, the institution of education has been, and remains inherently heterosexist, privileging heterosexuality while rendering other forms of sexuality as inferior. There are many factors and phenomena that significantly contribute to and influence the PoP, including the institutionalization and normalization of heterosexuality in our classrooms, schools, and all other social contexts (Pascoe, 2007; DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Butler, 1999). The current systems and structures that are in place within the education system, maintain heteronormativity and the continued oppression and erasure of diverse sexual identities (Gorski, 2016; Theoharis, 2007).

Queer theorists argue that institutions, such as Organization Z perpetuate gender and sexuality binaries, which both maintain and fuel the discrimination and inequities that exist for sexually diverse populations. When it comes to the PoP, queer theory provides a critical framework for understanding and addressing the ways in which schools can be discriminatory and harmful spaces for sexually diverse students. Queer theory challenges traditional

assumptions about sexuality and aims to resist and dismantle the oppressive binary ideologies that operate within schools, with the goal of creating equitable learning environments and opportunities for sexually diverse individuals. Through resistance and activism, queer theory calls on school leaders to advocate for professional learning opportunities, policy changes, and inclusive and affirming curriculum. However, colonial ideologies continue to permeate throughout the education system, which ultimately values hierarchy, heteronormativity, and maintaining the status quo (Pascoe, 2007).

An ongoing and deeply concerning issue within Organization Z is the discriminatory and dehumanizing experiences of sexually diverse students in schools. When compared to their heterosexual peers, sexually diverse students reported that they were more likely to not enjoy school, be excluded, or feel that school was not a safe and inclusive space (Peter et al., 2021; Organization Z, 2021). While Organization Z has the best of intentions by increasing efforts in matters regarding anti-bullying and diversity, there is a significant gap in understanding as it pertains to dismantling the oppressive structures and practices that engender continued harm against sexually diverse students.

The PoP that will be addressed is the lack of inclusion, representation, and affirmation of sexually diverse students in Organization Z. My POP and OIP will address the importance of developing equity minded school leaders who support the implementation of identity affirming practices, and inclusive school policies for sexually diverse populations.

School leaders can have a significant impact on creating inclusive and identity affirming learning environments for queer students, where identity development is fostered, and the humanity of students is honoured (Sausa, 2005). Currently, school leaders lack capacity in terms of building on their knowledge and developing their practice in the areas of equity, inclusion,

and identity affirmation of sexually diverse students. School leaders play a critical role in creating positive and inclusive school climates for sexually diverse populations and can have a significant effect on the culture of the school community (Boyland et al., 2016; Macgillvary, 2009). However, despite this, Pollock et al. (2020) found that only 43% of school leaders reported that their work is influenced by the OME's equity and inclusive education strategy, which requires all schools to intentionally foster inclusive learning environments that are free from discrimination and harm (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The demands on school leaders are partly to blame for the lack of meaningful engagement with equity and inclusion efforts, as there are multiple accountabilities and competing priorities that school leaders must contend with daily (Pollock et al., 2014). Coupled with the lack of visible difference, and internal/external pressures (i.e., various duties, religious freedom, political landscape), school leaders are being pulled in various directions at any given time, which has resulted in many leaders feeling that equity work is not germane to their role (Pollock et al., 2014).

In addressing the PoP, one of the challenges that is presented when attempting to interrupt and disrupt the heteronormative and exclusive practices that have entrenched our educational system is the threat that it places on the existing model of education (Gutek, 2013). For many, this is an uncomfortable concept to grapple with, as the education system they are familiar with and have supported for years, is being challenged and asked to undergo major changes (Giansen & Bonaker, 2003). For many, simply stating that schools are inclusive spaces for all and voicing their support of equity and inclusion is enough. Unfortunately, statements that include the word *all*, are often presented as a mere catchphrase that serves to maintain the status quo and hide the underlying marginalization and heterosexism that exists (Buchanan-Rivera, 2021).

Another challenge that is presented when addressing the PoP is the idea that the inclusion of various sexual identities in the classroom is a form of indoctrination or promotion of an alternative and sinister lifestyle. Many conservative supporters of this idea believe that schools should assume only academic responsibilities as their primary function and not engage with matters regarding social change (Giansen & Bonaker, 2003). These supporters feel that there is no room for equity education in our schools, as it takes time away from valuable instruction, which ultimately renders social justice and inclusion topics as invaluable and inferior (Giansen & Bonaker, 2003). Regarding diverse sexualities, conservatives argue that same-sex inclusion in education is a form of social experimentation, threatens tradition, so-called childhood innocence, and is disruptive to how society should function (Robinson, 2008; Gutek, 2013). However, research shows that students not only want to learn about their identities and those of their peers, but that they benefit from it as well (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Robinson, 2008; Sears, 1999). As adults, we hold on so tightly to the concept of childhood innocence because we fear the unknown and find comfort in being in control. In many schools, heteronormativity operates unquestioned, only acknowledged when the boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality are challenged, or when heteronormative constructions are expressed in a way that deviates from the norm (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Donelson & Rogers, 2004; Robinson, 2008; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Our students are more open minded than we think and if we share the realities of our world with them, they will generally respond positively.

Furthermore, school leaders have expressed that they are reluctant to attend to the inclusion of sexually diverse identities and topics for a variety of additional reasons. First, Lugg (2003) explains that the resistance surrounding 2SLGBTQI+ inclusion in schools has evolved from a history of paternalism that is rooted in school leadership that is mostly male,

heterosexual, and homophobic (Payne & Smith, 2011). These school leaders have expressed experiencing an overwhelming amount of pressure to adhere to and regulate their own sexual identity and gender expression. The pressure that is rooted in toxic heteronormativity also includes avoiding any affiliation with sexually diverse stakeholders, such as students and staff, for fear of reprisal or being presumed to be queer themselves (Blount, 2000; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Koschorek, 2003; Lugg & Tooms, 2010; Rottmann, 2006). Many school leaders who identify as heterosexual have explained that they do not feel that sexual identity should be addressed in schools, as it is unrelated to education and learning. With that said, many of the same school leaders claim that they lack both the knowledge and interest in addressing 2SLGBTQI+ topics and ensuring that sexually diverse students are supported at school (Payne & Smith, 2011). Additionally, the religious beliefs, coupled with personal beliefs and values of many school leaders has also been identified as a barrier to the inclusion and affirmation of diverse sexualities (Allen et al., 2009). These findings serve as a harsh reminder that there is both a lack of awareness and a significant pattern of resistance amongst school leaders when it comes to addressing issues regarding diverse sexualities.

Another startling fact is that many sexually diverse students (56.6%) shared that they did not report incidents of harassment and assault to school officials for fear that their situation would become worse (Peter et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2020). In fact, 60.5% of students shared that school staff rarely ever intervened when it came to addressing hateful acts (Kosciw et al., 2020). Sausa (2005) explains that sexually diverse students reported discrimination and abuse not only from peers, but also from school staff. In her study on the experiences of sexually diverse youth, Sausa (2005) reported that 2SLGBTQI+ students shared that teachers and school staff often blamed them for the harassment that they endured. Unfortunately, situations like this

are not uncommon. Numerous sexually diverse youth have shared that teachers failed to intervene when they were being harassed or harmed, and in many cases, school staff also exhibited hateful behaviours towards 2SLGBTQI+ students (Sausa, 2005; Kumashiro, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2020). Kearns et al. (2014) acknowledges that teachers are not prepared to address issues of homophobia and heterosexism in the schools. This is due in part to the fact that many education programs have excluded learning about creating caring and safe school environments, and more specifically, how to effectively support sexually diverse students (Boyland et al., 2016; Hernandez & et al., 2015).

To be truly inclusive means that the identities of sexually diverse students are continuously affirmed, and that no exceptions are created in a space that is both safe and affirming. In addition, educators must be mindful of the language that is used in educational spaces, as this plays an important role in creating identity affirming spaces where students feel valued and supported (Buchanan-Rivera, 2021). The impact that language has on identity formation cannot be underestimated, as the language we associate with identities can empower and/or denigrate our students, making it essential that educators use language that is not based in deficit and dehumanizing thinking and ideologies (Buchanan-Rivera, 2021; Rofes, 2007). Educational leaders must be encouraged to study heteronormativity, identify how it infiltrates within schools, and learn how to decenter it as we endeavor to build affirming environments for students. The immense power and influence that leaders have on their school community cannot be underestimated, as the actions of a leader serve as an example that is viewed and followed by all stakeholders (Dewitt, 2012).

In addition to not having a caring staff member to turn to, many of 2SLGBTQI+ students (59.1%) shared that they personally experienced discriminatory policies and practices while at

school (Kosciw et al., 2020; Peter et al., 2021). Some of the harmful policies and practices that students reported include being prohibited from discussing 2SLGBTQI+ topics in school, facing restriction in forming a gay straight alliance (GSA), being discouraged from participating in school sports, being harassed for identifying as 2SLGBTQI+, and being disciplined for public displays of affection that would go otherwise unpunished for heterosexual students (Kosciw et al., 2020). As a result of the egregious conditions that sexually diverse students face at school, they are much more likely to experience diminished levels of mental health and increased feelings of isolation and anxiety (Peter et al., 2021; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2015). Furthermore, sexually diverse students are at greater risk for negative academic outcomes, such as lower academic achievement and poor attendance (Peter et. al., 2021).

To improve the experiences of sexually diverse students, developing and delivering an inclusive and affirming curriculum that is representative of diverse sexualities is imperative. As it currently stands within Organization Z, school curriculum maintains dominant heteronormative biases and narratives through learning and content that contributes to the erasure of diverse sexual identities altogether (Surette, 2019; DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). It is widely known that both principal and educator training programs rarely include sexuality as part of their programming and that oftentimes, content regarding 2SLGBTQI+ topics are intentionally excluded (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008; Vavrus, 2008). Furthermore, many school leaders view the inclusion of sexually diverse content and narratives in their school programming as a brave and radical act that will undoubtedly label them as transgressive and troublesome (DePalma & Atkinson, 2008). Inclusive school policies can also have a positive impact on student success and well-being (Russell et al., 2010). Despite this understanding, there are many school boards, including Organization Z, that have responded by creating extremely general

equity frameworks and policies that rely on ambiguous language and lack a clear plan of action that effectively supports and protects sexually diverse students (Macgillvary, 2009).

Educational leaders have a professional obligation to ensure that all students are provided with opportunities to achieve their full potential, which includes fostering learning environments where equity and inclusion is prioritized (Stefkovich and Begley, 2007). Leaders must be held accountable for creating change, while also developing a lens of criticality to examine the systems and conditions that they have participated in creating (Kumashiro, 2002; Buchanan-Rivera, 2021). With that said, this PoP cannot be truly understood without first acknowledging and understanding the dynamics of privilege and power that have historically permeated throughout both society and the educational system. These dynamics have gone unquestioned for far too long, inflicting a tremendous amount of harm unto sexually diverse populations.

Framing the Problem of Practice

History

The plight of sexually diverse populations around the world is well documented, highlighting the urgent need to improve protections and inclusion for these communities. As a result of the deeply rooted heteronormative structures and homophobic ideologies that have entrenched the fabric of societal institutions, coupled with the lack of legal protections for sexually diverse populations, many 2SLGBTQI+ communities are victim to horrific acts of discrimination and violence (United Nations, 2022; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2015). Sexually diverse populations are often discriminated against throughout their educational experience, in the labour market, when trying to access healthcare, and when revealing their sexual identity to their communities and families. In many parts of the world, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals are beaten, sexually assaulted, tortured, and even killed, simply for identifying as sexually diverse (United

Nations, 2022). The United Nations (2022) reports that discriminatory laws which criminalize private, consensual, same-sex relationships exist in over 77 countries worldwide, predisposing sexually diverse populations to higher levels of arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, and in some countries, death.

Prior to the 1980s, there were few legal rights or provisions that could be invoked by 2SLGBTQI+ individuals (Hurley, 2003). The Canadian Human Rights Commission first recommended that sexual orientation be made a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1979 (Hurley, 2003). In 1982, Canada repatriated the constitution and adopted the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which informed many decisions regarding equality. In 1985, Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect, with the introduction of the equality rights provision, which guaranteed the legal protection of individuals based on race, national/ethnic origin, religion, sex, age, and ability, with the exclusion sexual orientation (Meyer, 2010; Rau, 2022). However, the courts accepted that section 15 is to be interpreted broadly and that discrimination based on sexual identity was prohibited by Section 15 of the Charter (Meyer, 2010). In June 1996, Parliament enacted Bill C-33, which amended the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation among the Act's prohibited grounds of discrimination (Hurley, 2003; Rau, 2014).

Provincially, Quebec added sexual orientation to its Human Rights Code in 1977, Ontario did so in 1986, and Manitoba and Yukon followed suit the following year (Meyer, 2010; Schrader & Wells, 2004). In 1998, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Alberta's human rights legislation must include sexual orientation because of the ruling that came in the case of *Vriend v. Alberta* (1998), a teacher who was fired for being gay (Rau, 2014). Despite the protections offered by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, sexually diverse students

are still victims of dehumanization at the hands of the education system. For example, in the case of *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36* (2002), the Surrey School District banned the use of books that included representations of same-sex families (Schrader & Wells, 2004). In the case of *Jubran v. North Vancouver School Dist. No. 44* (2002), Azmi Jubran was harassed by his peers over a five-year period by being repeatedly subjected to verbal (i.e., gay slurs) and physical assaults (i.e., spitting, punched, kicked) (Meyer, 2010). In the 2002 case of *Hall v. Powers*, Marc Hall was banned from attending his high school prom in Ontario with his boyfriend because his sexual identity did not seemingly align with the teachings of the Catholic Church. The court ruled in Hall's favour, citing that religious beliefs cannot supersede human rights (Grace & Wells, 2005). In Ontario in 2011, a Catholic school board chair went on record at a board level meeting comparing 2SLGBTQI+ students to Nazi's, stating: "We don't have Nazi groups either. Gay-straight alliances are banned because they are not within the teachings of the Catholic church" (Houston, 2011). Furthermore, there is evidence of homophobia, transphobia, and an overwhelming amount of hatred towards sexually diverse populations in a teaching guide that is aimed at instructing Catholic school teachers to challenge the secular understandings that "deny the natural difference between a man and a woman." This document further states that "transgender communities exist only to be provocative against traditional frameworks and annihilate the concept of nature" (Seidel, 2019), which is an incredibly vile and egregious sentiment that has no place in our educational institutions.

The implications of these blatant attacks on students are devastating and extremely dangerous, as a tremendous amount of harm and trauma is continuously inflicted upon them. While all Canadian provinces and territories offer protections from discrimination based on

sexual orientation in their human rights legislation, 2SLGBTQI+ students continue to be disproportionately harmed while at school (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2000).

2SLGBTQI+ Student Experiences in Schools

While schools are meant to be safe spaces for students, for the sexually diverse, schools are far too often a site of discrimination, exclusion, and bullying (Meyer & Stadner, 2009; Payne & Smith, 2011). In a national school climate survey, Peter et al. (2021) found that 62% of 2SLGBTQI+ students felt unsafe at school, while only 11% of their cisgender, heterosexual peers reported the same sentiment. In the elementary panel, Organization Z (2021) found that 46% of queer students do not feel as though they belong, compared to 25% of heterosexual students. In terms safety, 42% of queer students do not feel safe at school, in comparison to 13% of their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts. When asked if they have a trusted and caring adult in their school that cares about their well-being, only 50% of queer respondents expressed that they do (Organization Z, 2021). As a result of the lack of safety surrounding their school experience, 33% of sexually diverse students reported missing at least one full day of school in the past month (Kosciw et al., 2020). To make matters worse, approximately 45% of sexually diverse students shared that they avoided using bathroom facilities while at school and 44% avoided locker rooms altogether (Kosciw et al., 2020).

While the number of students that reported feeling unsafe at school is alarming, it is not surprising given that the 2SLGBTQI+ population is subject to continued verbal and physical harassment (Peter et al., 2021). Kosciw et al., (2020) reports that 68.7% of students experienced verbal harassment (i.e., being threatened, called names), 25.7% were physically harassed (i.e., pushed, shoved), and 11% have been physically assaulted (i.e., punched, kicked) while at school. When it comes to sexually diverse students being exposed to disparaging comments about their

sexual identity, 98.8% of 2SLGBTQI+ shared that they were the target of negative comments and 91.8% of these students expressed that this caused them a tremendous amount of distress (Kosciw et al., 2020; Dewitt, 2012).

When it comes to 2SLGBTQI+ students seeing their identity positively reflected in their learning materials, curriculum, and school environment, approximately 70% of elementary students reported experiencing this, in comparison to 60% of sexually diverse high school students (Organization Z, 2021). When asked about whether they are encouraged to think about social justice and human rights issues/topics, approximately 60% of elementary students responded that this is their experience. At both the elementary and high school levels, approximately 50% of transgender students reported experiencing discrimination while at school and 29% of these students shared that they are satisfied with the steps their school has taken to prevent bullying. When students were asked if they felt like they belonged at school, 45% of queer students at the high school level answered in agreement. Furthermore, across both panels, 50% of 2SLGBTQI+ students reported feeling anxious, nervous, or depressed most of the time (Organization Z, 2021).

As the data clearly illustrates, the school experience for sexually diverse students is one that is often negative and harmful. As a result of these experiences, sexually diverse students in Organization Z experience a multitude of side effects and symptoms, which include increased incidents of harassment, exclusion, isolation, stigmatization, lower self-esteem, decreased levels of achievement, poor mental health, negative self-perceptions, and increased risk of self-harm (Organization Z, 2022). To address these problems effectively, meaningful and sustained action is necessary on behalf of all leaders within the organization. The following actions are necessary when creating inclusive and affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students: 1)

seek input from sexually diverse students, families, and community members on how to improve their school experience and their unique needs; 2) offer ongoing training and education for school leaders and staff that includes a comprehensive understanding of diverse sexual identities and best practices; 3) provide opportunities for leaders and staff to co-plan and develop inclusive and affirming learning materials and curriculum; 4) develop and implement comprehensive policies that explicitly protect sexually diverse students against all forms of discrimination and harassment; and 5) establish safe spaces within schools where students can find support and access to 2SLGBTQI+ affirming services, such as counselling.

In addition to the data that has been gathered regarding the school experiences of sexually diverse students, it is widely known that there are many incidents of homophobia and heterosexism that go unreported within the Organization. The data provided, both internally and externally, confirms the urgent need to address the PoP, so that both the school experiences and quality of life of sexually diverse youth can be drastically improved.

Guiding Questions

As we plan and work towards creating inclusive and identity affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students, the following lines of inquiry are presented:

1. In what ways are our current practices harming queer students?
2. What knowledge and skills do school-level leaders need to engage in meaningful and critical work that will champion inclusive and affirming learning spaces for sexually diverse students?
3. What challenges are school leaders presented with as they work to create inclusive and affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students?
4. How can we reimagine the existing leadership approaches/practices and curriculum to be

more inclusive and identity affirming for sexually diverse students?

Leadership Focused Vision for Change

Present Gaps and Envisioned Future State

When thinking about change, and more specifically about the discrepancy between the current and future desired state of the school experience for sexually diverse students in Organization Z, there are pertinent questions that leaders must consider to effectively address the situation. Some of those questions include: Why is this change necessary? Who will benefit from the change? Where will the change take place? Who will help initiate the change? (Frontier & Rickenbaugh, 2015).

Changes to current practices in education are necessary to create identity affirming and learning environments where sexually diverse students feel that their existence matters (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022). Furthermore, changes are needed to align the organization's goals and priorities with actual practices and approaches that are taking place in schools and classrooms. By focusing our efforts on ensuring that sexually diverse students are intentionally and effectively supported and affirmed, students will experience a greater sense of belonging, increased wellness, and more success (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022). These changes will also serve all students in the school community, as an understanding and appreciation of diverse sexual identities will be highlighted.

It is quite evident that this is a significant area of need that must be urgently addressed, as the difference between the current and preferred state is enormous (Hathaway & Norton, 2018). Currently, there remains a lack of inclusive minded leaders who are properly trained and equipped to address the needs of sexually diverse populations. There is also an absence of school

practices and curriculum that are inclusive and affirming of diverse sexualities, which can also be seen as a form of curriculum violence (Jones, 2020). In addition, there also remains a lack of clear, enumerated policies that protect and support sexually diverse populations. Addressing these key areas will not only provide students with an educational experience that affords them the inherent right to feel safe, supported, and affirmed, but it will also allow them to successfully participate in all facets of life, both in and out of school.

There are four goals that I wish to achieve through the implementation of this OIP: 1) to increase leader capacity in queer and equity literacy so that school leaders can identify and dismantle the systemic barriers and practices that continue to harm sexually diverse students; 2) to foster a cultural shift by understanding how to effectively create and implement a culturally relevant and affirming curriculum that exposes students to queer excellence and diverse queer voices; 3) to create learning spaces for queer students that allow them to feel safe, affirmed, and included so that they can experience increased achievement, engagement and well-being, and 4) to provide the space for leaders and educators to continuously interrogate their own practice and reflect on the impact that their actions have on students.

The affirming learning environment that I envision for sexually diverse students is one where their identity is not considered a threat, but rather an important and valuable part of the learning community. This affirming learning space acknowledges the lived experience and voice of queer students as a gift and cultivates an environment of authenticity and joy. This learning environment yields acceptance, love, and collaboration, where the existence of sexually diverse pupils matters and deficit ideologies are neglected (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022).

While we acknowledge that heteronormativity is a larger problem that operates within society and institutional organizations alike, we must also acknowledge the role that leaders play at the individual level and how this operates within classrooms and schools. Therefore, the PoP

must be addressed at all levels within the organization, including the macro, meso, and micro levels.

Inclusive-Minded Leadership

This POP and OIP has been created with the intention of helping school leaders create more equitable, inclusive, and affirming school environments for sexually diverse students, which will ultimately improve their overall well-being and success. School leaders play a critical role in creating school climates that are identity affirming and inclusive for sexually diverse populations and can have a significant effect on the culture of the school community (Ryan, 2014). Sausa (2005) found that inclusive-minded school leaders had a notable impact on sexually diverse students who dropped out of school when compared to those who did not, in that sexually diverse youth who stayed in school were more likely to report that at least one staff member advocated for them and cared about their well-being.

Preparing school leaders that are equipped to support sexually diverse stakeholders, while cultivating an inclusive school climate is an issue that must be addressed in both administrator preparation and professional development programs. To systematically challenge heteronormativity and address homophobia in our schools, it is imperative that school leaders receive professional development training that will help build capacity and equity literacy so that undue harm is not committed against queer students while in the care educators.

Inclusive Curriculum and Practice

To improve the experience of sexually diverse students, developing and delivering an inclusive curriculum that is representative of diverse sexualities is imperative. Educational leaders must promote the practice of implementing a curriculum that positively represents sexually diverse populations so that positive aspects of student identities are reflected in their

learning and throughout the school community. Identity is not separate from curriculum and children should not have to wait until adulthood or post-secondary education to discover who they are (Muhammad, 2023). Snapp et al. (2015a) has found that an 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive curriculum has the potential to create much safer learning environments for all students. This type of curriculum consistently illustrates positive representations of sexually diverse populations, while normalizing and affirming diverse sexual identities, which contributes to students feeling an increased sense of belonging and well-being (Rofes, 2004; Sears, 1999). Teaching from cultural and historical realities can enhance efforts to cultivate identity, intellect, skills, joy, and criticality, providing students with a powerful purpose to learn and contribute to the world (Muhammad, 2023). Ensuring that representations are positive is imperative, otherwise leaders risk framing 2SLGBTQI+ populations as mere victims, while reaffirming a dominant narrative that stigmatizes the sexually diverse (Rofes, 2004; Ott & Aoki 2002).

School boards must promote the practice of implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy so that students can see positive aspects of their identity reflected in their learning, while developing critical perspectives to confront social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Gay, 2010). Schools should also be intentional about providing students with educational resources, materials, and spaces that educate them about diverse sexual identities, while teaching from an anti-oppressive framework that challenges heteronormativity (Kumashiro, 2002). Furthermore, schools that offer GSA affinity groups, report high levels of student safety, belonging, and acceptance, regardless of whether they belong to the group or not (Stonefish & Lafreniere, 2015, Wooley, 2014).

Enumerated and Inclusive School Policies

Despite the positive impact that inclusive school policies can have on student success and well-being, there are many school boards, including Organization Z, that have responded by creating extremely general equity frameworks and policies that rely heavily on ambiguous language and lack a clear plan of action that supports and protects sexually diverse students. Russell et al. (2010) explains that creating safe and supportive learning environments is best achieved through policies that require protection of all students from bullying and harassment, while also specifically identifying categories of students most likely to experience such harassment. The importance of educational policies cannot be underestimated, as these policies help school boards establish clear rules and procedures, while creating standards of quality for student learning, well-being, and safety (Martino et al., 2022).

Without policies in place that protect students, schools lack the structure and function that is necessary to provide for the educational needs of students and on which other inclusive and affirming school policies and practices can be based (Temkin et al., 2022). Furthermore, anti-bullying policies that do not specifically include enumeration of diverse sexual identities only begin to scratch the surface, as they do not provide the grounding that is required for consistent and impactful change (Russell et al., 2010). School boards must include enumeration in their inclusion policies, which refers to a complete and explicit listing of all protections afforded to students based on their identities. Being transparent when it comes to protections for students, rather than hiding behind ambiguous anti-bullying policy and language provides educators with the tools and confidence needed to implement specific protections for sexually diverse students. According to Russell et al. (2010), enumerated policies also provide students with a clear understanding of their rights to safety at school, while offering an increased sense of belonging.

Significance

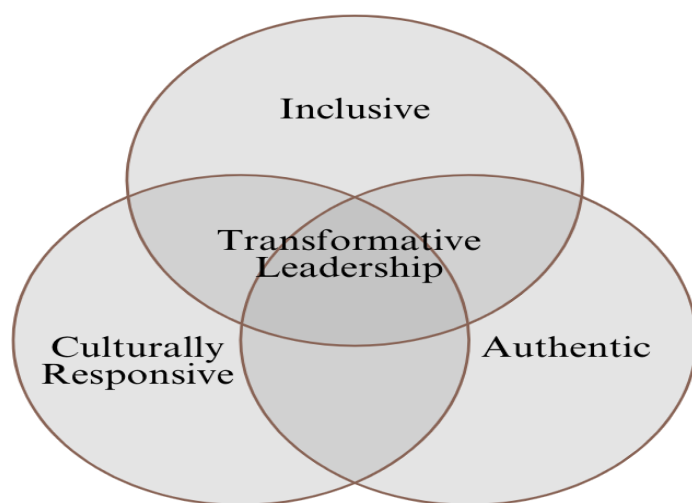
The preferred future state of the organization sees sexually diverse students as the primary beneficiaries of the intentional changes that are implemented by school leaders, regarding curriculum, practices, and pedagogy that are inclusive and identity affirming. The preferred state sees school and system leaders intentionally and valiantly ensuring that their schools are learning spaces that positively impact the lives of sexually diverse students. Identity affirming school environments that are supported and led by social justice minded leaders, coupled with inclusive classroom practices and policies, will serve to support sexually diverse students (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022). As a result, 2SLGBTQI+ students will develop positive self-reflections, rather than being limited to stereotypical and negative representations of self. The enactment of this vision will result in the dismantling of and eradication of limiting, deficit, and dehumanizing traditions, practices, and aspects of schooling that have served to only perpetuate heteronormativity, heterosexism, and hierarchy. Failing to address this problem will have serious implications for sexually diverse students, as they will continue to be harmed and dehumanized by their educational experience. Be it in the microcosm of the classroom or in the wider school system, I believe that addressing my PoP will contribute to the betterment of my school community and society (Archbald, 2008).

Chapter 2: Planning and Development

This chapter will discuss a hybrid approach to addressing the PoP, which consists of the transformative, inclusive, culturally responsive, and authentic leadership approaches. Recognizing the importance of social justice, inclusion, and affirmation, this hybrid approach provides leaders with strategies that embrace the unique perspectives, experiences, and strengths of individuals from diverse backgrounds. To effectively navigate the proposed change, three change frameworks that will support the PoP and lead the change process are introduced and discussed. Providing a systematic and structured approach to guide transformative efforts, Kumashiro's anti-oppressive education framework (AOF), Gentile's giving voice to values (GVV) framework, and Kotter's eight-step change model (XLR8) will be employed throughout the change process. In the section that follows, assessing the change readiness of the organization and respective leaders will be addressed, as this is a crucial step that can help to identify any potential barriers and challenges. Solutions to addressing the PoP will be offered in the final section of the chapter, with a comparison of the proposed solutions offered and a preferred solution selected.

Leadership Approaches to Change

While there are many approaches to change leadership that are in support of my PoP and chosen leadership theories, I am significantly drawn to the transformative leadership approach that is firmly grounded in social justice. The transformative leadership approach will serve as the foundational approach that will guide the work of my OIP, combined by complementary leadership approaches that will aid in addressing the PoP. As seen in figure two, the authentic, culturally responsive, and inclusive leadership approaches are included under the large umbrella that is the transformative leadership approach.

Figure 2*Leadership Approaches***Transformative Leadership**

The transformative leadership approach is strongly correlated to the work of my PoP and OIP, as it is grounded in social justice, inclusion, activism, and ethics, making it highly effective for invoking lasting and meaningful change within an organization (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018; Caldwell et al., 2012; Shields, 2010; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Van Oord, 2013). TL calls on leaders to partake in a complete overhaul of social systems, including that of education, so that the inequitable structures and practices that exist, can be dismantled, and ultimately rebuilt from the ground up (Shields & Mohan, 2008; Shields, 2010; Shields, 2018). Transformative leaders are mindful of the fact that rebuilding the structure of institutions must include intentional participation and input from members of marginalized communities. If this is not realized, then marginalized populations will continue to be stymied by the oppressive systems that were never designed to benefit them (Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Much like the critical and queer theories, transformative leadership critiques inequitable structures and practices, while attempting to improve the quality of life for populations who have

been continuously pushed to the margins (Shields, 2010). TL calls on school leaders to consistently infuse and encourage social justice in all education matters, so that all identities and lived experiences are affirmed and normalized (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022). When a learning environment is inclusive, affirming, and truly equitable, students are more focused on their learning, which in turn improves academic outcomes and overall well-being (Capper & Young, 2014).

The TL approach also highlights the existing gaps between the current state of the organization and the desired state, which as previously mentioned is significant. Furthermore, there are eight tenets of transformative leadership which work to provoke meaningful change within an organization. The eight tenets include: 1) begin with a mandate for significant and equitable change, 2) establish new knowledge frameworks and mindsets, 3) understand areas of interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness, 4) balance critique and promise, 5) focus on democracy, emancipation and equity, 6) redistribute power to those at the margins, 7) emphasize the public and private good, and 8) the call to exhibit moral courage (Shields, 2010; Shields, 2018). The benefits of the transformative leadership approach are intended for all stakeholders, with a focus on populations who have traditionally been disparaged, including the sexually diverse (Brown, 2004; Theoharis, 2007).

To move forward in creating truly equitable and inclusive spaces for sexually diverse students, leaders need to begin by engaging in thoughtful reflection by asking themselves some very important questions, such as: How are representations of sexually diverse populations related to traditional, social, and cultural understandings of sexuality and heteronormativity? How is heteronormativity represented and reinforced in my school community? What are the effects of these representations on students who do not conform to heterosexuality? Social justice

efforts must inform the practice of all school leaders and educators alike, which includes fostering a learning environment that encourages and promotes the overall achievement, well-being, inclusion, and affirmation of sexually diverse students (Theoharis, 2007). Leaders who wish to improve school culture for the better are committed to intentionally disrupting and eliminating the biases, barriers, and power dynamics that harm underserved and underperforming students (Buchanan-Rivera, 2020). These individuals also deeply understand that leading for social justice is a collective effort that is most successful when approached as a team, which is why building stakeholder capacity is a significant priority for social justice minded leaders (Wang, 2018).

When the overall well-being of students is prioritized, school leaders can begin to foster truly optimal learning environments where sexually diverse students can thrive (Furman, 2012; Lewis, 2016). Well-being and achievement, however, cannot be fully achieved until the disparities that exist within our schools are thoroughly interrogated and disrupted. Leaders whose practice is driven by the tenets of transformative leadership understand that when students are meaningfully included in educational practices, processes, and pedagogy, and when staff intentionally work to develop critical consciousness, nurture dialogue, and emphasize student well-being, organizations will be transformed and marginalized students will be successful (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022; Ryan, 2006; Ryan, 2014; Shields, 2018).

Inclusive Leadership

Like transformative leadership, the inclusive leadership approach is rooted in social justice, as optimal learning environments for queer students cannot be realized until this community is intentionally included in institutional practices, processes, and decision making (Ryan, 2006). Inclusive leadership intentionally prioritizes tenets one (begin with a mandate for

significant and equitable change) and six (redistribute power to those at the margins) of the transformative leadership approach, as creating more affirming and inclusive learning environments begins with educational institutions making a commitment to institute change and consciously ensure that the voices, experiences, and identities of all stakeholders, especially those that have been consistently silenced, are prioritized (Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Ryan, 2006). To be clear, leadership that is truly inclusive does not simply include marginalized individuals and populations into an existing system and structure that is entrenched in the dehumanization of certain populations. Instead, inclusive leaders seek input from affected communities, and together, they focus on achieving emancipation through democratic and equitable practices, while reimagining and reengineering the existing systems and structures that foster exclusion and oppression (Shields, 2018; Ryan, 2014).

Furthermore, inclusive leaders reject hierarchical and bureaucratic views of leadership that are founded in colonialism and heteronormativity, as they exclude the voices of those who do not occupy formal positions of power and leadership (Randel et al., 2018; Ryan, 2014). Inclusive leaders believe wholeheartedly that for organizations and their respective leaders to be inclusive, they must foster relationships that transcend racial, sexuality, gender, class, and ability divisions. If the goal is for all stakeholders to meet the challenges and demands associated with inclusion, then operating from an anti-oppressive framework is essential in building capacity in our school communities (Kumashiro, 2002).

Culturally Responsive Leadership

The culturally responsive leadership (CRL) approach is strongly connected to my PoP, as there is significant power in seeing one's identity and lived experience represented in social institutions, such as schools. CRL prioritizes tenets two (establish new knowledge frameworks

and mindsets) and three (understand areas of interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness) of the transformative leadership approach, as there is tremendous value in traditional narratives and culturally responsive teaching practices that highlight the myriad identities and unique positionality of those who have been excluded from mainstream settings (Shields, 2010; Shields, 2018; Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The impact of CRL extends far beyond the classroom and into the school community, as it positively develops a student's ability to see their lived experience and the contributions of those with similar identities as valuable (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Payne & Laughter, 2013; Dei et al., 2000).

Identity formation is a complex process that is an amalgamation of how one sees themselves, how others see them, and ultimately, who one desires/aspires to be (Crenshaw, 2018; Muhammad, 2023). Educators harness the power to provide students with mirrors allow them to see their image reflected at them and windows that give them the opportunity to understand and value identities that are different from their own. Students need spaces where they can make sense of who they are and who they are not, otherwise they risk being swallowed up by images of their identities that forcibly tell them who they are without their permission. If school leaders and educators recognize the ways in which identity is not separate from education and curriculum, “then our goal is not to just help students earn higher grades, but for them to gain the confidence to use learning as a personal tool to thrive in this world and to help them know and be themselves” (Muhammad, 2023, p. 68).

CRL argues that teaching and learning should be filtered through students' own unique lived experiences and identities, which can ultimately interrupt heteronormative thinking and practices (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Richards et. al (2006) argues that CRL consists of three dimensions, including the institutional, personal, and instructional. Institutional refers to

the values developed and reflected in school board policies and practices (Richards et. al., 2006). Personal is in reference to the mindset of culturally responsive leaders and the practices they engage in, while instruction involves knowing your students and considering the practices that foster culturally responsive environments (Richards et. al., 2006).

The CRL approach strongly connects with my PoP and the critical and queer theories, as this approach encourages leaders to engage in critical consciousness by recognizing and analyzing systems of inequity, while committing to establishing new knowledge frameworks and mindsets (Shields, 2018). CRL implores leaders to understand the contexts in which they lead, question their existing knowledge base, and help stakeholders develop a broader level of consciousness that enables them to critique the cultural norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities (Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). The CRL approach is also deeply rooted in ethical and values-based principles which will undoubtedly help in addressing the gaps and symptoms of my PoP (Gentile, 2012).

Authentic Leadership

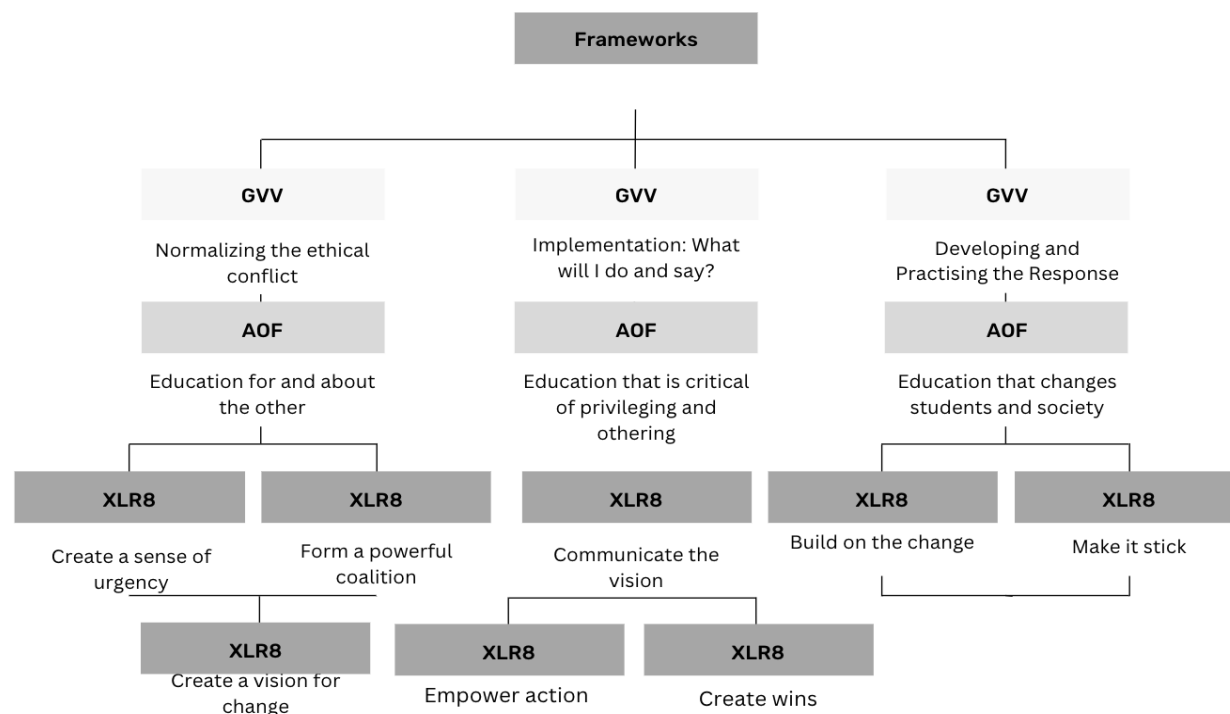
My PoP and leadership theory is also influenced by the authentic leadership approach, which is rooted in self, in that it requires a leader to be authentic to who they are, especially in their interactions with others (Randel et al., 2017). Authentic leadership prioritizes tenets seven (emphasize the public and private good) and eight (the call to exhibit moral courage) of the transformative leadership approach. As a leader who identifies as sexually diverse, I have a significant interest in ensuring that the needs of marginalized students are met and their voices heard (Duignan, 2014). As a queer person who has been on the receiving end of having my voice silenced, it can be frightening at times being a leader who is so forthright about their own identity and lived experience (Watson & Johnson, 2013; Randel et al., 2017). Nonetheless, being

transparent about my sexual identity and using it as a tool to inspire, invoke, and mandate for significant and equitable change within my organization, allows me to foster a climate of trust, create greater self-awareness, and develop relational transparency (Walumba et al., 2008; Shields & Hesbol).

My PoP is influenced by the authentic leadership approach, as both authentic and social justice minded leaders recognize and embrace the fact that schools are complex spaces where leaders must draw from a deep sense of self as they build connections and foster positive learning environments that inspire shared responsibility and action (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2017). Authentic leadership compliments social justice and inclusion efforts by emphasizing a deeper understanding in the areas of interdependence, interconnectedness, and critical reflection (Boekhorst, 2015; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Authentic leaders move far beyond the point where they are interested in promoting their own personal and professional values, to a place where they are invested in identifying and addressing injustices that plague schools and society (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2017; Walumba et al., 2008). It is also important to note that there is a direct correlation between the positive relationships that are formed between leaders and their employees, when employees feel that their leader is trust-worthy, genuine, and authentic (Bird et al., 2009; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Change Frameworks

There are three change frameworks that will support the PoP and lead the change process. Kumashiro's anti-oppressive education framework (AOF), Gentile's giving voice to values (GVV) framework, and Kotter's eight-step change model (XLR8) are the selected frameworks that will make significant contributions in addressing the PoP, while each providing a unique approach (please refer to figure three).

Figure 3*Change Frameworks*

Note. Adapted from Kumashiro, K. (2002). *Troubling education: Queer activism and anti-oppressive Pedagogy*. Routledge; Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business Review Press; Gentile, M. C. (2012). *Giving voice to values: How to speak your mind when you know what's right*. Yale University Press.

Anti-Oppressive Education Framework (AOF)

Through three imperatives, Kumashiro's framework outlines and critiques the oppressive ways in which we have been engaging in education and how this contributes to the further persecution of marginalized students. Kumashiro (2002) highlights three areas of focus in his framework to anti-oppressive education: Education for and about the other, education that is critical of privileging and othering, and education that changes students and society. Kumashiro

(2002) explains that the term other refers to populations that are traditionally marginalized in society or seen as other than the norm (i.e., students who are, or are perceived to be queer).

In the first approach, education for and about the other, Kumashiro (2002) looks at how leaders can improve the experiences of those who are oppressed. This focus area highlights the ways in which one's identities are systematically oppressed in schools and society and is intended to support students who experience oppression and educate those who experience privilege because of their identities. Education for and about the other has three main goals: 1) to change schools from harmful and dangerous spaces to ones that are empowering, supportive, and affirming, and 2) to normalize teaching practices and pedagogy that embrace and affirm students' various identities and lived experiences, and 3) to increase knowledge and visibility of othered identities (Richards et. al., 2006). Kumashiro calls on practitioners to examine their practice, the institutional bias that is inherent within schools, and the harm that is continuously committed against marginalized students. He encourages leaders and educators to disrupt existing deficit ideologies and engage students in critically thinking about why there has been a lack of accurate knowledge about othered groups. By educating all stakeholders about marginalized groups and the silencing that has taken place in schools, this approach can help bring attention to the misconceptions and harmful stereotypes that are so deeply embedded in the fabric of schools and society.

Education that is critical of privileging and othering focuses on the idea that "understanding oppression requires looking at more than one's dispositions toward, treatment of, and knowledge about the other" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 35). This approach involves a critique of power structures and dominant ideologies which calls on leaders, educators, and students to examine how and why some groups are privileged and others marginalized in and by society. Educators must engage critically with the social structures, ideologies, and histories that have

helped to maintain the processes of privileging and othering, while also examining how the school system has played a role in maintaining these power structures. The goal of this approach is to empower students to challenge oppression when they see it taking place in its various forms.

In the final approach, education that changes students and society, Kumashiro (2002) explains that oppression originates in discourse, and in the citing of discourses, which frame how people think, feel, act, and interact. This approach argues that one of the primary forces behind systemic oppression revolves around the repetition of harmful language, the reiterating of stereotypes and deficit ideologies, and the silencing that marginalized groups experience. This approach focuses on the way staff and students have personally interacted with oppression, asking them to interrogate their own positionality and the role they have played in perpetuating and normalizing oppression through narratives, stereotypes, and actions.

One of the limitations of Kumashiro's framework is that is general and simplistic in nature. Anti-oppressive education involves much more than simply acknowledging and learning about the other. To be truly anti-oppressive requires that entire organization and individuals that play a part in the system (i.e., senior leadership, school leadership, trustees, educators), collaborate to confront, question, and untangle the web of oppression that has been so deeply woven throughout the organization (Richards et. al., 2006). In doing so, stakeholders of the organization must ask very important questions: Are strategies provided to challenge stereotypes and assumptions? Are representations of oppressed groups balanced with depictions of joy, creativity, and aspects beyond oppression? Are different forms of oppression named and defined? Are concrete examples of oppression provided so that members can identify where power and privilege exist? Once the organization accepts accountability and begins to honestly answer difficult questions such as those above, that is when real transformative change will begin taking place.

Giving Voice to Values (GVV)

The GVV model by Dr. Mary Gentile (2012) is a leadership model that is grounded in values-based leadership development. GVV is rooted in the idea that although most leaders know what is right and just, an overwhelming number of leaders lack the capacity and wherewithal to effectively act on those sentiments and implement the appropriate actions that will lead to change (Gentile, 2012). GVV supports leaders in finding effective ways to voice and act on their values system in the workplace, which ultimately focuses on the ethical aspect of organizational change. The GVV model is action oriented, in that it helps leaders frame and reframe value-based conflicts and supports participants in learning how to act their way into a different way of thinking and doing (Gentile, 2012). GVV focuses on the concepts of rehearsal, prescription, and coaching leaders to develop the skills needed to effectively voice and act upon their values, especially when they are faced with a challenging situation that questions their existing values system (i.e., resistance from colleagues, political landscape etc.). In three distinct phases, GVV supports leaders as they anticipate change and the resistance that will follow, while working through how to advocate for the need to change their organization.

1) Clarification and Articulation of One's Values

In the first part, leaders must explicitly make their values and principles known to stakeholders and change participants. Leaders must then share the impact that acting on those given values will have on the organization, more specifically, sexually diverse students (Cawsey et al., 2020).

2) Post-Decision-Making Analysis and Implementation Plan

In the second part, leaders are required to examine and analyze model situations/case studies where individuals have clearly expressed their values and principles, how they overcame resistance, and ultimately achieved success (Cawsey et al., 2020).

3) The Practice of Speaking One's Values and Receiving Feedback

In the final part, leaders and participants engage in a series of exercises that involve pre-scripting, preparing, rehearsing, delivering, and ultimately receiving feedback from their peers. These exercises challenge participants to become comfortable articulating their values clearly and confidently to a wider audience (Cawsey et al., 2020).

The three phases of the GVV model reinforce the type of authentic engagement that is required of leaders as they attempt to remove the barriers that continue to negatively affect the learning experience of sexually diverse students. Gentile's GVV model is relatable to all individuals, as everyone is driven by their own values system (Gentile, 2012; Cawsey et al., 2020). GVV also acknowledges resistance from participants, which is something that leaders may underestimate or ignore. Resistance is to be expected when embarking on any kind of change journey and GVV provides the tools to overcome these barriers, specifically through the rehearsal and feedback process. To ensure that leaders are ready to speak-up and voice their values/principles freely will require leaders to engage in mirror work that calls on them to look deep within themselves and identify their own pre-existing biases, prejudices and other widely held beliefs (Buchanan-Rivera, 2021).

Gentile's GVV model is not without flaws, especially in that it can be overly simplistic. The idea that all individuals will be empowered to speak-up and voice their values and principles freely after undertaking a training program is a gross assumption. Some leaders and participants may never feel compelled to voice their values. Nonetheless, Gentile's GVV model is extremely applicable in addressing my PoP, as the problem that I am addressing is often a contentious issue within schools and other organizations. Ethically speaking, this model prepares leaders to have

courageous conversations, while ensuring that their leadership is driven by the ethic of care (Ciulla, 2005).

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (XLR8)

John Kotter (1996) developed a highly structured, eight-step process that addresses how to successfully implement change within an organization. Kotter argues that users of his model must navigate the eight steps in sequence to find success in the model.

1) Create a Sense of Urgency Around the Need for Change

It is imperative that leaders convey to stakeholders of the organization that the status quo is not working, and that change is required. During this crucial first step, leaders must ensure that they highlight the benefits of change and spark motivation in their employees (Kotter, 2014).

2) Create a Powerful Coalition

Leaders will organize a powerful coalition of well-respected individuals (i.e., leaders, experts, stakeholders) in the organization who share in the future vision of the organization. This coalition must have a shared commitment to the cause and any semblance of power and hierarchy must be withdrawn (Kotter, 1996).

3) Develop a Vision for Change

The leaders and their respective team must create a vision of the desired future state and develop strategies that will direct their change efforts. The future vision must be convincing enough to garner the support and attention of participants (Kang et al., 2020).

4) Keep Communicating Your Vision

Effective and consistent communication regarding the desired future state is very important when leading the charge for change. Leaders must ensure that they remain passionate

about the given change and lead by example so that participants buy into the vision (Applebaum et al., 2012).

5) *Empower Employees and Act on Vision*

At this point, leaders are beginning to invoke and change existing structures that no longer serve the organization and its stakeholders. Leaders will lead courageously, take risks, acknowledge, and challenge resistance and obstacles.

6) *Generate and Acknowledge Short-Term Wins*

Leaders must acknowledge and celebrate short-term wins with participants, as this will provide encouragement and momentum to continue working towards successfully achieving the desired level of change. Leaders must ensure that participants feel engaged and supported throughout the entire process (Kotter, 1996).

7) *Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change*

Leaders will inspire new projects and ideas, while identifying new change drivers, as they continue to set goals and reflect on the work that is being done. It is important to remember that despite the achievements being made, the hard work has only just begun (Kotter, 1996).

8) *Anchor New Approaches in an Organization's Culture*

This last step is about implementing and sustaining change within the organization so that it becomes ingrained in the culture and regular operation of the organization. This will require leaders to continuously demonstrate how the changes have improved the organization and why it is important to keep forging ahead with the new and improved practices that have fostered the change (Kotter, 1996).

Kotter's change model emphasizes the importance of collaboration and obtaining buy-in from all stakeholders to ensure success. The focus on stakeholders is crucial to this model, as it

determines the success or failure of the change efforts. With that said, this model highlights the importance of ensuring that stakeholders understand why the need for change is necessary, while also being involved in the process itself. Kotter's model also speaks to the importance of leaders seeking out the experiences of powerful and respected industry professionals, both internally and externally to garner buy-in (Burke, 2018). Kotter's model aligns well with organizational structures, in that it is prescriptive, providing clear steps to guide leaders through the process of change. However, Kotter's model is seen by some as extremely linear and rigid, which is contrary to the iterative, fluid, and resistant ideals that queer theory espouses. It is important to note that leaders can navigate the eight steps in the order that best suits the needs of their respective school.

Connections between Models and Frameworks

When used collectively, Kumashiro's AOF, Gentile's GVV, and Kotter's XLR8 models provide a very comprehensive and robust approach in addressing my PoP. Rooted in social justice, values, ethics, and structure, all three frameworks help leaders address the problem at its core, by also taking into consideration the vast terrain that accompanies an organization of this size. The three frameworks are all related to creating more equitable schools by providing different approaches to inclusion, identity affirmation, and addressing the systemic barriers that exist within education systems. Kotter's model provides a clear and structured approach to leading organizational change within the organization, as it keeps the change at pace by scaffolding the process for participants. By providing a roadmap for change, Kotter's model can help create a more equitable school system that supports the success of all students. Gentile's model helps leaders and educators by identifying and addressing ethical dilemmas/conflicts that may arise within the school system by provoking individual interrogation of practice and

thought. By encouraging individuals to interrogate their own practice, GVV helps to create a culture of leadership that is based in criticality, ethical decision-making, and accountability. Kumashiro's model provides a critical lens to examine the ways in which power and privilege operate within education systems. Kumashiro's AOF places the focus on the organization, emphasizing the importance of understanding how social identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality, intersect with systems of oppression and marginalization within the education system. By addressing these power dynamics, Kumashiro's framework assists organizational leaders in creating more equitable learning environments that truly value and affirm queer students. Overall, these models provide complementary approaches to promoting equity and inclusion in schools. By understanding and addressing systemic barriers and biases, promoting criticality and ethical decision-making, and managing the massive undertaking of organizational change, educators can create more inclusive and identity affirming learning environments that support the well-being and success of sexually diverse students.

Organizational Change Readiness

Wang et al. (2020) note that organizational readiness for change is a complex, layered, and multi-dimensional construct. The authors reference a variety of factors that influence organizational change readiness, including the content (i.e., what is being changed), the process (i.e., how the change is being implemented), the context (i.e., circumstances under which the change is occurring), and the individuals (i.e., characteristics of those being asked to change) involved (Wang et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2007). Readiness for change is also heavily influenced by the beliefs held amongst employees, more specifically that: (a) they can implement the given change, (b) the proposed change is appropriate for the organization, (c) the leaders are committed

to the proposed change, and (d) the proposed change is beneficial to organizational members (Wang et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2007).

Mindful of the fact that organizations only change through the actions of stakeholders, successful change will only occur when individuals alter their behaviors and actions (Wang et al., 2020; George & Jones, 2001; Porras & Robertson, 1992; Choi & Ruona, 2011). As a result, assessing change readiness and preparing stakeholders for the given change is vital to the success of any change initiative. The level of change readiness amongst stakeholders can be assessed using a change readiness assessment tool (please refer to appendix A), which can provide organizations with a comprehensive assessment of their readiness for change, potential barriers to change, and areas for improvement. The change readiness tool is divided into four sections that asks school leaders and educators a series of self-reflective questions regarding their practice and understanding of creating identity affirming learning environments. By using a change readiness tool, organizations can increase their chances of successful change and achieve their desired outcomes.

Experts posit that organizational readiness for change is an imperative precursor to successful implementation, arguing that more than half of all large-scale organizational change initiatives fail because adequate readiness had not been established. Holt et al., (2007) explain that change readiness includes stakeholders being both emotionally and cognitively accepting of the proposed change to improve or alter the status quo. For change to occur, leaders must understand that the implementation of the given change initiative will have a higher chance of success if stakeholders in the organization are properly supported and guided throughout the process (Cawsey et al., 2020). Part of effectively preparing stakeholders for change includes having a strong leader who clearly signals that they wholeheartedly believe in the given change

initiative, which will undoubtedly garner buy-in among the stakeholders (Hustus & Owens, 2018). Additionally, Holt et al., (2007) argue that stakeholders are more likely to accept change if they perceive the change as being both feasible and beneficial to them and the organization. With that said, changes at the cultural level require significant shifts in one's thinking and understanding, which can also be understood as unlearning (Dudar et al., 2017). Approaching change and fostering readiness amongst stakeholders is best achieved through a collaborative educational approach whereby everyone learns and works together to understand the proposed change and subsequent benefits (Dudar et al., 2017). Engaging in the learning as a collective, rather than in isolation is recommended when invoking transformative shifts within the organization (Dudar, et al., 2017).

In 2017, a review of Organization Z found strong evidence of a culture of fear and systemic discrimination within the school board. Upon the completion of the review, the MOE offered the school board a sweeping list of recommendations to employ to improve the toxic climate that had been described. Although this did not happen organically, this investigation triggered a response by the organization and as a result, various steps were taken to begin to improve and prioritize equity and inclusion within the organization. When it comes to driving positive change, negative media coverage can be an extremely powerful tool, as it forces the organization to not only take the allegations and findings more seriously, but to also begin taking the necessary steps in implementing change. Advocacy groups such as parents, families, and friends of lesbians and gays (PFLAG), equality for gays and lesbians everywhere (EGALE), and the gay, lesbian & straight education network (GLSEN) are instrumental in helping to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQ+ populations, as they help to inform public policy, inspire cultural

change, and promote human rights and inclusion through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy.

Organization Z has signaled that they are ready for change in several ways. First, the organization now collects school climate and demographic data, which allows the organization to understand who the communities in which they serve, while also gathering important first-hand information about the learning environments and school communities. Collecting school climate and demographic data holds the organization accountable to stakeholders, as it ensures that the voices of all, including the most marginalized, are heard. When it comes to school climate, the value of data cannot be underestimated as it aids in removing the barriers that are entrenched in the organization (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017).

Secondly, the organization has created an entire department whose sole purpose is to ensure that equity and inclusion is realized within the organization. Composed of various stakeholders including an associate director, superintendent, principal, teachers, and community partners, the equity and inclusive education department supports the organization's priority of championing equity and inclusivity (Organization Z, 2022). The fact this department even exists, and that a significant amount of funds and resources are allocated to support this priority is significant in signaling readiness for change.

Third, the organization has created and implemented an equity action plan and policy which is to be followed and upheld throughout the organization. The equity action plan and policy acknowledge that we must be committed to developing high levels of critical consciousness. The development of critical consciousness is essential to intentionally interrupting the status quo and to changing practices to improve outcomes for all students, as it will enable us to identify and dismantle systemic barriers that negatively affect achievement and

well-being. Both the AOF and GVV models support the development of this critical consciousness. While the existing equity policy is vague and ambiguous in nature, it is a good starting point in our efforts to ensure that sexually diverse students are supported and affirmed.

Fourth, each school is now required to appoint a staff member to the role of equity designate, ensuring that the daily operation of each school is upholding the equity and inclusion standards and expectations as set forth by the province and organization. Finally, numerous change drivers are also a significant force in helping to champion change for sexually diverse students. Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy is perhaps the most influential driver, as it is legally binding, and government directed. Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy makes it mandatory for all school boards in the province to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy, along with guidelines for the school board and all schools to follow. In addition, each school is to ensure that they are actively fostering a positive school climate that promotes equity, inclusion, and diversity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

As a result of these four actions, the organization is in fact preparing itself for meaningful organizational change that will allow for leaders to work towards dismantling the existing barriers that queer students experience. However, these actions alone do not serve as a panacea for the harm that has been committed against queer students. School leaders must be prepared to continuously recognize, respond to, redress, and sustain equity efforts by employing an anti-oppressive framework in their everyday leadership (Gorski, 2016; Kumashiro, 2004).

While the readiness of the organization at the system level is clear, the readiness of school leaders at the school level varies. When it comes to improving the school experience for sexually diverse students, the varying degrees of change readiness among school leaders can be seen across a spectrum. Changes readiness ranges among school leaders from high readiness and

proactive support to low readiness and resistance. Some school leaders are already committed to creating inclusive learning environments and are actively taking steps to improve their schools. These leaders are aware of the challenges faced by sexually diverse students and demonstrate a strong commitment to creating safe and affirming environments. Other leaders may experience limited readiness, as they have some level of awareness but lack the knowledge and skills required to initiate meaningful change for sexually diverse students. There are also some school leaders that may demonstrate resistance to change, which is due to various factors such as personal beliefs, fear of pushback from other stakeholders, or a lack of understanding about the importance of creating affirming environments. It is essential to recognize that change readiness is not fixed and can evolve over time with the right support, training, and dialogue. To enhance change readiness among school leaders, it is crucial to provide opportunities for professional learning/training, along with safe spaces to foster meaningful discussion, understanding, and commitment to improving the school experience for sexually diverse students.

Possible Solutions to Address Problem of Practice

When embarking on an organizational change journey, considering the myriad solutions that are possible in helping to invoke change is an essential part of the change process. For the purposes of my PoP, it is imperative that change solutions be social justice and equity oriented, capitalizing on the organization's current priorities and action plan. When speaking of change, Dewey (1916), argues that potential solutions are always tentative and evolving, subject to change and revision along the way. The solutions offered here are mere possibilities and open to change throughout this process. The three solutions presented vary from the macro to the micro level, yet all have the potential to be impactful on the organization and school community. There are four goals that I wish to achieve through employing the suggested solutions: 1) to increase

leader capacity in queer and equity literacy so that leaders can identify and dismantle systemic barriers and structural inequities; 2) to foster a cultural shift by creating and implementing a culturally relevant and affirming curriculum that exposes students to queer excellence and diverse queer voices; 3) to create learning spaces for queer students that allow them to feel safe, affirmed, and included so that they experience increased achievement, engagement and well-being, and 4) to provide the space for leaders and educators to interrogate their own practice.

Solution One: Professional Learning Network (PLN), Capacity Building Series

Creating identity affirming and inclusive school communities is a professional and ethical responsibility that rests in the hands of educators and educational leaders alike. School level leaders and educators play a critical role in creating positive school climates for sexually diverse youth by challenging heteronormative and discriminatory practices that have become entrenched within the school system.

This first solution will see the creation of a professional learning network that will bring together one administrator and two lead teachers from select schools in the organization. The PLN will see capacity building sessions take place monthly (with the cost of release time being shared by both the organization and respective schools), starting in year two of the change implementation plan, which will be led by the equity consultant team. Through a series of professional development learning sessions that are grounded in equity literacy, school leaders will learn about the unique histories of sexually diverse populations, the ways in which this population of students is being harmed by the existing structures and systems within the organization, and how to effectively support these students through an anti-oppressive framework that will intellectually, socially, emotionally, and critically empower them (Ladson-

Billings, 1995a; Gorski, 2020). Please refer to appendix B for more information about the topics that will be presented during the PLN sessions.

As we work with school teams, the goal is ensure that school leaders will be better equipped to: 1) build knowledge and capacity amongst their own staff around the systemic barriers that negatively affect student access to programming, achievement, and well-being; 2) disrupt oppression by identifying and addressing planning, instruction, and assessment practices that uphold power and privilege and maintain homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism; 3) understand their own social identities and positionality in order to identify the forms of oppression that impact the experiences of students; and 4) use practices that are reflective and responsive to the social identities of their student body (i.e., culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy).

The professional development sessions will take place throughout the entire school year, ensuring that learning is consistent, rather than siloed. One-time workshops and learning sessions have very minimal long-term impact on an educator's practice, signaling a very clear need for a more sustained commitment to professional development of leaders (Bullock & Sator, 2015; Durham, 2023). Professional learning that is consistent and collaborative has proven to be more effective when invoking change within an organization, as stakeholders are provided with more opportunities to reflect upon the new learning and practice, while also studying and gathering data on the impact of the changes in their school community (Ainscow et al., 2006; Bullock & Sator, 2015).

In between the PLN sessions, equity consultants will meet with each school leadership team to provide targeted and individualized support that will help to implement the new learning, make changes to existing practices, and develop a school improvement plan that is tailored to the

respective school. To further support the communication of the vision, the change leadership team will employ appreciative learning (AL) principles (adapted from appreciative inquiry) to build momentum and encourage support of the change plan during the collaborative school team sessions. Approaching the problem and change plan from an asset-based lens will prove to be beneficial in obtaining buy-in from stakeholders and encouraging active participation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Boyland et al. (2016) explains that school climate is significantly impacted by the school administrator and can have lasting effects on the culture and attitude of the school population, which is why school leaders must urgently focus their attention on the ethical treatment and support of LGBTQ+ students. With that said, many school leaders have expressed that they want to support their sexually diverse students but lack an understanding of the unique needs of this population, the urgency in addressing these needs, and how to go about providing effective support to students (Russell et al., 2021). Kearns et al. (2014) and Peter et al. (2021) acknowledge that school leaders are unprepared when it comes to addressing issues of homophobia and heterosexism in the classroom, citing that educators did not feel that their administrators showed leadership when implementing 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive curriculum. Numerous sexually diverse students shared that principals and teachers were often unhelpful when they were experiencing discrimination or harassment, which caused them to feel very alone and unsafe (Sausa, 2005). Sausa (2005) explains that sexually diverse youth who stayed in school and had more positive experiences, were more likely to report that at least one school staff member supported them and cared about their well-being.

Building capacity amongst school leaders about how to support sexually diverse students will have a significant impact on the entire school community, as school leaders will not only be

better equipped to create safe, affirming, and inclusive environments for their students, but they will also be leading by example (Greytak & Kosciw, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2011). Professional learning and training regarding anti-oppressive practice, more specifically, those that include 2SLGBTQI+ topics, is often neglected in educator preparation programs. Boyland et al. (2016) notes that many educational institutions have largely avoided this topic in their educational leadership training programs altogether, oftentimes because educational institutions themselves are unsure of how to address these topics. It is important that school leaders understand the needs of sexually diverse youth and be provided with specific strategies to build school cultures of acceptance and support.

This solution is in direct alignment with the critical and queer theories, as the overall objectives of the queer and critical paradigms is to expose modes of domination and exploitation, challenge existing ideologies, and invoke change (Willmott, 2005). Queer theory and transformative leadership support this solution through their shared emphasis on challenging and transforming oppressive systems and promoting social justice. Through my chosen solution, school leadership teams will be exposed to the ways in which sexually diverse students/identities have been virtually erased and excluded from educational institutions, the power/privilege that educators hold as professionals, and the ways in which they can help to change the lives and school experiences of queer students. By encouraging critical examination and deconstruction of oppressive norms and practices, centring, and empowering marginalized voices, encouraging collaborative learning and decision-making, and fostering continuous learning and growth, school leaders will be more empowered to create learning environments that truly transform the school experience for sexually diverse students.

Solution Two: Professional Learning Community, Inclusive Curriculum Development

Implementing inclusive curriculum practices that affirm the identities of sexually diverse students will go a long way in ensuring that students develop positive reflections and feelings of self. To improve the school experience of sexually diverse individuals, students must be given the same dignity and respect that is afforded to their heterosexual peers by being represented in their learning and school environment. An inclusive and affirming approach to education will not only help to reduce discrimination and homophobia, but also create more inclusive and equitable education for all students (Snapp et al., 2015b; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Moll, 2010; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2011).

The second solution will bring together a community of educators who will collaboratively engage in developing inclusive and affirming curriculum learning materials that can be shared by all members of the organization. Through this community of educators, participants will build and co-create lesson plans and learning materials that will positively and effectively create affirming and inclusive educational experiences for queer students (the cost of release time for educators will be covered by the organization). It is important to note that this solution will require dedicated amount of time for consultations with community partners to take place, as input from queer stakeholders is necessary if this solution is to be impactful, authentic, and not cause further harm.

Inclusive and affirming learning and curriculum refers to: 1) creating a culturally relevant and queer affirming curriculum that showcases queer excellence and reflects the diversity and intersecting identities within the queer community; 2) normalizing conversations about queer identities in order to dismantle homophobia and transphobia; 3) honouring different ways of knowing through varied texts, materials, and assessments; 4) provides students with the opportunity to see themselves positively reflected in their learning, instead of always through a

deficit “martyr-target-victim” lens (Rofes, 2004); and 5) fostering an environment where students can be their authentic selves (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022). Intentionally creating learning spaces where queer students see themselves reflected in their learning and school community is essential, as there is evidence that shows that students who are exposed to inclusive and identity affirming curriculum experienced increased levels of safety, engagement, well-being, and safety, with decreased instances of discrimination and homophobic behaviour (Snapp et al., 2015a; DePalma & Atkinson, 2006).

In terms of students’ readiness to engage in topics regarding diverse sexualities, DePalma & Atkinson (2006) report that children are interested in critically discussing issues relating to diverse sexualities and identities. Snapp et al. (2015a) further explains that the presence of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum also correlates with increased levels of peer support for sexually diverse students, as “67% of LGBTQ students reported that their classmates were accepting of LGBTQ people when the school taught inclusive curricula” (p. 581). Curriculum that is inclusive and affirming of the experiences of sexually diverse populations has also been shown to offer a sense of validation for queer students, while also providing heterosexual students with an opportunity to understand experiences that are different from their own (Snapp et al., 2015a).

Implementing inclusive teaching practices and curriculum calls on educators and school leaders to adjust aspects of their practice to what Sears (1999) describes as “teaching queerly,” which is an approach to education that creates classrooms that “challenge categorical thinking, promote interpersonal intelligence, and foster critical consciousness” (p. 5). Sears (1999) further explains that educators who intentionally queer the curriculum “are those who develop curricula and pedagogy that afford every child dignity rooted in self-worth and esteem for others” (p. 5). Central to the concept of teaching queerly is ensuring that sexually diverse populations are

positively represented and affirmed through in and through their learning. Rofes (2004) explains that consistent portrayals that showcase the plight of 2SLGBTQI+ populations will negatively impact sexually diverse youth and that constant exposure to negative images of queer populations may deter students from coming out and embracing their sexuality. Rofes (2004) suggests that it is imperative to create teaching resources that affirm sexually diverse youth, so that representation extends far beyond their experiences with homophobia and the ways in which they experience pain and suffering. Inclusive curriculum that consistently illustrates positive representations of sexually diverse populations will not only help to normalize diverse sexual identities, but also ensure that students feel an increased sense of belonging. Representation matters and when students see themselves represented in meaningful contexts and as meaningful participants, historically, presently, and in the future, they are significantly impacted in ways that will positively shape the trajectory and outcome of their lives (Snapp et al., 2015b; Alsup & Miller, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Nieto, 2000; Quinn & Meiners, 2011).

The culturally responsive approach strongly connects with my PoP and offered solutions, as the inclusion and affirmation of one's identities and traditional narratives is directly linked to practices that are responsive and relevant to one's identities (Khalifa et al., 2016). Gay (2010) refers to culturally responsive teaching as a practice that highlights the myriad identities and unique positionality of those who have been excluded from mainstream settings. Culturally relevant teaching fosters student achievement and helps students accept and affirm their identity, as they develop critical perspectives that challenge societal inequities (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Culturally responsive leadership argues that teaching and learning should be filtered through students' own unique lived experiences, identities, customs, characteristics, and perspectives, which will help to interrupt heteronormative thinking and

practices (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). However, before one can even begin to implement culturally responsive practices, they must be properly trained and educated on what this truly means, the value and impact behind this practice, and how to effectively go about doing so beyond the ways in which this concept is taken up superficially.

Solution Three: Policy Development and Amendment Focus Group

The importance of affirming and inclusive educational policies cannot be underestimated as policies help school boards establish clear rules and procedures, ensuring that student needs are prioritized and met (Temkin et al., 2022). The third suggested solution to addressing the PoP involves the creation of a focus group who will collaboratively review, alter, and amend, existing equity policies of the organization to ensure that sexually diverse identities are included and protected. The focus group will consist of a diverse group of individuals, ranging from senior leadership, school administrators, educators, families, students, and community members, ensuring that this process is collaborative and transparent. This solution will require a great deal of time and preparation on behalf of all stakeholders involved as there will need to be a coordinated and dedicated amount of time and effort to engage in consultations with stakeholders prior to the proposed changes being drafted and submitted to the board of trustees (as they are responsible for creating policies that are implemented in schools).

It is imperative that policies of the organization are responsive to social identities as this will ensure that sexually diverse students are protected, while creating standards of quality for student learning, well-being, and safety. Working with school and system leaders to amend and improve existing equity and inclusion policy will ensure that: 1) sexually diverse students are protected against all forms of discrimination; 2) all stakeholders know their rights while at

school; and 3) we disrupt oppression by identifying sexually diverse students as a protected group, disrupting homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism.

Without policies in place that protect students, schools lack the structure and function that is necessary to provide for the educational needs of all students and on which other inclusive and safe school policies and practices can be based. Despite the positive impact that school policies can have on student success and well-being, there are numerous examples of school boards (including Organization Z) that have responded by creating extremely general equity frameworks and policies that rely heavily on ambiguous language and lack a clear plan of action. Russell et al. (2010) explains that “creating safe and supportive learning environments is best achieved through policies that require protection of all students from bullying and harassment and also specifically identifies categories of students most likely to experience such harassment” (p. 8). Russell et al. (2010) also argues that school boards must include enumeration in their inclusion policies, which refers to a complete and explicit listing of all protections afforded to students based on their identities. Evidence shows that policies that affirm and enumerate sexual identities help illicit feelings of empowerment amongst educators and students alike, while ensuring that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the rights that are afforded to sexually diverse students (Russell et al., 2010; Boyland et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). Students that attend schools with inclusive policies have reported less harassment, an increased sense of well-being, and the belief that their schools are safer overall (Kosciw et al., 2020).

Being transparent when it comes to protections for students, rather than hiding behind ambiguous anti-bullying policy, provides educators with the confidence and tools needed to implement and foster truly identity affirming and inclusive learning environments (Russell et al., 2010; Boyland et al., 2018; Temkin et al., 2022). Anti-bullying policies that do not specifically

include enumeration of sexual identities do not provide the grounding that is required for consistent and impactful policy implementation and change (Russell et al., 2010). In another study highlighted by Russell et al., (2021) investigating the implementation of safe schools' policy on heterosexual students' sexual prejudice, it was found that heterosexual students in schools without enumerated school policies perceived the discriminatory treatment of sexually diverse peers as more acceptable than students in schools with enumerated policies. It is important to note that inclusive policies do not provide any guarantee that sexually diverse students will be safe and feel included at school. What is vital in ensuring student safety and affirmation is the critical role that school leaders play in creating, enacting, and upholding school policies (Martino et al., 2022; Spade, 2015).

Comparison of Solutions and Preferred Solution

The implications and effects of the suggested solutions are plenty, as students are directly impacted. There are parallels between the three proposed solutions, as they are all rooted in equity, social justice, and anti-oppression. The three solutions also all require new learning and unlearning on behalf of stakeholders, as well as a great deal of accountability. These three key areas are central to the work of school leaders, as they must be considered daily. Together, the three solutions approach the PoP from the perspectives of new learning, curriculum, and policy, which all tackle a different part of the PoP. Furthermore, the three solutions approach the problem from the macro, meso, and micro levels, which is necessary when dealing with a large organization.

At the macro level, more specific and enumerated equity policy will help to ensure that sexually diverse students feel safe and supported at school. This solution is also the only one of the three that involves the board of trustees, as creating policy is a governance issue. At the

macro/meso level is the training of school staff on understanding the unique issues that face sexually diverse students, while learning how to cultivate inclusive and affirming learning environments. Participating in the PLN will undoubtedly lead to changes in the actions, perceptions, and approaches of leaders when addressing the needs of sexually diverse students. Creating and implementing an inclusive curriculum that positively represents diverse sexualities will also take place at the macro/meso level, as ensuring that students feel protected, while seeing their identities reflected in their learning is something that must be seen across the entire organization. At the micro level, implementing an inclusive curriculum may look different from school to school, and classroom to classroom, which is an important consideration given the student body and the intersection of identities that affect pupils. In terms of staff training and learning, this may also look somewhat different depending on the location, as some staff may require more support due to situations that have transpired in their given school. Supportive staff who truly understand how to best support sexually diverse students will help students feel connected to their school community, foster a sense of belonging, and ensure that students stay in school. All three solutions will be impactful and helpful in working to improve the school experience of sexually diverse youth. However, solution one is the necessary first step on this journey of invoking change, as stakeholders must truly understand the need for change, their role in creating change, and how to effectively move forward.

The preferred solution is solution number one, as it is imperative that school leadership teams be provided with the proper training and professional learning that will equip them with the requisite knowledge and skills to create school cultures that are grounded in inclusion, safety, and affirmation. Learning about diverse sexualities not only reduces biases, but also increases teachers' commitment to helping students, which is one of the goals that my PoP aims to achieve

(Kosciw et al., 2020). Greater awareness and training of school leaders and staff is essential if we wish to have positive representation in the curriculum, enforce school policies that protect students, and intervene when we witness acts of homophobia and transphobia in the school community (Kearns et al., 2014). Without this first solution, the subsequent solutions will not be as impactful or effective, as this solution is foundational in fostering optimal learning environments that are inclusive, affirming, and supportive. Starting from a place of learning, unlearning, and understanding is essential, otherwise school staff, including leaders, will not be inclined to see this as an urgent matter needing immediate attention.

While the preferred solution has been thoughtfully considered and the change readiness of both school leaders and the organization identified, change initiatives require careful planning, strategic thinking, and clear communication to navigate the complexities and challenges that may arise. The preceding chapter will highlight how the preferred solution will be implemented throughout the change process, ultimately leading to impactful and positive outcomes for sexually diverse students within the organization.

Chapter 3: Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication

In any OIP, the key pillars of implementation, evaluation, and communication play a pivotal role in driving meaningful and sustainable change. Implementation ensures that proposed improvements are put into action efficiently and effectively. Evaluation measures the impact and progress of these changes, providing valuable insights for continuous refinement and success. Meanwhile, communication serves as the connective thread, fostering transparency, stakeholder engagement, and alignment of goals. By crafting a well-designed OIP that includes implementation, evaluation, and communication considerations, organizations can increase their chances of achieving sustainable and transformative results, while minimizing disruption and maximizing the adoption and acceptance of the proposed solution.

Change Implementation Plan

The proposed change implementation plan for Organization Z will take place over a two-year period and involve three phases of change that take place at the various phases (i.e., create a climate for change, engage and enable to organization, and implement and sustain the change) (Kotter, 2014). It is important to note that while the included timeline specifies the suggested timeframe for each phase, this is a working guide and many factors along the way may alter this. While the implementation plan is presented as linear, it is in fact a fluid and iterative process that is always evolving (Kumashiro, 2004). The tenets of AL, GVV and AOF are inherently non-linear, as they involve ongoing cycles of learning and discovery, reflection, and adaptation, which allow for a more holistic and nuanced approach to change. With that said, leaders must be prepared to adjust the plan according to their school needs, as implementing any kind of change requires a great deal of flexibility, agility, and adaptability (Cawsey et al, 2020).

The transformative leadership approach that is supported by the authentic, culturally responsive, and inclusive leadership approaches will inform the change process by uplifting individuals, embracing collective differences, and fostering an affirming and inclusive learning environment. As an empowering and inclusive approach, transformative leadership helps foster a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration, which sets the stage for successful change implementation and long-term organizational growth. Additionally, the identified leadership approaches promote resilience and agility which will allow the organization to navigate through the complex challenges that lie ahead. A final consideration for leaders is the challenges that may be encountered throughout the change implementation process, specifically as it pertains to resistance from various stakeholders such as parents and community members. The work proposed in this OIP will undoubtedly be met with resistance from stakeholders with opposing views. The active attempt to gain momentum among parents or community members who may not agree with or understand the problem at hand is an issue that leaders must anticipate, as this can have a significant impact on change implementation. As the school community is an integral part of creating inclusive learning environments, a lack of support from parents and other stakeholders may hinder efforts to provide such spaces for sexually diverse students. When parents and members of the organization are divided on this issue, it can create tension and uncertainty within the school community, potentially leading to the erosion of supportive policies and practices.

Addressing this challenge requires a significant amount of time, commitment, and patience. First and foremost, it is essential to educate stakeholders about the realities and needs of sexually diverse children, which will be an ongoing endeavor from the onset. This includes sharing data, dispelling myths/misconceptions, and fostering transparent and open

communication channels where all parties can be included in the change process. Additionally, building alliances with 2SLGBTQI+ organizations, advocacy groups, and community members can strengthen support for sexually diverse students and provide resources to stakeholders that can help to counter misinformation and support our work. Leveraging these partnerships can amplify efforts to protect the rights of sexually diverse students and promote inclusive and affirming practices within schools. Ultimately, it is crucial for school leaders, educators, and members of the organization to stand firm in their commitment to creating inclusive and affirming learning spaces, as this will have a significant and lasting impact on students.

Organizational Context and Preferred Solution

Wholistically, the change implementation plan is founded in the tenets of TL, and the XLR8, GVV, and AOF change models. Traditional leadership approaches and frameworks are entrenched in colonial and oppressive discourse and ideologies, which do not serve the queer student population within the organization. As a result, the TL approach and XLR8, GVV, and AOF change models will address the existing inequities and center the sexually diverse student voice and experience. Rather than serving as a change model, the AL principles will help guide the inquiry at the grass roots level during the PLN, centering a more positive approach and learning model, rather than a deficit one, which will foster a culture of support, improvement, and encouragement (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The AL principles will focus on managing organizational change by identifying and building upon the strengths of the participating schools, rather than solely addressing the weaknesses or problem areas. The process of AL involves several stages, including identifying the school's positive aspects (discovery), envisioning a preferred future state (dream), planning, and implementing solutions (design), and evaluating and sustaining the changes (destiny). AL

will unite stakeholders from across the entire organization to engage in a collaborative process of inquiry, exploration, and continued improvement, all in service of sexually diverse students (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

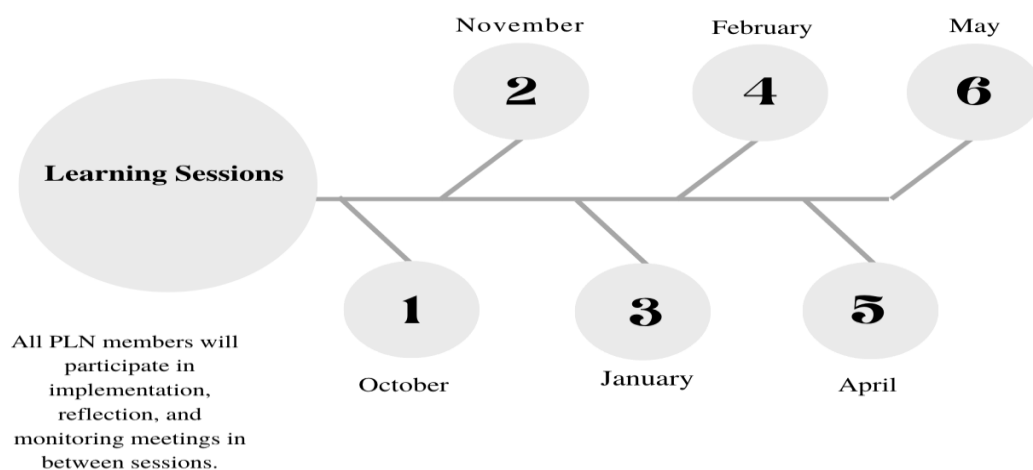
Through both the Director's annual action plan (DAAP) and the equity action plan (EAP), Organization Z has signaled a willingness and commitment to change the culture of the organization to one that is more inclusive and equitable. The preferred solution offered is in direct alignment with the equity and inclusion goals of the organization. Through impactful, measurable, and sustained action, the preferred solution will: a) increase leader capacity in queer and equity literacy so that leaders can identify and dismantle systemic discrimination and structural inequities; b) foster a cultural shift by creating and implementing a culturally relevant and affirming curriculum that exposes students to queer excellence and diverse queer voices; and c) create learning spaces for queer students that allow them to feel safe, affirmed, and included, so that they can experience increased achievement, engagement, and well-being.

To review, the preferred solution is focused on building the capacity of school leadership teams, through a professional learning network of select schools that will meet regularly and engage in a series of collaborative learning sessions. Through the formation of the PLN, participants will gather and engage in learning that is led by the equity consultant team, where learning about leading collective equity efforts and improving the school experience of sexually diverse students is the focus. Over the course of the PLN, participants will engage in a series of six learning sessions that will address various topics and meet targeted goals (the learning topics for the PLN sessions are outlined in appendix B). In the weeks between the PLN sessions, equity consultants will meet and collaborate with individual school teams to better understand their unique needs and to help plan and execute specific goals and strategies that will meet the needs of the school. This collaboration may include planning professional learning for the school staff,

planning a family engagement evening, or starting an identity affirming affinity space to name a few. The end-goal is to empower social justice-oriented leaders who are equipped in fostering an inclusive learning environment for 2SLGBTQI+ pupils that is informed by meaningful and affirming practices, pedagogy, and curriculum. Furthermore, the intention is for school leaders to take this new learning and embark on a learning journey with their respective school staff that will further build capacity with their entire school community. The timeline of the PLN is outlined in figure four.

Figure 4

Professional Learning Collaborative Model



Through the PLN, the organization will build a coalition of equity minded leaders and stakeholders who will serve as change agents and partake in the change implementation process from its inception. Each role within the change implementation process is important and impactful in realizing the given change. Change agents are individuals or groups of people who work to bring about change within an organization (Cawsey et al., 2020). Whether they are

internal to an organization (i.e., employees), or external (i.e., activists), these individuals may use a variety of methods to bring about change, including education and activism.

According to Cawsey et al. (2020), the organizational change roles include: a) change leader (me): This person is typically a formal change leader, and they may also take on the role of initiator, implementer, or facilitator; b) change initiator (me and equity consultant team): the person who identifies the needed change and works to achieve it; c) change implementer (PLN participants): the person who has the critical responsibility of ensuring that the change happens, while charting the path forward; d) change facilitator (me and equity consultant team): the person who assists initiators, implementer, and recipients with the change process. They also help to alleviate problems along the way and provide guidance to participants; and e) change recipient (students, staff, and community): the person who is affected by the change. This person often must alter their behavior to ensure that change is effective.

All change agents and stakeholders will focus on specific priorities of the change implementation plan. As the change leader, I will guide and monitor the change implementation plan throughout the entire process, ensuring that all stakeholders are supported and that prescribed goals are being met. The stages of the implementation plan are directly aligned with the three major phases of Kotter's XLR8 model, ensuring that the change plan is gradually introduced and chunked into manageable sections, with each stage of the change process being executed intentionally and thoughtfully. Furthermore, Gentile's GVV and Kumashiro's AOF will ensure that the change initiative and implementation plan provoke participants to engage with criticality, while also holding the organization to account through the interrogation of current systems and structures that are in place.

Timeline of Events

Broken down into three phases, the outlined timeline below explains the sequence of events and significant steps to fully implement the change plan over a two-year period. Please refer to appendix C for more information regarding the change implementation timeline.

Following the timeline will ensure that the necessary steps are taken so that the organization can create truly inclusive and identity affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students.

Phase One-Year One

September - December

At the start of year one, the focus will be on creating a sense of urgency regarding the PoP. At the start of a change implementation plan, it is imperative that leaders convey to the various stakeholders of the organization that the status quo is not working, and that change is required (Kotter, 2014). In response to the rise in hatred towards sexually diverse communities and continued evidence of homophobia and heteronormativity that is pervasive in our schools, a background report will be created by the change leadership team and released to the system/organization, referencing various data sets that highlight the harmful learning environments that currently exist for queer youth (Kumashiro, 2004). The background report will seek input and feedback from stakeholders within the organization who self-identify as sexually diverse, as the lived experience of this population must be prioritized.

Directly aligned with the first phase of Kumashiro's AOF, education for and about the other will document the need for a strategy to dismantle homophobia and heteronormativity within the organization, further emphasizing the urgent need for improved efforts aimed at supporting queer students (Kumashiro, 2002). In terms of Gentile's GVV, this initial phase will allow school leaders and staff to start examining their own level of understanding on the topic, while also understanding and accepting the conflict that exists (Gentile, 2012). During this time,

the change team will continue to examine and critique the ways in which power and privilege are embedded throughout the organization (Kumashiro, 2002). The equity consultant team will also begin to engage in pre-implementation monitoring by completing some baseline assessments regarding the current state of the organization and change readiness of school and system leaders. Some of the monitoring tools include surveys, engagement with school climate data, and conversations and observations. This baseline monitoring will continue throughout the first year of the change implementation plan.

December - January

With continued work on the background report, December and January will focus on mobilizing a team/coalition of like-minded leaders across the organization who share a commitment to the cause and will help support the change implementation plan (Kotter, 1996). The team/coalition, which will consist of system and school leaders, including school administrators and lead teachers who will work in collaboration with the change leadership team, mainly through the PLN that will take place later in the implementation plan. Participants will act in various change agent roles, from initiators to facilitators at their respective school sites. This part of the implementation plan is extremely important as it will encourage collaboration and shared decision-making amongst change agents/participants, as we work to empower them throughout the change process and instill a sense of ownership and investment in the changes being made (Shields, 2010). This stage will see the guiding coalition contribute to the background report by sharing their experiences with sexually diverse students (those who self-identify), while also identifying the values that are most important to them as leaders and those which are relevant to the change plan (Gentile, 2012). Identifying the power dynamics and modes of oppression that are relevant to the PoP is also important to action at this stage as it will

allow stakeholders to see that the organization has contributed to the harm of queer students (Kumashiro, 2002).

February - March

February and March will see the change leadership team review current data on the experience of sexually diverse students in our schools. The data will include school climate data, report cards, incident reporting, and referrals that come into the equity and inclusive education department. The change team/coalition will create a vision of the desired future state and develop strategies that will direct their change efforts (Kang et al., 2020). Together, this team will help develop the vision that will center student inclusion, affirmation, excellence, and well-being, by creating a culture of continuous improvement where risk-taking is valued and encouraged (Shields, 2010). A focal point of GVV, this stage will also see school leaders identify situations in which their values and the respective goals of this change initiative will be challenged and must be defended. Being prepared in the face of resistance will allow leaders to respond and identify with the specific actions that are needed to align the organization and propel the change forward (Gentile, 2012). Leaders will also further examine how the school system has played a role in maintaining social/power structures and ideologies that have helped to maintain the processes of privileging and othering (Kumashiro, 2004).

April

The area of focus for April will be on communicating the vision to the organization through various and ongoing modes of communication that highlight the need, foundational principles, goals and priorities, actions, and benefits of the proposed change plan (Kotter, 1996). The vision will set the direction for the organization, allowing the work to begin in a thoughtful manner. Leaders must ensure that they remain passionate about the given change and lead by example so that participants are intrigued and buy into the vision (Applebaum, 2012). Building

and nurturing relationships by actively seeking out opportunities to engage with school leadership teams and staff will help to create a sense of trust and respect amongst stakeholders (Shields, 2010).

May - June

In May and June, efforts will be focused on building and developing the PLN, which includes planning the new learning that participants will engage in during the learning sessions and help to empower/equip leaders within the organization to act and support sexually diverse students. The PLN is the crux of the change implementation plan, as meaningful change requires ongoing learning, support, capacity building, and ultimately a shift in thinking to be successful (Shields, 2010). Part of this planning will have the change leadership team create inquiry based, guiding questions that will lead the learning in the PLN (please see table one).

Table 1

PLN Guiding Questions

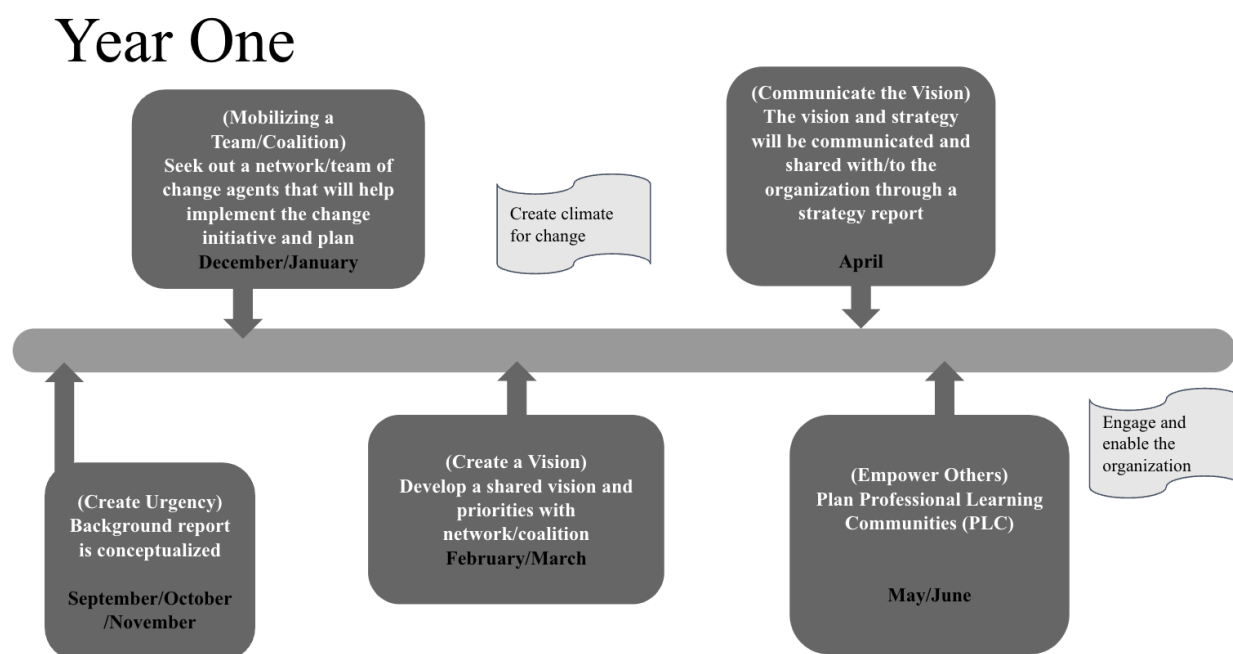
Appreciative Learning Principles	Guiding Questions
Discovery: Appreciating	In what ways are your current practices benefitting queer students?
Dream: Envisioning Results	How can current practices be reimaged to affirm queer identities? What is required to do this?
Design: Co-Constructing	How can we further support you in ensuring that your school is identity affirming for queer students?
Destiny: Sustaining Change	How can we as leaders ensure that these efforts are prioritized and sustained over time, benefitting future generations?

Note. Adapted from Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D. K. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change* (1st ed.). Berrett-Koehler.

At this point, the hope is that the commitment to engage in the PLN and challenge the existing structures that no longer serve the organization and sexually diverse students continues to grow. This point in the change implementation plan will also see change leaders continue to prepare for any incoming resistance, by preparing a script that can defend both the values and priorities of the organization and the change implementation plan (Gentile, 2012). This script will include specific language and examples that can be used when communicating the change plan to staff, community members, and other stakeholders (Gentile, 2012). Leaders will also create safe and supportive spaces (i.e., the PLN) where marginalized stakeholders and leaders can share their experiences, build solidarity, and work together to challenge oppressive systems (Kumashiro, 2002).

Figure 5

Year One Timeline



Stage Two-Year Two

September - December

At the start of year two of the change implementation plan, efforts will be focused on creating new learning communities, building capacity, and empowering leaders within the organization to create identity affirming schools for sexually diverse students. As the PLN begins, change leaders will bring the vision to life and engage in reimagining the existing structures and practices that harm sexually diverse students. The PLN will empower leaders to lead courageously, take risks, and acknowledge and challenge resistance (Kotter, 1996). The community of learners will engage in learning that spans several months and covers a wide range of topics, such as reimagining promising practices, the power of socialization, culturally responsive and relevant teaching, understanding identity and identity affirmation, and countering resistance. Change leaders will engage in continuous script delivery and rehearsal, while seeking feedback from colleagues, so they are prepared to communicate the change plan effectively and align their actions with the values (Gentile, 2012). School leadership teams will also begin to monitor changes that are being made in their respective schools, with their staff, and in their community. From the start of year two of the change implementation plan, the equity consultant team will intentionally engage in ongoing monitoring practices that will track the progress of the change implementation plan. Using various monitoring tools, including surveys, school improvement plans, and conversations and observations, various data sets will be gathered to inform next steps along the implementation journey.

January - February

January will allow leaders to begin to celebrate successes, reflect on the changes made thus far, and continue to work with leaders within their school networks to mobilize for change. Leaders will be encouraged to celebrate, as they continue to implement small changes that

demonstrate progress towards achieving the vision. Providing encouragement and momentum to continue working towards successfully achieving the desired level of change is important at this stage (Kotter, 1996). Leaders will continue to practice delivering their script so that they are prepared when they continue to encounter resistance and defend the change initiative (Gentile, 2012). Change leaders will also help participants become aware of and critically analyze the ways in which power and privilege operate in their lives, and to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to resist oppression (Kumashiro, 2002).

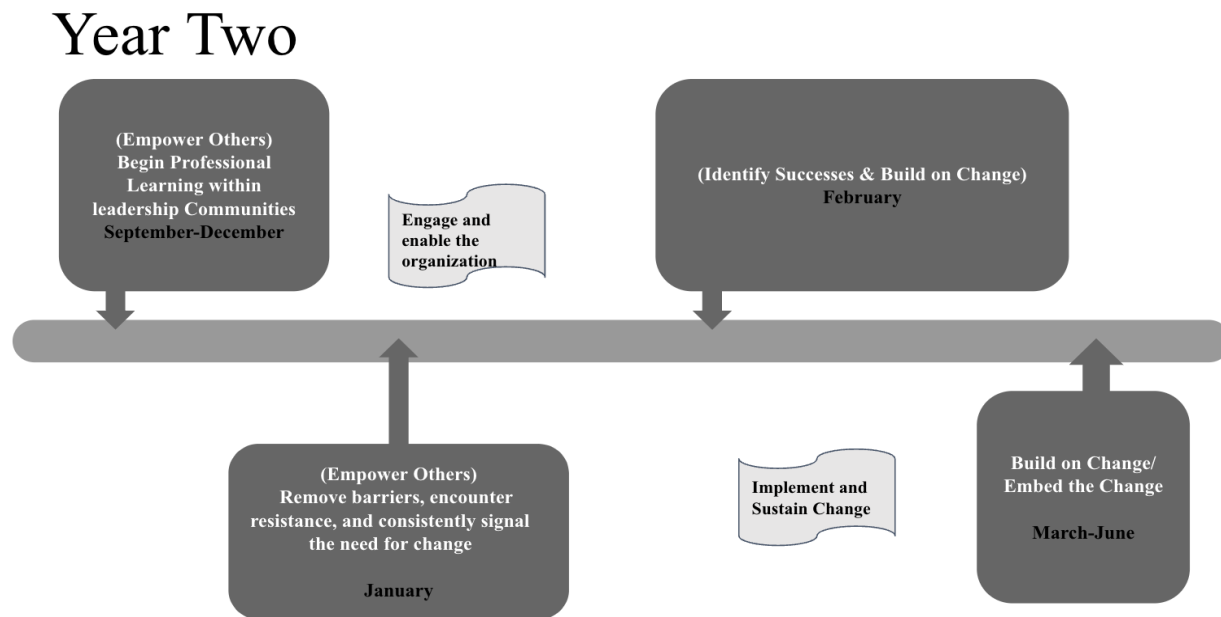
In February, we will continue to build on the change efforts and initiatives by having school leaders begin sharing their new learning with their staff and community. Leaders will continue to celebrate small wins and successes with staff as they continue to implement small changes that demonstrate progress towards achieving the vision. Leaders will inspire new ideas and keep the momentum going, as they continue to set goals and reflect on the work that is being done. It is important to remember that despite the achievements being made, the hard work has only just begun (Kotter, 1996). Leaders will also continue to actively monitor and evaluate the change process to ensure that educators and staff are aligning their actions with the values of the organization and that the change plan is achieving its intended results (Gentile, 2012). As the PLN continues, the equity consultant team will regularly collect data to identify any improvements, trends, patterns, challenges, and areas of success in implementing the desired changes.

Stage Three: Year Two

March - June

March to June will see school leaders continue passing on the new learning by building capacity in their respective schools, while also working to normalize the change and make it part of daily practice. Anchoring new approaches in how the organization operates is vital to

successfully implementing the change plan. This final phase is about implementing and sustaining change within the organization so that it becomes ingrained in the culture and regular operation of the organization. Ensuring the success of the change initiative will require leaders to continuously demonstrate how the changes have improved the organization and why it is important to keep forging ahead with the new and improved practices that have fostered the change (Kotter, 1996). Leaders will remind their team that when the situation arises, they are to use their script as a guide for speaking up or acting in a way that aligns with the values of the organization. Leaders will continue to refine the script, based on feedback and results (Gentile, 2012). Leaders, along with their staff, will engage in a process of critical reflection and action, in which students and educators work together to understand and challenge oppressive systems so that they can create more just and equitable environments (Kumashiro, 2004). School leadership teams will continue to monitor the changes being made at their school site by documenting attitudes, perceptions, actions, and other reactions to the change implementation plan. At the end of the PLN, the equity consultant team will conduct a post-implementation evaluation that will include a comprehensive analysis, evaluation report, and follow-up assessments.

Figure 6*Year Two Timeline***Possible Challenges**

According to Yilmaz & Kiliçoğlu (2013), there are several challenges that can arise when implementing a change plan in an organization, including resistance to change, lack of buy-in from stakeholders, lack of clear communication and/or direction, lack of resources or support, and difficulty in measuring the success of the change. Additionally, changes in the external environment, such as political and social climate, can also make it difficult to implement a change plan. Resistance manifests in various ways, therefore it is important to anticipate this and proactively work to avoid this, which is why GVV has been employed. For some employees, change can cause feelings of fear and uneasiness, as employees may be uncertain about how they will be affected (i.e., loss of control or job security). For others, they may be resistant to change if they do not trust the people leading the change, or if they feel that the change is being imposed on them without their input or consent. Some employees may also be resistant to change if they

do not understand the reasons for the change, or if they feel that the change is not aligned with the organization's goals and values. Furthermore, some employees may be resistant if they feel that they are not properly trained or supported, or if the change goes against their beliefs or values (Yilmaz & Kiliçoğlu, 2013). With that said, resistance can often be combated through a transparent and thoughtful monitoring, evaluation, and communication strategy.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Peter Drucker, otherwise known as the father of modern management, once said that if you cannot measure something, then you cannot prove it (Beatty & Drucker, 1998). Measuring change, which includes both monitoring and evaluation, is essential to determining the success of the change initiative at various levels, such as across the entire organization (macro), at schools (meso), and at the individual (micro) level. Monitoring and evaluation are two distinct but related processes that are commonly used when implementing change within an organization. While monitoring and evaluation share some similarities, there are also key differences between the two (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

Of particular importance are the evaluation questions, as thoughtful lines of inquiry that are directly correlated to the change implementation plan, which will help to determine the success of the change plan (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). The five domains of the monitoring and evaluation model are: a) appropriateness, which focuses on the fit between the intent, design, and context of the change plan; b) efficiency, which focuses on the use of resources and the delivery of the change plan; c) effectiveness, which focuses on achievement of the change plan objectives; d) impact, which focuses on results produced by the change plan; and e) sustainability, which focuses on the degree to which benefits will be maintained long after the completion of the plan (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

Measuring transformative change, specifically the degree to which one changes their beliefs about or attitudes towards sexually diverse students, can be challenging as it involves assessing internal shifts in mindset and values. One of the main challenges that the change implementation team is faced with is measuring authentic change versus performative change, as there will undoubtedly be school leaders and educators who declare that they are on board with implementing the proposed changes yet have no intention of doing so. It is imperative that the measurement process be fluid and considerate of the complexity of attitudinal changes, as this will avoid an oversimplification of both the process and impact. Transformative change in attitudes and beliefs is a gradual process, and the goal is not to achieve uniformity in opinions, but rather to encourage genuine growth, understanding, and improved practice. As a result, measurement practices should align with the principles of queer theory, which are grounded in emancipation, affirmation, and inclusion.

Monitoring

When change initiatives are monitored and closely scrutinized, the direction, progress, and outcomes of the change initiative will be in alignment with the change implementation plan (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016; Cawsey et al, 2020). Monitoring is primarily concerned with tracking progress of achieving change goals and identifying potential problems in real-time, and as they occur throughout the entire change process. Monitoring change involves collecting, analyzing, and using data to identify areas where alterations may be needed in the change process to keep the implementation plan on track to achieving the desired vision. Monitoring activities vary and will include regular check-ins with stakeholders and change agents through conversations and feedback, data collection and analysis, and regular reporting.

When monitoring change, several key performance indicators will be developed and used to track and assess the progress of the change implementation plan and impact on queer students (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Reporting on this data at both the system and school levels will identify existing gaps and where to target specific supports. Khalifa et al., (2016) suggest that culturally responsive school leaders use data to align policy, curriculum, and school reform, as this places high value on equity and culturally relevant practices. Gathering this data will provide system and school leaders with a clear, accurate, and useful understanding of the degree of inequity present in their own schools (Park, 2018). Key performance indicators/areas will include school climate data, report card data, representation among suspensions and expulsions, student mental health and well-being data, representation of self-identified queer students/staff, visual representations of queer identities in the school, and reporting of hate incidents/crimes.

Evaluation

Evaluation, on the other hand, is a systematic and objective process of assessing the extent to which the change plan achieved its intended results (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Evaluation involves measuring the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, and impact of a change initiative and will include several activities, such as collecting data on outcomes, conducting surveys and interviews with stakeholders, and analyzing results to identify strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement, and future needs/considerations. When determining if a change initiative has been successful, a variety of data will to be gathered (both qualitative and quantitative data) that will highlight the progress and impact of the change initiative, as data-informed decision making is imperative when it comes to informing school-based decisions and outcomes for students (Schildkamp et al., 2019). The evaluation model of this process will complement the information that is gathered through the monitoring process, while also

providing answers to a series of evaluative questions that target different elements of change (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Evaluating the data will allow for leaders to assess the level of change within the organization and the degree of impact and success (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Culture change is a unique form of change, in that it is about changes in the behavior of individuals which is exactly the type of change that my change plan aims to invoke. Please see appendix D and E for the monitoring and evaluation tools.

Monitoring and Evaluation Tools

While there are various monitoring and evaluation tools that will be used to measure the success of the change initiative, queering the measurement process is vitally important to maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the OIP. Queering the monitoring and evaluation process involves incorporating queer knowledge, perspectives, values, and methodologies into the measurement framework. This approach recognizes and respects the unique experiences and worldviews of queer communities and ensures that the evaluation process aligns with their cultural context. Queering the monitoring and evaluation process is essential for meaningful and equitable evaluation of queer issues and in queer contexts (Sears, 1999). By embracing queer perspectives, the evaluation process can contribute to positive and sustainable change that promotes respect and empowerment of the queer community (Sears, 1999). Queering the evaluation process is a crucial step in the OIP, as it will support efforts in creating more inclusive and affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students. Here are some ways that we will queer the monitoring and evaluation process:

Engage Queer Communities

Collaborate with queer communities from the onset to ensure their meaningful participation in the design, implementation, and interpretation of the evaluation process. This

includes seeking input and feedback from queer leaders, staff, students, families, and community members (Safir & Dugan, 2021).

Incorporate Queer Indicators

Develop evaluation indicators that align with queer epistemologies, values, aspirations, and priorities. These indicators should capture qualitative and holistic aspects of change that are relevant to queer communities (Henrickson et al., 2020).

Emphasize Focus Groups and Personal Narratives

Utilize focus groups as evaluation methods to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of queer stakeholders. Personal narratives can provide rich and contextualized insights into the impact of change initiatives (Safir & Dugan, 2021).

Respect Alternative and Fluid Timelines

Be mindful of concepts of time when engaging in the evaluation process, recognizing that the queer community may prioritize cyclical timelines over those that are linear and rigid. Respecting individual timelines can result in more positive and meaningful experiences for all.

Implement Culturally Responsive Data Collection

Use data collection methods that are culturally responsive to queer communities. This may include incorporating culturally appropriate survey tools and adjusting language that is used. It is also important to ensure that data analysis is conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect for the queer community (Safir & Dugan, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Adhere to ethical guidelines and protocols when working with queer and marginalized communities. Respecting and protecting privacy and other personal information is of the utmost importance (Bettinger, 2010).

Foster Reciprocity and Mutual Learning

Emphasize reciprocal and mutual learning throughout the measurement process, recognizing that both the change implementation team and queer stakeholders have valuable contributions to make, and that learning is ongoing (Henrickson et al., 2020).

There are several monitoring and evaluation tools that can be used to measure the impact of the change initiative within Organization Z, but for the purposes of this OIP, the impact of learning that takes places in the PLN will be measured closely. Below are some of the measurement tools that will be employed:

Surveys

A survey is an efficient way to get important questions answered and vital information gathered. A survey enables both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected and allows change leaders to understand the impact of the given change. A survey is also a great way to learn more about how stakeholders, such as students, are feeling at various stages throughout the change process. Surveys can also serve as a tool to gage the change readiness of stakeholders and gather insight into what they would change about the process. It is important that surveys and questionnaires be designed with carefully crafted questions that can measure the impact that the change initiative has had on 2SLGBTQI+ students.

Observations of Behaviours, Conversations, and Practices

Observations can be very powerful when measuring change, especially change that involves the culture of an organization. Observations can include individuals' behaviors and interactions with 2SLGBTQI+ students over time, and any shifts in behavior that reflect a more inclusive and accepting approach towards these students. Other observations and conversations can include the review and discussion of certain practices, curriculum, and written/verbal communication to identify changes in the language and rhetoric used when addressing

2SLGBTQI+ issues. Otherwise known as street data, this kind of qualitative and experiential data is rooted in the human experience. This type of data can be very emotional, as it is ultimately about the lived experiences of individuals and groups of people (Safir & Dugan, 2021).

Self-Reflection Exercises

Encouraging individuals, such as leaders and educators to engage in self-reflection exercises where they can assess their own attitudes and beliefs of queer students can be quite beneficial for participants, while providing the change implementation team with useful information. These exercises can include journaling, guided reflections, or group discussions, allowing participants to track their own transformative journey.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Conducting focus groups or individual interviews with participants, such as students, can help to gain deeper insight in how the change initiative has impacted their school experience. Interviewing leaders and educators can also help the implementation team better understand the magnitude of both the personal and professional transformation that has taken place. These qualitative methods can provide rich data about the nature and extent of attitude changes and the factors that contributed to these changes (Safir & Dugan, 2021).

School Improvement Plans

Schools will be held accountable for ensuring the implementation of the change initiative by reporting on the changes being made in their schools and the impact this is having on sexually diverse students. Data at the school level is extremely important, as it allows for targeted school-level supports and interventions that will improve school experiences and outcomes for queer students. School staff will be required to complete a self-assessment, identifying the various practices that are in place that support and affirm queer students, as well as the perceived impact

of these measures. Schools will also be asked to submit a plan of action addressing the ways in which they plan to further support the change plan.

Teacher Performance Appraisal

The teacher performance appraisal (TPA) is designed to provide teachers with meaningful appraisals that foster teacher development and identify opportunities for learning and support. Through this process, leaders can see first-hand how educators are intentionally reimagining their practice (i.e., pedagogy, resources, environment) so that sexually diverse students feel an increased sense of safety, well-being, and affirmation.

Annual Learning Plans

The teacher's annual learning plan (ALP) is used to support teachers' professional learning and growth. The ALP is teacher-authored and directed and developed in a consultative and collaborative manner with their school administrator. Teachers will be encouraged to include actions to support their ongoing learning about how to create inclusive learning environments for sexually diverse students.

All the various data sources mentioned can be used by several stakeholders, including the change leadership team, who can use the data to monitor effectiveness and ensure accountability through data-informed evaluations (Young et al., 2018). Having queer students engaged in the monitoring and evaluation process is crucial for ensuring the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of change initiatives aimed at improving school conditions for sexually diverse students. Including sexually diverse students in the measurement process allows for a more accurate evaluation of whether the implemented changes are meeting the intended goals and if there are unintended consequences that need addressing. Queer students can help assess the real-world impact of change initiatives from their perspective, which may be overlooked by others.

Knowledge Mobilization Plan

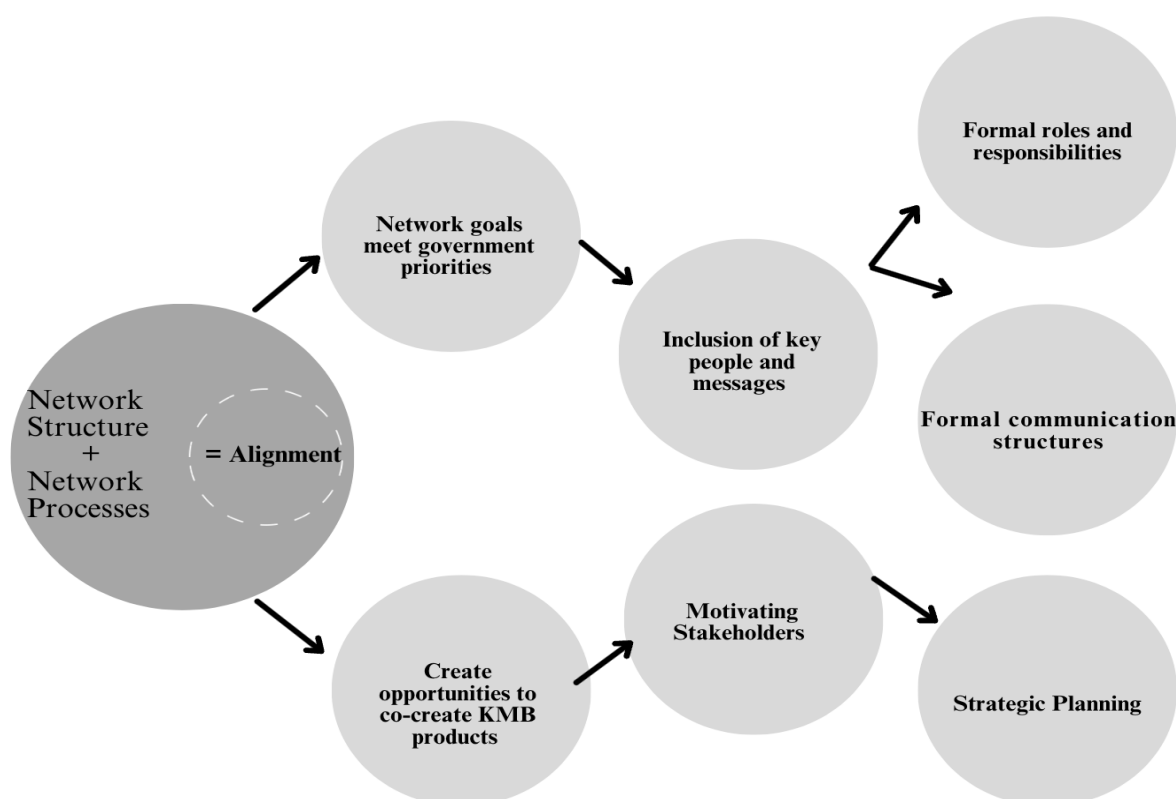
Knowledge mobilization is meant to “increase the use of research evidence in policy and practice in the education sector among and between individual, organizational, and system levels” (Pollock et al., 2015, p. 20). The meaningful use of evidence and expertise to align research, policy, pedagogy, and practice will enable school leaders to significantly improve outcomes for sexually diverse students and families. Knowledge mobilization is not just simply about disseminating information, but rather it is about intentionally and thoughtfully engaging stakeholders, including the larger school community, which is exactly what my change implementation plan aims to do (Earl & Katz, 2007; Pollock et al., 2015; Nutley et al., 2007).

Cooper (2012) argues that knowledge mobilization occurs through several interactions between the various and diverse groups that compose the organization, as they work to improve educational outcomes and aspects of well-being for students (Hadfield et al., 2006). As a result, networks, such as PLN’s can be extremely effective in knowledge mobilization, as networks not only connect people together, but harness ongoing communication and dialogue (Chapman & Fullan, 2007; Gilchrist, 2000). The use of a PLN as a tool for knowledge mobilization will be the nexus of how the content/research is turned into improved practices that will benefit queer students. In fact, educational networks have been shown to be extremely effective when making improvements in public education that will benefit students (Church et al., 2002; Finnigan & Daly, 2014; Nutley et al., 2007). PLN’s can be extremely effective in utilizing knowledge mobilization efforts to perform a variety of tasks, such as building capacity among professionals, creating professional development tools based on research-based evidence, acting as knowledge brokers, and building and fostering relationships (Pollock et al., 2015).

Pollock et al., (2015) identify four components of successful professional networks: a) similar goals and objectives to current government priorities; b) inclusion of key people and organizations; c) formal roles and responsibilities, and d) organized methods of communication. The PLN that will be implemented as part of addressing my PoP is in direct alignment with the equity and inclusion goals of the province, is inclusive of individuals who are involved in top-level decision making within the organization, ensures that participants understand their roles and responsibilities as change agents, while also including intentional and formalized communication methods for participants and stakeholders to disseminate, share, and co-produce knowledge (Pollock et al., 2015, p. 26). Please refer to appendix F for the knowledge mobilization tool.

Figure 7

Knowledge Mobilization



Note. Adapted from Pollock, K.E., Briscoe, P., Campbell, C., & Carr-Harris, S. (2015). Finding the sweet spot: Network structures and processes for increased knowledge mobilization. *Brock Education*, 25(1), 20-34.

By integrating the knowledge mobilization plan with the communication plan, Organization Z can optimize the dissemination of research findings and knowledge, leading to greater awareness, understanding, and application of collective goals. This integration maximizes the potential for positive outcomes and impact based on the generated knowledge. Both the knowledge mobilization and communication plans have identified the same key target audiences, which includes school and system leaders, educators, staff, families, and community members. Ensuring congruence between the objectives and messaging of the knowledge mobilization and communication plans is paramount, as the knowledge mobilization plan aims to make research and knowledge accessible, while the communication plan focuses on delivering messages effectively to reach and engage stakeholders. It is also important to determine the most effective communication channels for reaching the target audiences (i.e., background report), while developing engaging and informative content that reflects the key messages from the knowledge mobilization plan (i.e., PLN). Both the knowledge mobilization and communication plans encourage ongoing participation and communication between the organization and stakeholders. Engaging in continued dialogue with stakeholders, especially those who identify as sexually diverse, can enhance the relevance and impact of the knowledge being mobilized. Finally, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the communication efforts and knowledge mobilization activities is vital to the success of the change implementation plan, as this information will be used to refine future knowledge mobilization and communication strategies.

Communication Plan

When implementing the change plan within Organization Z, it is imperative that change leaders focus a significant amount of their efforts on the communication aspect of the given plan. Many change initiatives often fail, not because the change is not needed within the organization, but because organizations lack a clear and concise communication plan (Mei et al., 2004; Klein, 1996). The success of organizational change is largely dependent on the level of communication and trust between leaders and stakeholders throughout the change implementation process, as this will elicit and encourage engagement, while also warding off resistance to change (Hansma and Elving, 2008; Cawsey et al., 2020).

One of the key elements of a strong and successful communication plan is the ability to gather as much support and awareness of the vision as possible (Kotter, 2014; Cawsey et al., 2020). One of the most effective ways of garnering buy-in from employees and staff is by involving them in the planning and envisioning process in the early stages of the change planning process (Cawsey et al., 2020). Leaders must also ensure that they are providing guidance and reassurance to members of the organization who will be affected by the change implementation (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Cawsey et al., 2020; Kotter, 2014). Ensuring ongoing communication during the implementation phase is equally important, as stakeholders will want to understand how the change will affect them and the role in which they play. In the final phase of the communication plan, which will involve the continued implementation and confirmation of change, leaders must communicate the successes of the change plan, while also looking ahead and anticipating next steps (Kotter, 2014; Cawsey et al., 2020).

It is important to note the significant difference between simply sharing/relaying information to stakeholders (i.e., telling them what to do) versus communicating with them (i.e., including them in the process of sharing information and decision making) (Hansma and Elving,

2008). The way in which messages are communicated has a significant impact on the sensemaking of stakeholders who participate in the change processes, and it will determine their level of engagement or lack thereof (Lewis, 2011). Syahmi et al. (2019) argue that dialogic communication can effectively facilitate organizational change, more specifically, the humanistic elements that should be considered when exchanging messages about change (including how leaders deliver their change message).

The various stakeholders who need to be included in the engagement of my change initiative include students, teachers, school staff/personnel, administration, area superintendents, families, trustees, and the community at large. Whether directly or indirectly, all stakeholders will be affected by the change initiative, especially those who identify as sexually diverse, and without their input and involvement, a vital piece of the school community will be missing. Excluding any of the stakeholders throughout the change implementation process will go against the inclusive aspect of the OIP and perpetuate the existing hierarchical structure of the organization. Additionally, there are several components that need to be considered when developing a communication plan for an organization. Leaders must be considerate of the organizational context, the culture of the organization, the purpose of the plan, the change implementation plan itself, and the various forms of communication that will be employed throughout the process (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). While these components are being considered, leaders must also be aware of the three distinct phases of the communication plan, which include the before (preparation and development), during (mobilization/adoption), and after (institutionalization) change phases (Armenakis & Harris, 2001; Klein, 1996).

Communication Before Implementation: Preparation and Development

Communication that begins early in the change planning process will allow for change leaders to seek input from the myriad stakeholders within the organization, as well as the community at large. When communicating an organizational change plan, it is important to first establish a sense of urgency for the change which will be driven by data and involve intentional opportunities to engage in conversation with sexually diverse students from the organization (Kotter, 2014). It is also essential that change leaders be clear and transparent about the rationale for change, the alignment between the change and the organization's mission, vision, and values, and how stakeholders will be impacted (Cawsey et al., 2020). Leaders must ensure that they never lose sight of why the change is so essential, and consistently communicate the message that sexually diverse students are not benefiting from the current structure and practices of the system.

With that said, the important role that school leaders play in the implementation of the change plan must be highlighted, with emphasis on the fact that the role of school leaders is being reconceptualized (Griffiths, 2013). During this phase, it is also important to involve stakeholders in the planning process and provide them with opportunities to provide input, share feedback, and ask questions. Community voices, especially from those affected by the change plan, will prove to be a vital component in ensuring that the change is meaningful, impactful, and sustainable (Lewis, 2019). In addition, this phase will also mark the formation of a guiding coalition that will lead the change and help to communicate the nexus between education and the overall well-being of sexually diverse students (Kotter, 2014; Klein, 1996). The guiding coalition will essentially lead the charge and will include many stakeholders who will voice their ideas, opinions, and concerns. Transformative and culturally responsive leaders encourage active

participation from stakeholders ensuring that their voices are being heard and valued (Kirshner et al., 2021). In the early stages of the change implementation plan, various stakeholders will be invited to participate in this initiative and share their thoughts on what the needs of sexually diverse students are and possible solutions. Modes of communication will include social media posts, system memos/announcements, the written background report, surveys, and a town hall meeting.

Communication During Implementation: Mobilization/Adoption

During the second phase of the communication implementation plan, stakeholders will require that specific information about the change plan be communicated to them, such as the vision of the change plan, operational aspects, the steps involved in the process, how roles will be impacted, and how they will be supported (Kotter, 2014; Cawsey et al., 2020).

Communication regarding the content of the change will be vitally important, as stakeholders begin to understand new roles, responsibilities, and practices. Change leaders must also remain enthusiastic about the change plan, as that energy will be contagious, impacting how the change plan is continued to be received by stakeholders. Having an ear to the ground and engaging in intentional monitoring practices that were presented in the monitoring and evaluation plan will also prove to be useful during this phase, as change agents must be readily aware of any issues or missteps along the way so that they can immediately intervene (Cawsey et al., 2020). Leaders must also be prepared to confront resistance that they will undoubtedly encounter during the implementation phase and remove any potential obstacles that will hinder the change process (Gentile, 2012; Kotter, 2014). Modes of communication during implementation will include social media posts, system memos and announcements, school team meetings, focus groups, and surveys.

Communication After Implementation: Institutionalization

During the final phase of the communication implementation plan, change leaders will need to communicate the successes and impact of the change plan, to reinforce commitment and reduce uncertainty amongst stakeholders (Kotter, 2014; Cawsey et al., 2020). Continued ongoing and varied levels of communication will ensure that stakeholders receive this message, via a variety of communication methods, such as through school team meetings, evaluation reports, system memos/announcements, conversations, social media posts, and other mediums (Cawsey et al., 2020; Klein, 1996). Engaging in communication that revolves around evaluating the change plan is also imperative and should continue to focus on the voices of stakeholders, especially those affected by the change (i.e., change recipients). Communication regarding the evaluation of the change plan will serve to build trust and transparency among stakeholders, improve accountability, both internally and externally, and help to identify best practices and areas for improvement. Leaders must also look forward to how the organization will continue to institutionalize and normalize the changes so that the change plan will have lasting and meaningful impact on the organization. Please refer to appendix G for information regarding the communication tools that will be utilized throughout the change implementation plan.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

As learning is a life-long process, the PoP that this OIP addresses will need to be continuously reviewed, reconceptualized, and revisited. After successfully implementing the change plan, Organization Z will need to engage in several next steps and future considerations that will ensure the given change is both impactful and sustainable. Some next steps and future considerations include: a) ongoing professional development, training, and learning that forces

educators to confront their own biases and challenge the practices that harm students; b) continued monitoring and evaluation in the form of collecting data on school climate and student well-being that will continue to provide valuable information on the school experiences of students, while also holding the organization accountable; c) ongoing communication with stakeholders about the changes made and the expected outcomes, as this will help to maintain momentum and address any concerns that may arise; d) a review of school board policies and procedures to ensure that they are in alignment with the change and new direction of the organization; and e) fostering a culture of continuous improvement, as change is an ongoing process. Finally, the organization's knowledge mobilization plan should be a living document that adapts to the organization's needs and the changes in the environment. Regular review and update of the plan is necessary to ensure that it remains relevant and effective.

The interest for this inquiry was born out of my own harmful experiences as a sexually diverse student who never felt included, affirmed, or supported by school personnel and organizational practices. The goal of this OIP is to build capacity within educators so that they can effectively support sexually diverse students by creating affirming and inclusive learning environments that represent and respect the unique identities in which their students hold. Improving the school experience for sexually diverse students is not only vital, but also an ethical imperative. By fostering a safe, inclusive, and affirming learning environment, schools can empower 2SLGBTQI+ students to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. When schools embrace diversity and prioritize the needs of their 2SLGBTQ+ students, they send a powerful message of love, acceptance, and affirmation. By continuing to offer leaders high level learning opportunities that build upon the knowledge they will have gained through their participation in the PLN, the organization will finally begin to see the alignment between the practices that are operating in the system and the values and priorities of the organization.

Furthermore, one of the major take-aways resulting from this inquiry is that the organization will benefit from engaging in ongoing equity and inclusion work that will extend far beyond sexually diverse pupils, ultimately benefiting other marginalized students and communities.

Appendix A - Change Readiness/Responsiveness Assessment Survey

Readiness/Responsiveness Dimensions			
Intentional Spaces for Belonging	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
I intentionally think about the message(s) my classroom environment communicates to learners?			
I consider how I can co-construct learning environments with the input of students?			
Students engage in critical conversations about humanity (i.e., sexuality, race, etc.)			
Students actively engage in identity work or learning that promotes self-awareness (for human development and in efforts to build community).			
Students understand the concept of equity and are responsive to each other's needs, building a cohesive learning community.			
Systems work and conditions for learning			
The policies and sociopolitical contexts of education influence how I arrange, design, and organize space and learning in my classroom.			
Features within the classroom invite students to see themselves in learning experiences.			
Instructional materials are authentic and culturally relevant.			
Authentic representations of/for learning			
When I see something that is dehumanizing and harmful, I say something.			
I engage in critical conversations about heteronormativity and diverse sexualities in school and social contexts outside of educational spaces.			
I engage in ongoing mirror work (i.e., self-reflection) to better understand my own identity, ideologies, and how I show up to students.			

Identity affirmation			
Literature and learning materials connect to identities and histories of students and their families, portraying positive images of their humanity.			
I am aware of the identities of students when determining and devising instructional practices and materials for learning.			
I intentionally think about power dynamics and sociopolitical contexts while working with students and developing learning experiences.			
Humanizing approaches and the power of community			
I embrace feedback and accountability in efforts to become a better person.			
I recognize that good intentions alone do not yield equitable outcomes, and purposefully think about my impact while serving students and their families.			
Total:			
<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -if the school leader/educator has a total of more than 8 checkmarks in the ‘rarely’ column, it is unlikely that he/she/they is ready for change -if the school leader/educator has a total of more than 10 checkmarks in the ‘sometimes’ column, it is likely that he/she/they is ready for change -if the school leader/educator has a total of more than 12 checkmarks in the ‘often’ column, it is very likely that he/she/they is ready for change -the purpose of this tool is for educators to be self-reflective and engage in thoughtful and critical reflection about their practice 			

Note: Adapted from Buchanan-Rivera, E. (2022). *Identity affirming classrooms: Spaces that center humanity*. Routledge.

Appendix B - Outline of PLN Session Learning Topics

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
<p>Introduction to PLN</p> <p>Critical conversation protocol</p> <p>Norms</p> <p>Learning goals</p> <p>Humanizing huddle</p> <p>Guiding questions</p> <p>Collaborative inquiry model</p> <p>Background report and data review</p>	<p>Socialization</p> <p>Understanding heteronormativity and homophobia in schools</p> <p>Colonization and heteronormativity</p> <p>Interrogating our own practice as leaders and educators</p>	<p>Mirror work/self-reflection</p> <p>Understanding identity and identity affirmation</p> <p>Promising practices</p> <p>Supporting 2SLGBTQI+ Families</p> <p>Queering education</p>	<p>Selecting resources and learning materials</p> <p>Culturally responsive and relevant teaching practices</p> <p>Reimagining promising practices</p>	<p>Understanding how to monitor and measure change initiatives</p> <p>Carousel breakout groups</p> <p>School planning time</p> <p>Encountering resistance</p> <p>Engaging the community</p>	<p>Consolidation of learning</p> <p>Sharing of school/team successes and best practices</p> <p>Question and answer period</p> <p>Guest speakers</p> <p>Final reflections and next steps</p>

Appendix C - Change Implementation Plan

AL	XLR8	GVV	AOF	Transformative Leadership	Timeframe	Considerations and Goals	Implementation and Communication
Discovery	Establish a sense of urgency around the need for change	Clarification and articulation of one's values	Education for and about the other	<p>Begin with a mandate for significant and equitable change</p> <p>Balance critique and promise</p>	Year 1: September to November	<p>Build a sharing understanding of the problem and raise awareness</p> <p>Provide evidence to highlight the need for change</p> <p>Establish change readiness</p>	<p>Early communication to stakeholders</p> <p>Clearly name heteronormativity and homophobia as it exists and operates within the organization</p> <p>Create the background report that will be released to the system/organization, highlighting the harmful learning environments that currently exist for queer youth (Kumashiro, 2002)</p>
Discovery	<p>Create a powerful coalition</p> <p>Develop a vision for change</p>	Clarification and articulation of one's values	Education for and about the other	<p>Understand areas of interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness</p> <p>Focus on democracy, emancipation, and equity</p>	December to January	<p>Building relationships</p> <p>Develop a sense of criticality</p> <p>Ensure that the voices of sexually diverse community are included</p>	<p>Gather like-minded inclusive leaders that will carry-out the change implementation process (i.e., identify schools for the PLN)</p> <p>Provide a structure and framework for the change implementation plan</p>

				Redistribute power to those at the margins			Co-create the vision and outline for PLN Centre marginalized voices
Dream	Develop a vision for change Communicate vision	Clarification and articulation of one's values	Education that is critical of privileging and othering	Emphasize the public and private good	February to March April	Develop communication plan Communicate and share vision with the system	Embed continuous communication tools throughout the process Share the vision and plan with stakeholders and community Review data to ensure the areas with the greatest need are recognized
Dream	Empower employees and act on vision	Post-decision-making analysis and implementation plan	Education that is critical of privileging and othering	Call to exhibit moral courage Establish new knowledge frameworks and mindsets	May to June	Prioritize difficult conversations and support leaders in addressing resistance and fears Confront oppressive practices and engage in courageous conversations	Prioritize opportunities for learning and conversation Support school leaders in their learning Plan PLN sessions

AL	XLR8	GVV	AOF	Transformative Leadership	Timeframe	Considerations and Goals	Implementation and Communication
Design	Empower employees and act on vision	Post-decision-making analysis and implementation plan	Education that is critical of privileging and othering	Establish new knowledge frameworks and mindsets Balance critique and promise	Year 2: September to December	Bring the PLN to life with the first session Monitoring progress	PLN begins and collaborative school meetings will follow. Monitoring the change implementation plan begins
Design	Generate and acknowledge short-term wins Consolidate gains and produce more change	The practice of speaking one's values and receiving feedback	Education that changes students and society	Establish new knowledge frameworks and mindsets. Call to exhibit moral courage	January to February	Continue with PLN Monitoring progress	Continue with PLN sessions and collaborative school meetings Monitoring continues
Destiny	Anchor new approaches in an organization's culture	The practice of speaking one's values and receiving feedback	Education that changes students and society	Establish new knowledge frameworks and mindsets Emphasize the public and private good	March to June	Monitoring and evaluation Establishing and normalizing the changes and new practices as the standard	Leaders will continue to slowly implement changes in schools and build capacity with staff Leaders will continue to engage in monitoring and start planning for the evaluation process

							Change leaders and school leadership teams will engage in reflection and identify next steps in the implementation plan
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Appendix D - Monitoring Tool

Evaluation Questions	Focus of Monitoring	Indicators and Targets	Monitoring Data Sources	Who is Responsible and When
Appropriateness What do we want to achieve? To what extent will the target group participate in the PLN? Is the PLN appropriate to address the PoP?	Participation Participant characteristics Level of participant satisfaction	Number of participants from target group (i.e., 90% participation from target group) Gender and sexuality balance (i.e., minimum 40% male participants) Participants reporting new and advanced level of understanding and improved practice	School climate data Conversations and observations Surveys	Equity consultant team Year one
Effectiveness Will the learning be sufficient to achieve the goals? To what extent will participants increase their knowledge of creating identity affirming learning environments for queer students?	Changes in knowledge following participation in PLN	Difference between participant knowledge of how to create identity affirming learning environments for sexually diverse students before and after participation in the PLN Implementation of new practices	Conversations and observations Surveys	Equity consultant team Year one
Efficiency Will planned activities be carried out as planned (i.e., on time and on budget)?	Costs against budget and areas where overruns or underspends occurred	Performance against budget and timelines Possible challenges	Conversations and observations Surveys	Equity consultant team

Will anything unexpected arise and cause a deviation from the plan?	Learning completed in the allotted timeframe			Year one
Impact Will participants who attended the PLN more aware about 2SLGBTQI+ issues and because of the PLN, working to improve the school experience of students? To what extent will there be an improvement in school climate data, specifically amongst queer students? What new information will we gain from the cycle?	Trends in school practices and culture	Changes in school and classroom practices Increase in students reporting that they feel like they belong at school	Focus groups and participant interviews Conversations and observations Surveys Self-reflection exercises	Equity consultant team Year one
Sustainability Will there be evidence of ongoing benefits beyond the program? Next steps: How can we adjust and improve?	Development of new partnerships and relationships that will enable continued learning and improvements	Number and type of new partnerships developed	Conversations and observations Surveys	Equity consultant team Year one

Note: Adapted from Markiewicz, & Patrick, I. (2016). *Developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Appendix E - Evaluation Tool

Evaluation Questions	Summary of Monitoring	Focus of Evaluation	Evaluation Method and Implementation	Who is Responsible and When
Appropriateness What do we want to achieve? To what extent did the target group participate in the PLN? Is the PLN appropriate to handle the PoP?		Motivation for participation by target group Response to the PLN by target group Extent of application of key principles from PLN to changed practices	Focus groups and participant interviews Conversations and observations Surveys Evaluation report	Equity consultant team Year Two
Effectiveness Is the learning sufficient to achieve the goals? To what extent did participants increase their knowledge of creating identity affirming learning environments for queer students?		Areas of successes and failures, with reasons for both	Conversations and observations Surveys Teacher performance appraisal Annual learning plan Evaluation report	Equity consultant team Year Two
Efficiency Are planned activities carried out as planned (i.e., on time and on budget)?		Any budget variations Adequacy of budget in meeting program requirements	Conversations and observations Surveys	Equity consultant team Year two

Did anything unexpected arise and cause a deviation from the plan?			Evaluation report	
Impact Are participants who attended the PLN more aware about 2SLGBTQI+ issues and because of the PLN, working to improve the school experience of students? To what extent was there an improvement in school climate data, specifically amongst queer students? What new information did we gain from the cycle?		Identification of changes that are attributable to the PLN Unintended results	Focus groups and participant interviews Conversations and observations Surveys Self-reflection exercises	Equity consultant team Year two and beyond
Sustainability Is there evidence of ongoing benefits beyond the program? Now what? How can we adjust or improve?		Viability of partnerships developed Commitment of stakeholders to ongoing participation	Conversations and observations Surveys School improvement plan Evaluation report	Equity consultant team Year two and beyond

Note: Adapted from Markiewicz, & Patrick, I. (2016). *Developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Appendix F - Knowledge Mobilization Through Professional Learning Network

Network Structure	Example	Network Process	Example
Network goals/objectives to current government priorities	<p>Increase leader capacity in queer and equity literacy so that leaders can dismantle systemic discrimination and structural inequities.</p> <p>Foster a cultural shift by creating and implementing a culturally relevant and affirming curriculum.</p> <p>Create learning spaces for queer students that allow them to feel safe, affirmed, and included.</p>	Creating opportunities to collaborate and co-create KMB products.	<p>Collaborating and co-creating the background report on the current state education for 2SLGBTQI+ students.</p> <p>Identifying the needs to sexually diverse students and needed strategies to affirm their identities.</p>
Inclusion of key people and messages	Sexually diverse stakeholders are intentionally included and consulted throughout the entire change implementation.	Motivating and incentivizing stakeholders	Engaging in this work will foster allow students to have positive school experiences which includes a greater sense of belonging, and increased well-being, happiness, mental health, and academic achievement.

	Commitment from the organization to ensure that this vision is realized, and outcomes improved.		
Formal roles and responsibilities	Senior leadership, school administrators, educators, and equity consultants.	Strategic planning	Plan for required training (i.e., the PLN) for select schools and leadership teams, with the goal of reaching the entire organization (i.e., all schools and staff).
Formal communication structures	<p>Invitations for collaboration extended to stakeholders</p> <p>Official memos and reports released to the system</p>		

Note: Adapted from Pollock, K.E., Briscoe, P., Campbell, C., & Carr-Harris, S. (2015). Finding the sweet spot: Network structures and processes for increased knowledge mobilization. *Brock Education*, 25(1), 20-34. <https://doi.org/10.26522/brocked.v25i1.432>

Appendix G - Communication Plan for Organization Z

Phases of Communication	Mode/Format	Goals (Kotter, 2014)
Communication Before Implementation: Preparation and Development	Invitations for collaboration and input Memo to system Background report Social media posts Stakeholder surveys Focus Groups	Increase change awareness and readiness Form a guiding coalition Develop and communicate vision
Communication During Implementation: Mobilization	PLN workshops Invitations for feedback School team meetings Social media posts System memo Conversations	PLN Communication of learning through strategies, literature, pedagogy, and practice Celebration of small wins
Communication After Implementation: Institutionalization	System memo Video summary School team meetings Social media posts Evaluation report Stakeholder surveys and feedback	Review of learning, findings, and results from monitoring and evaluation Celebration of success Consolidate improvements and next steps

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