Exploring LGBTQ Identity and Anti-Homophobia Education in the Elementary Classroom

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Abstract

There is a lack of inclusion around the topic of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) identities in the elementary classroom. This is resulting in unrelatable and unsafe environments for students and their families who identify as such. The focus of the research was on how a sample of elementary school teachers create opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity and challenging heteronormativity in their formal curriculum. Through the use of a qualitative research approach, this research investigated the practices of two exemplary teachers which confirmed both the importance and relevance of the topic in the elementary classroom. The findings from this study revealed the most effective approaches to including LGBTQ identity in the classroom, which included responding to student needs, integrating LGBTQ identity throughout the curriculum in explicit and implicit ways, and creating a culture of acceptance through every day practices. Teachers also reported factors and resources that support their work in this area including colleagues, administration and the school board (TDSB), as well as challenges they experienced ranging from parental bias to time constraints. The findings also revealed influences which inform teachers' commitment and competence to do this work to be as a result of personal relationships and high levels of student interest in the topic.

Key Words: LGBTQ identity, Anti-homophobia, Heteronormativity, Instructional strategies, Elementary classroom
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Research Study

Canada has a very diverse population in many aspects, including sexual orientation. According to the 2012 Canadian census, 1.3% of Canadians aged 18-59 reported to consider themselves to be either gay or lesbian, and 1.1% reported that they consider themselves bisexual (Statistics Canada, 2014). Statistics Canada also reported the number of same-sex couple families in 2011 to be 64,575 and the number of same-sex married couples to be 21,015 (Statistics Canada, 2012). The number of children aged 24 and under living with same-sex parents in 2001 was 9,600 (Statistics Canada, 2014). These numbers demonstrate the varying sexual orientations that exist within Canada. It is important to note that these numbers are only representative of married same-sex couples, the number of citizens who identify as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) is not known. From this, it can be said that students and their families have a range of sexual orientations which should be reflected in the elementary classroom. Sexual diversity is a topic that is often pushed aside in the elementary classroom, and there are negative consequences to doing so (Ceplak, 2013). The recently updated 2015 Ontario Health and Physical Education document acknowledges the importance of teaching students to respect individual differences including sex and gender identity and foster their development of collaboration and mutual respect (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Several problems exist surrounding the lack of discussion of topics related to LGBTQ identity in the elementary classroom. The privileging of heteronormativity in schools, teacher’s hesitancy regarding how to address topics related to LGBTQ, and homophobic bullying are all key aspects of the problem (Ceplak, 2013, Bickmore, 1999 and Toomey, McGuire, Russell,
The privileging of heteronormativity in the curriculum and overall environment contributes to the major problem because it sends the wrong message to students. According to Ceplak (2013), major problems arise from beliefs about the normalcy of heterosexuality. Chesir-Teran (2003) stated that school climates do reflect broader pressures of heteronormativity, or what is considered “normal” based on gender and sexuality (as cited by Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012). This often leads to risk for victimization in school when students do not conform to these norms (Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012). If students are not taught from a young age about diverse sexual orientations as well as acceptance and respect of differences, it can lead to bigger problems. According to Walling (2008), 70% of students are bullied in school, many of them because they are or are thought to be LGBT. Walling (2008) states an important message for educators, which is to address the problem of homophobic bullying by informing students about sexual orientation issues.

Often times when topics related to LGBTQ identity or sexual diversity are brought into the classroom, they are limited to “extra” curricular rather than formal curriculum and this is a problem because it is sending a certain message to our students. While it may appear to some teachers that these are not issues addressed in the curriculum, there is a place for topics like gender and homosexual identity in the elementary curriculum in several areas (Bickmore, 1999). Specifically in the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum grades 1-8 (2010), for example, there is a strand titled “Growth and Development” which places a focus on understanding sexuality in the broadest context. Another strand of this curriculum document which relates is titled “personal safety” which includes bulling, peer assault, child abuse, harassment and violence in relationships. Topics related to LGBTQ identity can thus be
incorporated into lessons while fulfilling the requirements of the Ministry document. Recently, the new Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum grades 1-8 (2015) document was released and will be put into practice September 2015. Specifically, in the grade 3 curriculum strand “Human Development and Sexual Health”, C3.3 states “describe how visible differences... and invisible differences (e.g. learning abilities, skills and talents, personal or cultural values and beliefs, gender identity, sexual orientation, family background, personal preferences, allergies and sensitivities) make each person unique, and identity ways of showing respect for differences in others” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, pg. 124). In this new curriculum, it explicitly lists “gender identity and sexual orientation” as possible invisible differences which can be taught to by Ontario teachers.

It is evident that often times teachers are unsure about how to approach discussion about themes related to LGBTQ and may disregard the topic all together (Bickmore, 1999). Bickmore (1999) confirms that facing these issues and addressing them in the classroom is necessary if we want children to learn and to be safe in the long run. Although this topic may seem sensitive, it is important that teachers take these risks, for the benefit of the students. Teachers’ choice to censor homosexual topics could be as a result of several factors. One, challenge that teachers face is managing conflictual topics efficiently as well, their fear of political controversy (Bickmore, 1999). Houser (1996) as cited by Bickmore (1999) concluded that elementary school teachers often avoid vital issues such as these, in exchange for striving to create a comfortable classroom environment. Pressures of curriculum accountability have also been noted as a reason for why some teachers avoid this topic or are hesitant to engage student’s in discussion around it.
(Bickmore, 1999). However in light of the new curriculum released, this should no longer be a reason for avoidance.

Excluding LGBTQ identity and related themes in the classroom is also a problem because of the prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools (Toomey et al, 2012). According to Solomon & Russell (2004), incidents of this nature deteriorate the confidence and well-being of LGBTQ youth. Lack of self-esteem, rejection, peer abuse, homelessness, unsafe sexual behaviour and self-injury are just a few of the problems they face as a result. The phenomenon of suicide as a consequence of homophobic bullying is a huge issue that must be addressed. Studies have consistently found high suicide attempt rates among LGBTQ youth (D’Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington, 2001). In a study done by D’Augelli et al., high levels of suicidality in a sample of LGBTQ youth aged 21 and younger were reported. The suicidal thoughts were reported as being related to their sexual orientation, suicide attempts often occurring prior to disclosing their orientation to others, including parents. If children are given the correct strategies for discussing homosexuality and other gender role questions, it can prepare them to resist homophobic ignorance, to avoid unsafe practices and to engage in mutual respect (Rofes, 1995). As educators we are responsible for ensuring students have access to a safe and secure environment where they can feel free to be themselves.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to learn how a sample of teachers create opportunities for learning about LGBTQ identity and anti-homophobia education through the formal curriculum. I wanted to investigate how teachers are implementing lessons in their curriculum
which include LGBTQ experiences in meaningful ways in order to share best practices with the education community. I hope that with the information gathered throughout my research study, teachers can share their experiences and learn from others who are positively contributing to the education of this theme.

1.3 Research Questions

The main question guiding this research was: how do a sample of elementary teachers create opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity and challenging heteronormativity in their formal curriculum? The subsidiary questions I have include: What impacts do they perceive this instruction having on their students? What range of factors and resources support these teachers in their work? What challenges do these teachers experience, and how do they respond to those challenges? What experiences influence and inform these teachers’ commitment and competence to this work?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

As an educator, I am committed to creating safe and inclusive classrooms where all children have the freedom to express themselves and to be educated on a range of relevant topics. I connect with this topic personally because of personal relationships I have with individuals who identify as LGBTQ and I have witnessed the hardships and ostracization they have faced as a result of their gender identity/sexual orientation. Equality in this respect is something I am very passionate about and has always been important to me. I want to make a change so that this cycle of inequality, hate and exclusion ends, and so that our future society can
someday love and include all people, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation. I believe that the inclusion of LGBTQ identity in the elementary classroom is essential in fostering open mindedness and acceptance among children and future generations. I think it is very important to educate young students in order to set the stage for social change. Every child has the right to learn in a safe and secure environment where they are able to engage in discussion of all topics. Each and every student needs to be represented in the classroom and feel included, this includes diverse sexual orientations. Children deserve to be educated on a wide range of social topics and it is our job as educators to see that this happens. I feel very strongly about the inclusion and representation of all sexual orientations in the classroom, in particular, the education of LGBTQ identity and related themes.

1.5 Overview

To respond to the research questions I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two teachers about how they create opportunities for learning about LGBTQ identity and anti-homophobia education through the formal curriculum. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature surrounding LGBTQ identity and related themes in elementary school settings, as well as factors that contribute to the lack of these themes in the formal curriculum. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedures that were used in this study, in particular information regarding the sample participants and the data collection instruments. Chapter 4 reports the research findings and discusses their significance in light of the literature. In Chapter 5 I discuss the implications for the educational community and for myself as a
beginning teacher, and I make recommendations for future practice as well as further reading and study. References and a list of appendices follow at the end.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There is a wide range of literature surrounding the topic of LGBTQ inclusion in the elementary classroom. The literature that was reviewed revealed both commonalities and discrepancies amongst areas around this topic. In this literature review, I reviewed literature in the following areas: heteronormativity, homophobia and harassment, teacher hesitancy in addressing LGBTQ identity, teacher training with regards to LGBTQ education, and the opposition of LGBTQ inclusion.

2.2 Research on Heteronormativity in Society, School and Practice

Heteronormativity, as defined by Ngo, is a “culture where heterosexuality is assumed to be the norm” (2003, p. 116 as cited in Fredman, Schultz, and Hoffman). Heteronormativity is prevalent in our society, in our schools and through teachers’ practice. Heteronormativity benefits those who perceive themselves to be heterosexual, or “straight,” and disadvantages those who identify themselves as something other than that.

2.2.1 Societal Structures

Heteronormativity can be seen throughout society, privileging its members based on gender and sexuality, it enforces beliefs about what “normal” is (Toomey, McGuire, Russell, 2012). This is affirmed by Ferfolja and Robinson (2004), who argue that through heteronormativity, particular individuals and groups are enhanced, while others are subordinated, and this is done through societal relations of power. Poole and McPhee (2005) argue that
members of society learn heteronormative behaviours through their experiences, and are often not aware of the rules controlling their actions. Society and its structures thus contribute to the reproduction of heteronormative beliefs and practices that exist.

2.2.2 School Environments

Heteronormativity dominates school environments reinforced by administrators, teachers and students (Cramer, 2002). This is something seen at all levels of education. From the early years, heterosexuality is reinforced in the education of children (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004). Elementary school children are able to understand and engage in the practices of gender norms and heteronormativity (Renold, 2002; Thorne, 1993 as cited in Toomey et al., 2012). Cahill & Theilheimer (1999) report that in early childhood settings, heterosexuality and heterosexual desires are constructed as a part of everyday practice. Students are facing constant heteronormative messages in a variety of ways, whether it be through the lack of curriculum attention or through school gossip amongst their peers and teachers (Nixon & Givens, 2007).

Allan, Atkinson, Brace, DePalma and Hemingway (2013) reported that heteronormativity dominates schools in both implicit and explicit ways. One way this is done is through the lack of acknowledgment and representation of the LGBTQ community (MacGillivray, 2000). Systematic exclusion is the process where role models, messages and images about LGBT people are silenced in schools (Friend, 1993). This process occurs as a result of heterosexism and homophobia in the school system. It involves several actions including: disregarding the presence of LGBT individuals, leaving out topics of sexual orientation in the curriculum,
ignoring students’ questions about sexual orientation and the school library not having books on homosexuality (MacGillivray, 2000).

Sometimes heterosexuality is actually encouraged and enforced through the school’s practices (MacGillivray, 2000). LGBTQ students and families are often left out of school policies and practices, thus reinforcing a heteronormative culture. An example which MacGillivray (2000) provides is official forms and documents which do not recognize that not all families are composed the same (i.e. a mom, dad and kids). Another example is permission forms sent home requiring parental signatures from a mother and father. These types of policies/practices are not inclusive to all. The majority of sexuality education programs across the world default to the heteronormative mode, which is harmful to LGBTQ youth (Elia & Eliason, 2010). LGBTQ awareness and sexual orientation are lacking in curriculums, silent even (Walling, 1997). Both Walling (1997) and Friend (1993) agree that schools are silent when it comes to topics of this nature (MacGillivray, 2000). LGBTQ identities are ignored and are absent based on the fact that they are not addressed in formal school contexts (DePalma & Jennett, 2010).

2.2.3 Teachers

Teachers play a big role and can make an enormous difference in shifting the heteronormative culture within school settings. Often, teachers are not aware that they are in fact reinforcing heterosexuality through their daily practices. This is being done through heterosexist policy, curriculum and pedagogical practices (Ferfolja, 2003). There is a term “compulsory heterosexuality” which was coined by Rich (1980), that refers to assumptions that students and parents are heterosexual. This assumption is held by some teachers, without them being fully
aware of it. There are some strategies that teachers can use in order to steer away from the heteronormative culture being represented and enforced in schools. Teachers can include discussions of gender identity, sexual orientation and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in the curriculum by deconstructing gender role stereotypes, and providing equal educational opportunities to LGBTQ students (MacGillivray, 2000). However, some teachers reported being fearful of imposing values on students and this is why they chose not to discus LGBTQ topics in their classrooms. Although, by doing this they are reinforcing heteronormative values (MacGillivray, 2000; Phoenix et al., 2006). By choosing not to talk about something, for whatever the reason, there is a message still being sent. This same conclusion was found by Puchner & Klein (2011), as they state that the way in which educators communicate (language choice and treatment of LGBTQ topics in their class) may be reinforcing dominant heteronormative discourses. In doing this, educators can be knowingly or unknowingly marginalizing and dismissing that which is not heterosexual (Fredman et al., 2015). One way to eliminate heterosexism and homophobia from school environments according to MacGillivray (2000), is to represent all sexual orientations and gender identities throughout the curriculum as well as practices and policies of the school. The National Union of Teachers revealed that teachers need to learn how to affirm gay and lesbian relationships because children as young as 3 are using homophobic language (Legg, 2006). Teachers have the power to serve as positive and socially aware role models for students (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004), and they should take advantage of it to promote inclusion for all.
2.3 Research Documenting Homophobia and Harassment Regarding LGBTQ Youth

Homophobia is defined as “the systemic and purposeful social policing of hegemonic masculinity” (DePalma & Jennett, 2010, pg.16). Homophobic harassment and bullying are major concerns in schools today. For sexual minority students (those who identify as LGBTQ), experiences of physical abuse, verbal abuse, and homophobic discourse (language/slurs) is a serious issue (Peter, Taylor & Chamberland, 2015). In a Canadian study it was reported that six out of ten LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed about their sexual orientation, and one in four LGBTQ students had been physically harassed about their sexual orientation. As a result, three quarters of LGBTQ students and 95% of transgender students felt unsafe at school, leading them to skip school, feel unaccepted, be uncomfortable talking to their teachers/principal about LGBTQ issues, and feel depressed about going to school because of their belief that they don’t belong (Taylor, Peter, Schachter, Paquin, Beldom, Gross, & McMinn, 2008).

2.3.1 Negative perceptions

From when children are very young they start forming opinions and biases about gays and lesbians. Chasnoff and Cohen report that young children often apply their negative perceptions in derogatory ways (1997). They also state that since these negatives attitudes are formed in early childhood, they continue to hold these beliefs through their teenage years. DePalma & Jennett argue that homophobia and transphobia are a cultural phenomena which can only be addressed by promoting equality of LGBT individuals, and by celebrating diversity while challenging inequity (2010). The system needs to be transformed, and it has to happen as soon as children enter school (DePalma & Jennett, 2010).
2.3.2 Supportive teachers & inclusive environments

It was noted by Russell, Seif and Truong, that students are less likely to encounter problems at school when they perceive their teachers as supportive (2001). Similarly, students report less LGBT bullying and harassment at school when they are learning about LGBT topics through the curriculum (Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laud and Manke, 2006). It is consistent amongst the literature that teachers and administrators play a huge role in minimizing harassment having to do with homophobia. Fredman et al., (2015) present findings that show this, stating that educators and administrators are responsible for managing school climates where bullying and harassment are evident (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002, 2003; Lipkin, 2002; Meyer, 2009; Puchner & Klein, 2011; Rofes, 2000; Uribe, 1994). Teachers and administrators have the ability to protect students to a certain extent. They can do this by intervening directly when they witness anti-LGBT harassment and discrimination (Toomey et al., 2012). Another suggestion is that they contribute to a climate which respects and includes all students, an LGBT-positive climate. This can be done through fostering an LGBT-positive curriculum and other experiences that can contribute to a welcoming environment for LGBT students (Toomey et al., 2012). It is important for teachers and administrators to advocate on behalf of these students and provide an equitable and safe learning environment for all.

2.3.3 Inclusive Climate and Safety

Also, it has been noted that the availability of resources which challenge gender norms play a role in promoting an inclusive climate (Toomey et al., 2012). Schools that have an inclusive curriculum where students are able to learn about LGBT identity and have access to
information (O’Shaughnessey et al., 2004), were found to report less incidents of LGBT harassment and bullying (Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub & Manke, 2006) The school environment feels safer according to students, when there is an inclusion of LGBT identity in the curriculum, there is accessible information related to LGBT identity and when teachers do not take part in glorifying heteronormative practices (Toomey et al., 2012). This has implications for the academic achievement and other emotional outcomes for students (Eccles and Gootman, 2002).

2.4 Research on Teacher Hesitancy in Addressing LGBTQ Identity & Related Topics

Educators face several challenges in addressing LGBTQ topics in school thus making them hesitant to incorporate them into their teaching. These challenges include apprehension about administrative response, parental and community feedback, concerns about the energy they can expend on validating LGBTQ identities and questioning their own competence and training to address the topic effectively (Fredman, Schultz & Hoffman, 2015).

2.4.1 Discussing controversial topics

It can be difficult for teachers to discuss topics that are seen as controversial, LGBTQ identity and its inclusion in the elementary classroom being one of them (Fredman et al., 2015). In order to help support LGBT-positive activities in school settings, we have to find out more about teachers perceptions of risks and barriers to discussing this topic, in order to effect change and be role models to others (Dimito, 2008). In that same study, the authors concluded that a significant amount of school personnel, administrators and teachers are not onboard with the
importance of addressing LGBTQ identity (Grace, 2007). In a study about anti-homophobia education in teacher education conducted by Ferfolja and Robinson (2004), they reported that 1/5 of the respondents indicated that lesbian and gay topics or anti-homophobia education was not incorporated into their teachings. They also mentioned that those who reported they did include lesbian/gay perspectives and anti-homophobia education, did not give much focus to the topic or time allotted to it. In another study by Fredman et al., (2015), they cited that most teachers expressed that they avoid LGBTQ discussions in their classroom (Puchner and Klein, 2011). Also reported in this study was that educators felt fearful of imposing values upon students.

2.4.2 Safety and security

Safety plays a big role in a teachers decision to include LGBTQ identity and related themes in their classroom. Educators feel a sense of risk when they are asked about dealing with LGBTQ topics in their classroom according to Schneider & Dimito (2008). However, it is important that educators do feel safe in addressing these topics since they are responsible in ensuring schools are safe and welcoming for all students, including LGBTQ students. The main reason that teachers avoid LGBTQ topics in their classrooms appears to be due to a fear of backlash, whether it be from parents or school administrators. MacGillivray (2000) and Meyer (2009) found that teachers feared what parents and administrators would say if they incorporated LGBTQ topics into their curriculum. This finding is also consistent with DePalma & Jennett’s (2010) findings, where most of the teachers they interviewed said that they feared retaliation from parents if they were to address LGBT equality in their class. They also noted that not one of the teacher participants mentioned that any parents, including LGBT parents, might want them to
address these topics in their class. The findings of Schneider & Dimito’s (2008) research were that teacher participants expressed that they believed parents and students were bigger barriers than colleagues and other professionals when asked about dealing with LGBT topics in school. They also found that some participants felt their jobs were at risk if they were to discuss these topics in their classroom, however many others believed that their job security was not an issue.

2.4.3 Lack of preparedness and support

Another consistent theme among teachers hesitancies in addressing LGBTQ topics in their classroom was a lack of preparedness and support in doing so. This finding was noted in a study by Fredman et al., (2015), that many teachers felt unequipped to incorporate LGBTQ themes into their curriculum due to a lack of support and an already heavy workload (MacGillivray, 2000 and Myer, 2009). They also noted concerns that teachers had around feeling unprepared due to lack of training in this area. A desire for training to better prepare them to be inclusive educators and create safe spaces was described by participants (Fredman et al., 2015). DePalma and Atkinson (2009) found that in particular, straight interviewees reported feelings of being worried that they were not well informed to take on this topic in their classes. Another finding consistent with this theme, from a study by Wickens and Wedwick (2011), was that teachers and librarians find it challenging to know how to select age-appropriate materials which include LGBTQ identity and content. This lack of support from resources makes it hard for teachers to engage the students in a variety of literacy materials, depicting different sexual orientations. Lastly, with regards to teacher hesitancy in addressing LGBTQ issues, DePalma and Atkinson (2009) found that gay and lesbian educators reported feeling challenged in addressing
LGBTQ identity in their classes as they could be seen as advancing a personal agenda. On the other hand, straight educators feared being labelled as gay themselves (MacGillivray, 2000). This finding is consistent with one noted by Fredman et al., (2015).

2.5 Research Documenting Teaching Training on LGBTQ Identity & Related Topics

A common theme amongst the literature was the lack of teacher education surrounding the topic of LGBTQ identity and the need for this pre-service support. The trainings which are designed to increase educators knowledge and abilities to create supportive classroom environments are scarce and limited (Goodenow et al., 2006; Perotti & Westheimer, 2001). In Ferfolja and Robinson’s study they reported that teacher educators expressed anti-homophobia education was an important part of pre-service teacher education (2004). Research by Gorski et al., (2013) cited that interventions including in-service professional development and pre-service teacher education, gives teachers the tools to counter the effects of heterosexism within the school and classroom. Also noted in their research, was the fact that many scholars have argued for teacher education programs inclusion of sexual orientation and heteronormativity topics into coursework (Blackburn, 2005; Bower and Klecka, 2009; Clark, 2010; Coiser and Sanders, 2007; Mulhern and Martinez, 1999; Rofes, 2005; Talburt, 2004). Participants in a study by Ferfolja and Robinson (2004) reported that anti-homophobia education was important, especially in recognizing that schools are homophobic and heterosexist institutions which encourage dominant constructions of gender and sexuality. It is important for teachers to be trained and educated on LGBTQ identity so that they feel comfortable discussing them within their classrooms and are aware of the heteronormative behaviours that exist within the school environment, so they can
help change that. Responding to heterosexism through teacher interventions can improve conditions for LGBTQ youth, parents or guardians and educators (Robinson and Ferfoja, 2008; Russell et al., 2001). It has been said by many that teachers need to be prepared to disrupt heterosexism in their classrooms (Blacburn, 2005; Cosier and Sanders, 2007; Rofes, 2005). This can be done through anti-homophobia and LGBTQ education in pre-service training or professional development. It is evident from the literature that one of the reasons teachers shy away from this topic is because they feel unequipped and unsupported to do so, therefore teacher training is important to help prepare them for this task.

2.6 Research on the Opposition of LGBTQ Inclusion in School

There has been debate about whether school, elementary school in particular, is a place where “controversial” topics such as LGBTQ identity and related themes should be discussed (Fredman et al., 2015). This is a result of the belief that values should not be imposed on children and that these topics are best left for parents to discuss with their children if they wish to do so (Macgillivray, 2000).

2.6.1 Imposing values

There is a widely held notion that sensitive topics, especially those involving sexuality, should be kept away from young children. As well, discussion of these particular topics in primary and early childhood are not seen as relevant by many (Ferfolja and Robinson, 2004). In a study by Macgillivray (2000), it was found that the values being instilled in children were of concern to teachers and parents. Imposing values on children is one thing, but having open and
unbiased discussion surrounding relevant topics is another. Friend (1993) argues that to speculate discussion of homosexuality in schools means imposing values, is not to take notice of the message being sent when it is not talked about at all. Whether or not homosexuality or any LGBTQ related topics are discussed in a classroom, there is a message being sent. The first being the reality that different sexual orientations exists in our society, and the second being that it is wrong and therefore we should not be talking about it.

2.6.2 A job for parents, not teachers

Also on this opposing side are views that values concerning sexuality are best left for parents to teach to their children because if schools are teaching it, the rights of parents are being violated if they choose not to have their children involved in discussions of this nature. From this, arises a dilemma for teachers and administrators who are torn between advocates and opponents of LGBTQ inclusion. The final reason for opposition of LGBTQ themes in schools, stems from a fear that through discussion of the topic, students may in fact be encouraged to become homosexuals. However this fear is not validated as research shows no evidence to support that sexual orientation is a learned trait (Macgillivray, 2000).

2.7 Conclusion

There is a vast amount of literature surrounding this topic. The areas of literature which are most relevant to the current research study included: heteronormativity, specifically within societal structures, school environments and teachers attitudes/behaviours, homophobia and harassment with regards to negative perceptions, supportive teachers and inclusive environments,
teacher hesitancy in addressing LGBTQ identity and related topics including discussing controversial topics, safety and security as well as lack of preparedness and support, teacher training on LGBTQ identity and related topics specifically with regards to pre-service and support, lastly I looked at research on the opposition of LGBTQ inclusion in schools. The current literature available on this topic demonstrates that there is a need for future research which will benefit educators by giving them practical and meaningful strategies to use in their classrooms. Reviewing this literature has allowed me to gain more insight into the research question: how do a sample of elementary teachers create opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity and anti-homophobia education through the formal curriculum? I want the research to serve as a platform for current educators to share their experiences and best practice with the teaching community. My hope is that the research I conducted can make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of research by providing educators with useful strategies for incorporating LGBTQ identity and related topics in their formal curriculum and daily practices.
Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review key aspects of the research methodology. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures and data collection instruments before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. I explain data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. The methodological limitations and strengths of the methodology will be discussed. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for them, given the research purpose and questions.

3.2 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi structured interviews with teachers. A qualitative approach was used for this research as according to Creswell (2013), this approach is used when a problem or issue needs to be explored. Khan (2014) states that this type of approach is a process to explore a social or human problem. The issue in this particular study being the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ themes in the elementary classroom.

Qualitative research originated from both the education and social science disciplines (Taylor, 1984 as cited by Khan, 2014), the purpose being to study human behaviour. Qualitative research is an approach in which participants’ life experiences are studied and given meaning through exploration of behaviour, perspectives and daily experiences (Bums and Grove, 2009 as cited by Khan, 2014). Creswell (2013) also stated that in order to obtain details from people,
conversations directly with participants is necessary where they can share their stories freely. As a researcher of a qualitative study it is important to empower the individuals to share their stories and to encourage their voices to be heard (Creswell, 2013). The advantage to qualitative research in this respect is that participants are free to tell their experiences without being swayed by what the researcher is expecting to find or what they have read in literature (Creswell, 2013).

As the purpose of this study was to explore the opportunities for learning about LGBTQ identity and inclusion in the elementary classroom through the views of teachers, a qualitative approach was most appropriate. As Creswell (2013) states, qualitative research is used because a quantitative approach would not fit the problem.

3.3 Instruments of Data Collection

Given the parameters of the MTRP, the instrument that was used for data collection was the semi structured interview protocol. These interviews were conducted with two elementary school teachers. During semi structured interviews, participants are given the opportunity to share their experiences (Creswell, 2013). The semi structured interview format is designed in such a way that the interviewer plans the interview which attends to the research question while still leaving room for participants to add on and redirect attention to possible areas unanticipated by the interviewer. With respect to the research purpose, which was to learn how a sample of teachers create opportunities for learning about LGBTQ identity and anti-homophobia education through the formal curriculum, the questions were designed to address teachers beliefs and best practices regarding LGBTQ inclusion in their teaching. The questions were designed in an open
ended format to decrease bias and conclusion and to encourage the participants to speak openly and freely about their experiences and beliefs.

The semi structured interview allows for a flow of conversation between the participants and interviewer. Qu and Dumay (2011) state that interviews are a useful way for researchers to gain insight into the world of others. Semi structured interviews are the most common of all qualitative research methods (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). This type of interview is popular as it is flexible and accessible and it is often the most effective and convenient way of gathering data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The advantages of the semi structured interview are rooted in the fact that its basis is in human conversation, which allows for the interviewer to modify the style and pace of the interview as well as the ordering of questions in order to evoke the most true and full response from participants (Qu and Dumay, 2011). The semi structured interview requires planning before, during and after with respect to how questions are asked and interpreted (Qu and Dumay, 2011), but the benefits of this planned and semi structured approach provided quality data for interpretation.

3.4 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment and I review the avenues pursued for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section where I introduce each of the participants, with a brief summary depicting their past and current teaching careers.
3.4.1 Sampling Criteria

The sampling criteria that were used to determine appropriate participants for the research study included the following:

1. Teachers will have a minimum of five years teaching experience.

2. Teachers must have demonstrated a commitment, leadership or expertise in teaching LGBTQ identity and inclusion in the elementary classroom.

3. Teachers must be teaching in an elementary school setting (Grades 1-8).

These criteria were developed in order to select participants who would be suitable for the research question at hand. The first criterion, teachers must have a minimum of five years teaching experience, was developed to ensure that participants have had the opportunity to receive feedback on their practices with respect to the inclusion of LGBTQ content in their classroom. It was important that the participants had become comfortable and aware of what practices had worked for them and which they would eliminate. The second criterion was that teachers must have demonstrated a commitment, leadership, or expertise in this area. This could have been in the form of advising school clubs, leading or participating in professional development, writing or graduate degree in the field of LGBTQ identities and education. This ensured that participants have a dedication to the topic and an understanding of the importance of education on LGBTQ identity and challenging heteronormativity in their daily practices. The third criterion, teachers must be teaching in an elementary school setting between the grades of 1 and 8, was chosen as this study looked at how a sample of elementary school teachers are creating these opportunities in their classrooms. My particular interest in this stage of development is my chosen division which is primary/junior.
3.4.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

In this research study, I located participants through the use of both purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling, is a sampling technique used in qualitative research where the participants are selected because they can purposefully understand the problem in the research study (Creswell, 2013). Maxwell (1997) also defined purposive sampling as individuals being deliberately selected for the important information they provide that cannot be obtained through other choices. By developing the 3 specific criteria for participant recruitment, this would fall under purposive sampling as I looked for individuals who fit all 3 criteria listed.

Convenience sampling, according to Dörnyei (2007), is where members of the target population are selected if they meet certain practical criteria including proximity, availability, easy accessibility or willingness to volunteer (as cited by Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). Marshall (1996) states that this is the least rigorous technique as it simply requires the selection of the most accessible subjects and it is also the least costly in terms of time, effort and money. I located the participants through a personal contact, both of whom fulfilled the three criteria I had set out. I sought recommendations through an in person meeting. After I was provided with possible participants, I contacted them through email to explain the research and then set up an interview date and time.

3.4.3 Participant Bios

The two teachers who participated in the interviews - Sharon and Dillon (pseudonyms) were from the same school.
Sharon

The first participant was a grade 6, 7 and 8 teacher in the Toronto District School Board located in the GTA. At the time of the interview, Sharon had been teaching for 25 years and had worked at 6 different schools within the TDSB. She had been at her current school for 9 years. Sharon was previously a guidance counsellor and received an ample amount of training around supporting students. She took professional development courses around equity while completing leadership training to become a Principal, which she ultimately chose not to pursue.

Dillon

The second participant was a grade 6 extended French teacher in the Toronto District School Board located in the GTA. At the time of the interview Dillon had been teaching for 7 years and had been working at the same school for the entirety of his career. Over the course of his career he had taught grades 6, 7 and 3. Dillon came from a Science background and was extremely enthusiastic about being in the teaching profession now despite changing careers in his 50s.

3.5 Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the interviews conducted, I coded the data and looked for common themes as well as divergences within it. The basic coding process with regards to content analysis is to organize bigger quantities of text into fewer content categories, which are patterns or themes that directly emerge from the text (Weber, 1990). Data analysis should start with reading all of the information thoroughly to obtain a sense of the whole (Tesch, 1990).
started off by reading each of the transcripts from the semi structured interviews conducted, one by one. Then, I looked at each transcript individually, categorizing and identifying various themes that emerged. This is supported by Hsieh & Shannon 2005. They suggest to read data and to derive codes by highlighting exact words from the text that demonstrate key concepts or thoughts. Then, I looked at the transcripts beside each other, synthesizing what participants spoke about and what they did not. Labels for codes were assigned that were reflective of key themes (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The codes were sorted into categories which were then used to organize the codes into meaningful themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Patton, 2002; as cited by Hsieh & Shannon 2005). I then looked at what had been found and the meanings of it in terms of what the emergent themes were and what matters about them given what has already been noted in the literature. I also acknowledged null data, topics that participants did not speak to. It is important to include this in the data analysis as sometimes what is not spoken about is as significant to note as what is.

3.6 Ethical Review Procedures

To ensure that this study met the criteria for ethical standards, participants were presented with a letter of consent prior to their commitment to the study giving their consent to the interview as well as audio recording (Appendix A). Informed consent is defined by Annas, Glantz & Katz (1977), as “knowing consent of an individual or his legally authorized representative, so situated as to be able to exercise free power of choice without undue inducement or any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress or other forms of constraint or coercion” (Munhall, 1988; p. 291). This letter explained the purpose of the research study,
outlined the procedures including data collection and analysis, the right to withdraw, risks of participation, member checks as well as data storage. Participants had the chance to review the letter of consent prior to the interview and had the opportunity to ask any questions. Participants were notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage as well to refuse any questions they were not comfortable with answering.

Both participants were assigned a pseudonym and their identities remained confidential. This was carried out by excluding any markers to their school and students which could potentially reveal their identity. There were no risks associated with participation in this study. With respect to data storage, all data is stored on my password-protected laptop and will be destroyed in 5 years time. I am the only individual who will have access to the data. Participants also had the chance to retract any statements that they do not feel represents their values and practices. These are the steps that were taken to ensure participant consent and confidentiality throughout the course of the research study.

3.7 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

There are both strengths and limitations in terms of the methodology of the study. Given the ethical parameters that have been approved for the MTRP, the research could only involve interviews with teachers. As a result, the scope of the research is limited, being that interviews were only conducted with two teachers. While the data from these interviews is detailed and based on lived experiences which inform the topic, they cannot generalize the experience of teachers more broadly speaking. Also, since it was not possible to interview students or parents for this research study, I was limited in terms of what I could learn through my research. It would
have been beneficial to conduct interviews with parents and students to learn about their views on the research problem and how they feel it impacts them personally. As a result of this limitation, I relied on the participants’ perceived impact on the students and families through their own observations and experiences.

The strengths of this study include the means of data collection which was semi-structured interviews. This allowed teachers to express their values and beliefs while describing their daily experiences and best practices. As Qu and Dumay (2011) found, these types of interviews are an exceptional way for researchers to gain insight into the world of others. Participants were chosen for their commitment and interest in this research topic and so the data collected is reflection of their experiences directly with this issue, which is what the semi-structured interview is designed to do (Creswell, 2013). This study may also benefit the participants involved as they had the opportunity to reflect on their own practices and time to think about their rationale for their teaching.

3.8 Conclusion: Brief Overview and Preview of What is Next

In conclusion, the methodological decisions made for this research study were built around the parameters approved for the MTRP. The research was a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured interviews with two teachers who fulfilled the three criteria that was set out. Teachers had a minimum of five years teaching experience, were teaching in an elementary school setting and had demonstrated a commitment to teaching LGBTQ identity in the classroom. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Review Unit at the University of Toronto for the MTRP. To maintain ethical standards and protect participant confidentiality, several steps
were taken. Participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to participating in the interview and were made aware that they may withdraw at any stage. The participants’ identities were protected by using pseudonyms and school names were excluded. The methodology of the study had both limitations and strengths. One limitation being that only teachers could be interviewed for the research study, and the strength being that semi structured interviews are a strong means of obtaining the information pertinent to the study. Next, in chapter 4 I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the findings obtained from two semi-structured interviews with teachers which respond to my main research question: how do a sample of teachers create opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity and challenge heteronormativity in their formal curriculum? Pseudonyms are used in place of the participant’s real names in order to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. After coding and categorizing the data from both interviews, I have identified the common themes amongst them. This chapter will outline those themes. I will discuss what has been found in terms of what the emergent themes were and their significance in light of what has already been recorded in the literature. The chapter will be organized by using the themes as headers and sub themes as sub headers. The themes and subsequent sub themes that were found include:

- Teacher commitment to the topic of LGBTQ identity is influenced by personal relationships and values that they hold and did not waiver under any barriers
- Teachers did not experience any pre-service training on the topic of incorporating LGBTQ identity in their teaching but rather found support documents useful
- Teachers found the most effective approach to the inclusion of LGBTQ identity is to respond to student needs
- Teachers integrated themes of LGBTQ throughout their curriculum in both explicit and implicit ways
- An important approach teachers took to including LGBTQ identity was to create a culture of acceptance and foster inclusion through every day practices
• Teachers have found both internal and external sources of support in this area of work
  • Teachers recognize colleagues and principal/admin as sources of support
  • Teachers recognize the school board as a main source of support
  • Teachers recognize external supports including student families and groups
• Challenges that teachers identified when exploring LGBTQ identity in their teachings ranged from outside influences including parental bias, cultural assumptions and time constraints
• As a result of their instruction, teachers perceived students and colleagues to become increasingly comfortable, accepting and possess a greater sense of safety
• Factors that inform teachers confidence and practice in this area include personal relationships and high levels of student interest and response to the topic
• Factors that influence the success of teachers work in this area are a safe and inclusive environment and committed members of the school community

4.2 Teacher commitment to the topic of LGBTQ identity is influenced by personal relationships and values that they hold and did not waiver under any barriers

A common theme that emerged amongst the participants were the factors that influenced their commitment to the inclusion of exploring LGBTQ identity and anti-homophobia education in their classrooms. Both participants attributed their strong commitment to the topic to personal relationships and the values that they believe in. Dillon’s commitment stemmed from his family life, where none of his 3 daughters identify themselves as straight. This was his reality and it informed his commitment as well as approach, to teach the way he would want his kids to be
taught. His personal relationships have an impact on the reasons behind his commitment, including the fact that he wants to normalize what his own children are going through, and in turn for his students. His daughter had introduced him to the idea of a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) at her high school, and made him aware of it from a parental standpoint. Similar to Dillon, Sharon’s close personal relationships with a transgendered individual as well as a same sex couple inform her commitment to the topic because she was very attuned to the challenges they were facing.

Not only did these personal relationships influence both participants’ commitment to the topic, but their own values and beliefs played a role in that as well. For example, Dillon comes from a Science background which he attributes to his ability to see things in more than one way:

_I also come from a science background where by training you are open to different explanations of phenomenon and you’re also open to diversity in how you look at stuff, so to me it was just the obvious thing to do, both as a parent and as a teacher to have that on the radar screen._

Sharon understands her commitment to the topic as coming from an equity perspective and working from the place of recognition. Both participants had similar reasons as to why they are passionate about this topic and why it is necessary to be a part of school life. They both were aware of the idea through family and friendships in their lives and came to understand the challenges they faced, and in turn wanted to make a difference for those important people in their lives which translated into their teachings.

Both participants held their values and dedication to the inclusion of the topic no matter what barriers got in their way, in some cases even increased their determination and persistence as Sharon reported:
Our former Principal I’m pretty sure was not totally on board, but I just would like try to keep going ahead because I knew he couldn’t really say anything against it, it almost put more fire in my belly, cause I had a feeling but I wasn’t sure, but I thought well let’s just see how much he can take.

Dillon and Sharon both shared a dedication to the topic and even challenging administration did not change that. They continue to bring forward whatever they can and continue to keep moving forward. Sharon noted that if one of them gets tired, the other person will take it over, and they will alternate. They work together in keeping the commitment alive, no matter who might oppose.

There is significance in these findings as the literature I reviewed did not speak to what influences teachers’ commitment and dedication to the inclusion of LGBTQ identity in their classrooms. Given these findings, it can be concluded that teachers who have a commitment to the topic have personal relationships to members of the LGBTQ community. Their reasons for dedication include being aware of the challenges that they face, and wanting to normalize their experiences for them. Personal values and beliefs play a big role in their commitment as well, and understanding that it all comes from an equity perspective.

4.3 Teachers did not experience any pre-service training on the topic of incorporating LGBTQ identity in their teaching but rather found support documents useful

With respect to pre-service training on this topic, both participants reported not having any. In both University and Teachers College, Dillon and Sharon said they did not have any training on this topic. Sharon also spoke to the lack of AQ courses available that addressed LGBTQ identity and inclusion in the classroom. Both participants believed that there should be some sort of formal pre-service training around this topic to prepare new teachers for introducing
and dealing with both the students and parents. This is supported through research that found many teachers mentioned that they need to be prepared to disrupt heterosexism in their classroom (Blackburn, 2005; Cosier and Sanders, 2007; Rofes, 2005). Participants thought that some sort of training would be helpful and that a degree of preparation would benefit teachers in their work. However, Sharon addressed an important factor in whether or not it would have the effects hoped for. She noted that just because something is mandatory it does not automatically mean they will understand it and be inclusive.

In terms of pre-service support documents, Sharon mentioned that the Equity document, that comes from the Ministry of Ontario, was excellent and helpful in terms of pre-service. Dillon also mentioned a document for secondary school teachers about creating safe spaces that he found to be a great support document. He believes that a document like this one should be created for the elementary level as it is an important topic at both levels.

The lack of pre-service training and support on the inclusion of LGBTQ identity in classrooms is evident in the literature reviewed as well. Training which seeks to inform educators on how to create supportive classroom environments are scarce and limited (Goodenow et al., 2006; Perotti & Westheimer, 2001 as cited by Toomey et al., 2012). For those teachers who had access to anti-homophobia education as a part of their pre-service teacher education, they reported that it was extremely important (Ferfolja and Robinson, 2004). There is a need for pre-service training and support because of the effects it can have on the inclusion of the topic in the classroom. Fredman et al., (2015) reported that many teachers felt a lack of preparedness and support in the area, resulting in them being uncomfortable to address these issues. If teachers aren’t feeling comfortable in addressing this topic in their classrooms, it is clear that training
needs to happen prior, in order to help alleviate their fears and to better prepare teachers in training.

The participants also noted that it was not until last year that they received some sort of in-service around the topic of LGBTQ identity and GSAs, but Sharon had mentioned at that point they had already been doing it for a while. Sharon also mentioned that she had taken leadership training to become a principal, and that the courses around equity were the best professional development courses in relation to this topic. Gorski et al., (2013) cited that inservice and professional development courses gives teachers the tools to counter the effects of heterosexism within the school and classroom. Given the findings from the participants as well as what was reported in the literature, it is evident that pre-service, inservice and professional development courses are needed in order to prepare and to combat new teachers’ fears of addressing this topic in their classroom. Many scholars have argued for teacher education programs to include sexual orientation and heteronormativity topics into course work (Blackburn, 2005; Bower and Klecka, 2009; Clark, 2010; Coiser and Sanders, 2007; Mulhern and Martinez, 1999; Rofes, 2005; Talburt, 2004). This research is consistent with the beliefs of both participants, in that they believe some sort of training around the inclusion of LGBTQ identity would have been very helpful.

4.4 Teachers found the most effective approach to LGBTQ identity inclusion is to respond to student needs

Perhaps one of the largest, most noticeable themes amongst the data collected was the responsive approach that teachers took to the inclusion of LGBTQ identity in their teachings.
Both participants made it very clear that their philosophy is to respond to and support students’ needs concerning this topic. They found that the responsive approach is most effective and well received by students. Teachers reported several times that it is not about coming at it with their own agenda, and that they are not there to lecture but to respond to what the students need, as Dillon put it: “It’s something that I don’t come at it with my own personal agenda but I will respond to the needs of the kids and do my best to be supportive.” It was important for both teachers to let the discussions be child-centered and allow them to lead the conversations, they will tell you what they want to know. Sharon spoke about how to navigate those conversations: “Let them lead it, and you ask those open ended questions that you co-create together and facilitate that with those ground rules, with respect.” Dillon reported the how students have a say in the discussions: “So the discussions are sort of child centered and it’s their interests and concerns and stuff they want to do or change etcetera around the school.”

It was evident that the teachers are not imposing their beliefs onto the students but rather broadening their horizons. Both teachers spoke to the importance of being open and willing to respond to students and also to help expand and further along their thinking by tossing little ideas at them. If the students don’t respond or jump at the ideas tossed, then they move along until something catches their interest. Teachers must be aware of what is happening in their classroom and school environment and be ready to respond appropriately. One example of how Dillon uses this responsive approach is to pay attention to language: “Be very attuned to what the sort of school yard talk is, be very attuned to words that you hear being used in the hallway and be prepared to call people on it, and to respond to it.” Another example of how teachers responded to the needs of the students was around the GSA. The teachers were not the ones who started the
GSA, it was brought to them by a student and they took that need and responded to it, Sharon recalled: “It was student initiated (the GSA) ... she said I want to start a GSA and so I said: LET’S GO!” Both teachers spoke about how the GSA was student initiated and it is there as a safe place for any students who needs it. The research demonstrates the effects that having supportive teachers has on students. Students are less likely to encounter problems at school when they perceive their teachers as supportive (Russell, Seif and Truong, 2011). This research is in line with what the participants had to say about being open and supportive for students. The literature reviewed did not speak to a responsive approach to work in this area. Given the lack of research on responsiveness as an approach, the participants in this study provided a meaningful and effective way to address the topic of LGBTQ identity in their practice.

4.5 Teachers integrated themes of LGBTQ throughout their curriculum in both explicit and implicit ways

Another theme which was common amongst participants was the integration of LGBTQ identity throughout the curriculum in both explicit and implicit ways. By explicit I am referring to direct and clear discussions around LGBTQ identity in their teachings, and by implicit I am referring to those indirect and unspoken strategies. Both participants used an integrative approach to the inclusion of this topic and to challenge heteronormativity in their teachings. One way in which Sharon approached the topic was by integrating it into Character Education: “When respect floats around, we talk about respect, when empathy comes around, we talk about you know, we did bullying prevention week, and then human rights, fairness ... I could always find a place to hit it and include it in Character Ed.” Both participants spoke to weaving the topics into
their curriculum as an instructional strategy. Human rights and fairness were two areas that were commonly spoke to regarding how they incorporate the topic seamlessly.

Implicit ways in which Sharon integrated LGBTQ identity and challenged heteronormativity was through systematic measures. For example, she spoke about how she handles participation in her classroom. She alternates girl boy when choosing students for participation, as she said that boys usually get more turns. There is a mutual understanding between herself and the students that this is the way it works, and a variety of voices will be heard.

In terms of explicit teachings of the topic, Dillon provided an example of a presentation that the GSA put on for the school, where they demonstrated a lesson of indistinguishable differences:

There was a string of 10 kids, basically saying well can you tell if any one of us is gay and literally they scripted it saying “is it me or is it me, or is it me?” and that not being able to tell was the real lesson there, and they wanted to get that across. So if thats an example of a lesson it’s the fact that you can’t tell and it shouldn’t really matter anyway, and the fact that you’re still living with full fledge whole persons and it’s one little aspect of their nature and their preferences and their choices.

With the help of the students in the GSA, Dillon was able to integrate a lesson about LGBTQ identity and anti-homophobia into an assembly for the whole school. Another message that stemmed from that discussion about who is gay and how can you tell, was a piece about how sexual orientation can change, and things don’t necessarily stay the same over the course of your life. The message that Dillon was trying to send through the workshop was:

There are people that will have families and then realize that you know that was a neat experience and then they decide to separate from their heterosexual partner and go into a homosexual relationship, and that happens, and you’re not going to be one thing all your life.
This sort of lesson could have related to particular students and validated their own experiences in their lives. The message could also help those students who are struggling with who they are and it supports them by letting them know it is okay to change your mind. Another example of a whole school approach was having a transgendered woman come and speak to the whole school. Both participants spoke about how there are a lot of teachable moments and it is our responsibility to take them and use them. Sharon spoke specifically about how to navigate these types of explicit conversations in terms of setting expectations and knowing your students: “You need to know where they’re at developmentally, to be able to engage in those conversations.” She also spoke about setting expectations by having a conversation with the class about sensitive topics and how they need to be respectful in the ways that they speak. She reported that in her experiences, students don’t normally challenge her around these topics, and will be respectful: “Because you’ve set the norm, like the expectations around how you’re going to facilitate this, how you’re gonna talk about it, and since they don’t wanna risk that, then they usually will follow in the norm.”

There are many ways in which these participants challenged heteronormativity and anti-homophobia in systematic ways and integrated it in their classroom rules and expectations. These systematic strategies challenge the research which says that teachers are not aware that they are in fact reinforcing heterosexuality through their daily practices, done through heterosexist policy, curriculum and pedagogical practices (Ferfolja, 2003). The participants were very aware of the silent reinforcers of heteronormativity and worked to push against them in their daily practice. The significance of this strategy of challenging the norm in implicit and explicit ways goes back to what was reported in the literature. The lack of acknowledgement and representation of the
LGBTQ community according to MacGillivray (2000), is one way that heteronormativity dominates schools. Both participants challenge this in their practice by being aware of what they are reinforcing or not, and always coming from a place where they are cognizant of equitable practice.

4.6 An important approach teachers took to including LGBTQ identity is to create a culture of acceptance and foster inclusion through every day practices

Another strategy teachers reported using when including LGBTQ identity in their teachings was to create an overall culture of acceptance within the school and to foster inclusion through their every day practice. Both participants spoke about reinforcing the safety and comfort of the students in their care by working to create a school culture that is accepting of all people. The participants spoke about how it is not done all in one lesson, that it is done over time, Dillon spoke about the idea of a culture: “It’s creating a culture, it’s not just about instruction, it’s about the every day having a little kernel that keeps sending out the message that there is a myriad different ways of being and they’re okay.”

Despite the widely held notion reported in the literature, that sensitive topics, especially those involving sexuality, should be kept away from young children (Ferfolja and Robinson, 2004), the participants discussed the importance of starting these discussions at a young age and having this culture of acceptance from the start. Participants reported that at the elementary level it is important to include discussion around the topic and to provide students with safe spaces where they know they are supported. Ferfolja and Robinson’s (2004) findings about the common notion that these topics are irrelevant in primary and early childhood are not supported by the
participants’ experiences. Dillon and Sharon reported the need for discussion around this topic right from the start. Dillon reported how this topic comes in at the elementary level: “At this age it’s not about their own orientation, sometimes it is but it’s largely about preventing bullying, the singling out of kids who have an alternative family structure.” Dillon spoke about how students come from a variety of family structures, and it is important that they are made to feel okay with whatever their family structure is:

At their age, it’s mostly about the families that they come from and it’s about fostering of acceptance, of fostering the feeling of being okay whatever your own family background is, and not feeling singled out. I guess that’s my instruction strategy, it’s sort of get it out there as being okay, and support the kids that are going through stuff of their own.

Both participants spoke to the reasons behind their GSA and what it is really about is bullying prevention. The GSA ultimately adds to the overall culture of acceptance that has been created within the school. In Dillon’s words: “If you foster that sort of welcoming environment and you front end the fact that yes we have a GSA and it’s not about being gay or straight it’s about preventing bullying of people.” The participants noted how the GSA plays an important role in the culture of acceptance and has aided in the creation of it. This culture really supports the sense of inclusion and the degree of acceptance in the school community. The GSA works as a strategy itself in solidifying this culture and relaying the message of inclusion, acceptance and anti-bullying. Dillon’s spoke about his hopes for the outcomes of the GSA: “Not just have the GSA be this little group of quirky kids that get together but to really broadcast the message of welcoming and acceptance through what we do, through the announcements in the morning, through our pink week, and our pride week.” Dillon and Sharon are both involved in working with the school’s GSA. Sharon reported the importance of having a GSA in an elementary school
is so that students know there are supports out there for them, and even if they aren’t ready to be a part of that in elementary schools, they will be aware of the idea and perhaps seek it out in high school:

_Students generally are more at risk in that transition, and in Grade 9 they know they can go to a GSA if they’re having mental health issues, if they’re questioning, if they’ve come out to their parents and their parents are really hard on them, they know there’s a place._

The creation of a culture has really been key in the ways in which both participants have navigated their work in this area. The everyday practices and the acceptance, anti-bullying stance they take, aid in the creation of the culture they speak about. Both participants reported the importance of the overall culture of acceptance that they have worked to create in the school community, and that each initiative they take, further supports and reinforces that idea. Dillon reported that this is integral to the success of his teachings, and that this is a response to the demographics of our society and ensuring the future generations be accepting and supportive of one another: “We live in a multicultural society and we need to bring out kids that are from the start, aware of the fact that there are multiple formats for everything, for families, for how you relate to other people, and that’s where I kinda bring it back to we need to create that culture.”

These findings are significant in relation to what was reported in the literature because they offer a counter argument for those who doubt this topic has a place at the elementary school level. As the participants noted, it is not just about the students themselves, but it is about their families and the people they know. It is about creating a culture of acceptance amongst both younger and older generations, so that people can feel okay with who they are and what their family structures or preferences are. The argument reported by Ferfolja and Robinson (2004), that many believe these topics are irrelevant at the primary level, are challenged by the findings
The participants stated the reasons why it is so important to start these discussions from the beginning, because it is all about the creation of an accepting and supportive school, which will translate into their personal lives. As the participants said, it is not just about their own orientations, it is about the family background they come from and they need to feel that they are supported.

4.7 Teachers have found both internal and external sources of support for their work in this area

A common theme amongst participants’ answers were regarding the supports that they found helpful in navigating their work in this area. There are three sub themes that this theme will address: teachers recognize colleagues and administration as sources of support, teachers recognize the school board as a main source of support, teachers recognize external supports including families and other groups. When I speak about internal sources of support I am referring to those supports that are found within the physical school itself, as in colleagues and administration. When I speak about external sources of support I am referring to those supports that are found beyond the physical walls of the school, being the school board (TDSB in this case), and families as well as other groups.

4.7.1 Teachers recognize colleagues and administration as sources of support

The first internal source of support I will discuss is the closest to the teachers, their colleagues and administration. Both participants reported the importance of having colleagues with whom you can discuss ideas with and feel supported in this area by. Sharon reported:
It’s really important to talk to colleagues and to debrief with colleagues. I really think it’s important to have a community at school to support you that you feel you could feel safe talking to, before you’re preparing a lesson, after, what did you think, so you can be a reflective practitioner; I think that’s really really important.

The idea of not being alone in the work, and having a school community to support you makes a difference. Dillon noted that through their work in this area, they have been getting more attention and interest from other colleagues:

So we’re looking to handing off and we’re getting a lot of support and we’re actually getting people that are on staff that are now starting to come to the meetings and being sort of the next person to take over that.

The participants who are currently in the role of leading the work in this area, including the GSA, have noticed an increase of involvement and interest from staff. They reported feeling supported and encouraged by this development. Participants reported teachers being appreciative of the work they do. Specific colleagues in the school such as the school librarian were also noted as sources of support. In the literature it was reported that teachers are hesitant to take on this topic because they find it challenging to how know to select age-appropriate materials which include LGBTQ identity and content (Wickens and Wedwick, 2011). Sharon mentioned that the school librarian is an excellent resource to use when looking for materials to bring into your classroom, including books about coming out, about questioning and about gay parents. This is important to note given the literature, as teachers may not be aware of this support that they can make use of right in their school. Guidance Counsellors within the school were also mentioned as sources of support. Although not every school has their own Guidance Counsellor, there should be one allotted to them, and teachers should use them as resources and support in their work where they feel they need it.
Another internal source of support for teachers in this work was their administration. Participants reported the importance of having a supportive Principal and administrative team. One participant referred to administration as their “lightning rod,” and giving them the leeway to do what they want to do without having to answer to those who don’t agree. An example of one way administration was supportive of the work the participants were doing in this area was how they responded to parental pushback. The GSA had organized a transgendered speaker to come and talk to the school, Dillon reported that having administration on their side made things much easier:

*We had Anza come in and speak to our kids, and we had some family pushback after the fact, but admin was totally on board going into it, was totally on board afterwards when dealing with some of the pushback, and they took that on, they didn’t just download it onto the teachers that organized it.*

Sharon also noted the support from administration, specifically how the Principal responded to parental pushback and backed up the teachers 100%:

*When that one parent was giving my Principal...it was his job to go toe to toe, my Principal said: he is just wrong, we are bringing Anza Anderson in, a transgendered speaker, we are because that’s the right thing to do for our kids.*

Participants also reported that having supportive administration is a fortunate situation, but is not always the case that a supportive admin team will be there. However, regardless of the administration’s personal stance on the topic, this work is supported through the school board (TDSB) which is the biggest and most crucial source of support according to the participants. Another example of how administration supported this work was regarding a student who made a request for a gender neutral bathroom, Dillon recalled:

*Our transitioning kid contacted administration and said you know I don’t want to go to the girls bathroom and I really don’t want to go to the boys bathroom yet either, so she’s transitioning girl to boy and she’s experimenting, he’s experimenting with that and...*
immediately admin kind of went okay let’s get a paper sign up, let’s get a proper plastic sign up made from the TDSB sign making shop. It was instantaneous, like the sign was up the day of.

Administration immediately responding to a request of this nature from a student shows their level of support and their level of understanding and acceptance. In this instance, it would have been difficult to not have the support of administration. The instantaneous response to this particular need, sends a message not only to that student, but to the whole school community that this is something they support and will stand by. In the literature, fears from teachers were expressed around losing their jobs if they were to discuss these topics in their classroom (Schneider & Dimito, 20008). This is not consistent with the participants responses, as they never once referenced a sense of risk to their job security because of their dedication to this work, even when the administration was not completely on board.

4.7.2 Teachers recognize the school board as a main source of support

The school board (TDSB) was noted as the most crucial source of support as it dictates what should be and what needs to be happening in its schools. Through the TDSB’s mission, the participants’ work in this area is supported fully, as Sharon said: “The Toronto District School Board expects this to happen in the classroom, you have their full support.”

Equity and inclusion are key aspects of the TDSB’s mission and it is important that teachers are aware of the support that backs them up at the board level. Bickmore (1999) reported that teachers are hesitant in discussing topics of this nature as they have a fear of political controversy. This might be dependent on the School Board that one works for, however the participants in this study made clear that in the TDSB they are supported, Sharon reinforced
this: “You just need to know that you are supported, your Union supports you, the School Board, its part of their mission, your Principal should support you, your Superintendent supports you.”

Furthermore, participants are curious about what other supports are available at the board level, as Dillon said:

*I would want to learn more about what supports are there at a board level, I know that we have people at the board level address these issues but I want to learn more about how that functions, so I want to take that time to better understand outside of only the school context, what else is there that is of support to kids and to us.*

The commitment to learning about what other supports teachers can tap into, demonstrates the dedication and persistence of the participant, to continuing supporting students and bringing in whatever they can to help them in their work.

4.7.3 Teachers recognize external supports including families and other groups

Participants reported feeling support from external means such as families of students in their school as well as other support groups for LGBTQ identity and inclusion. With respect to parents, participants reported getting the least amount of feedback from them, when compared to students and administration. However, it is not meant in a negative way, parents just don’t always have the opportunity to share their feedback with teachers. Dillon reported that he is feeling very supported when it comes to parents: “*I have parents that will come and sort of drop by my classroom, their kids are graduated but they still come back and they go, yup they had something really special here.*” Having the parents on board reportedly made it easier for teachers to progress in their work. When the parents recognize the importance of the work these participants engage in and how they create safe spaces for their children, it is a huge confidence booster and it validates all of the efforts the participants make on a daily basis. One participant found support
in another teacher who is the head of the GSA at a local high school. Sharon reported finding 
support in this teacher who had a GSA before she did, and won many awards for her work in this 
area. The words that she told Sharon were “you are supported.” External support resources and 
groups that were mentioned included: No Name Calling, Jer’s Vision and Gender Based Violence 
Group. Sharon mentioned that her commitment to this topic allowed her to access these 
resources before they were brought in as an inservice because she had hunted them down herself. 
Both participants alluded to the fact that there are groups and individuals who are there to 
support and guide you, but you have to be willing to seek them out yourself, they will not always 
be handed to you.

4.8 Challenges that teachers identified when exploring LGBTQ identity in their teachings 
ranged from outside influences including parental bias and cultural assumptions to internal 
influences such as time constraints

Teachers identified several challenges which had an impact on their work in this area. 
They also identified how they respond when met with these challenges. There were two sub 
themes identified amongst the data: Teachers work was impacted by outside influences including 
different views and parental bias, Teachers respond to challenges through administrative/board 
level support and a human rights approach. One teacher reported having a fear of misinformation 
where this topic is concerned. She was worried she would make a mistake at the beginning, but 
then realized that you get opportunities to try different things, and that it is okay to make 
mistakes. This fear is consistent with the literature in a study by DePalma and Atkinson (2009)
where they revealed straight participants reported feelings of being worried that they were not well informed to take on this topic.

Both participants reported outside views and biases, mostly coming from parents, to be a challenge when doing work in this area. Dillon recalled parents questioning whether or not teachers should be engaging students in discussions of this matter: "With the challenges that I’ve had they’ve been coming from parents, and it was a questioning of whether we should be addressing issues of acceptance of gender orientation." This finding is consistent with the literature, whether parents believe it is the teachers role to talk about this or not (MacGillivray, 2000). The way in which these teachers handle this sort of response is by putting it on the same stage around acceptance of skin colour, or religious beliefs, and by taking an equity and human rights standpoint. The participants find it challenging when parental views influence the students ideas around the topic. When students are hearing one message at home and one message at school it can be confusing for them. Dillon approached this sort of bias that comes from the parents in a respectful manner:

If I can get the parents on board that’s fantastic, if the parent is still reluctant I’m not going to sort of change how the kid relates to the parents, but I will encourage the kid holding their own thoughts and values, because they can start doing that and you can still be perfectly respectful of the family values but you can also have your thoughts and that’s okay.

Both participants spoke about challenges that they have faced or that administration has had to deal with coming from parents who are not on board with their teachings in this area. Participants reported that some parents were surprised that they would have a transgendered speaker talk during pink week, and perceived others to be just homophobic. Luckily for the
participants they have had the support of administration to back them up when these challenges arise, as Dillon said:

*I would not go as far as qualifying any of my experiences as backlash, I know that there’s been pushback, and I know that admin has dealt with it, and I’ve been spared that flogging and I’m very grateful for that.*

Other instances when differing views create challenges for teachers are when parents seek to opt their children out of specific discussions, especially with the new Health and Physical Education curriculum in effect. Sharon does not feel that parents should have the option to opt their children out of these discussions as they are a part of the curriculum, part of the school culture, and if they are coming to school, they are going to get the information regardless:

*I can’t help but think about the new Health curriculum when we’re talking about this, and I’ve never believed that we should have to send letters home to say: oh we’re doing sex ed right now, so then your kid can then have an option. I don’t think that parents that choose to opt out their children from things like LGBTQ and sexual education should get an OHIP card, that’s how strongly I feel about it” ....It’s what we do, it’s what the Toronto District School Board does, it’s everywhere right. So if they’re coming to school, they’re gonna get it anyway.*

Participants believe that it is important for all students to be there for these conversations and it is important to broaden students’ perspectives and open their eyes to different ways of thinking. These parental biases are similar to MacGillivray’s findings regarding parental concern about the values being instilled in children (2000). However, the way in which the participants navigate the topic is through open, unbiased discussion and through the lens of acceptance of all people.

Time also plays a factor in the effect that the participants felt they could have in their teachings around this topic. Sharon had the experience of being a Guidance Counsellor and reported that when she was in that role she was able to do so much more and have a greater
impact. As a result of a budget cut, that role no longer exists. Sharon also noted wanting more release time to work with the GSA and to work on special projects. With respect to the topic of LGBTQ identity and inclusion, she feels that the demands of teaching weigh on the amount of teaching she can do in her classroom around this topic: “With all the demands of what I’m supposed to be teaching, I feel like I haven’t been doing classroom work I’ve just been doing GSA.” Amongst the many challenges teachers face with their work in this area, most reported was the impact that parents have on their own children’s beliefs. Dillon reported handling this type of situation with a parent like so:

You’ve got your value set, you can hold it, as a parent, however we’re still going to run a school that is inclusive and really sort of qualified in terms of ok you can hang onto whatever values but you cannot impose those values on the rest of the school.

The participants are not trying to change the values of the parents but they are trying to encourage their students to keep open minds. Teachers are aware of cultural differences which might impact the way a family views their work in this area. Dillon reported an understanding of perhaps families in transition to Canadian society, or holding onto older ways of thinking. Normally family values trickle down to the children and can potentially change their beliefs that they have formed around acceptance and inclusion. Dillon experienced a challenge where a student was influenced by his parents’ beliefs and was at a crossroads, not knowing what to do:

He came to me one day and he said I’m not sure I can still come to GSA because my mom said there’s a bad name in the GSA, in the name of the club, and I said okay well let’s have a little chat with mom, and I got mom in the classroom and they were from a South East Asian background and it would have not been their preference to have anything to do with homosexuality or even just he mention of the word gay, but once we put it in terms of it’s not about the kids themselves it’s about preventing bullying of kids that have families that are either two dads or two moms or are other than heteronormative, and that actually shifted it to mom actually coming on board and the kid being able to stay in GSA because we clarified the fact that it’s not about the badness it’s about the inclusion.
Both participants faced these challenges and took them on with a human rights and equity approach. They attempted to reason with parents and get the message across that their work revolves around acceptance of different ways of being, and increasing tolerance, therefore minimizing bullying. Some of the reactions from parents could stem from a misunderstanding, or a lack of information. Through a conversation with the parents, Dillon demonstrated how teachers can get parents on board by getting them to understand where they are coming from with this, which is an accepting and inclusive standpoint to prevent bullying.

4.9 As a result of their instruction, teachers perceived colleagues and students to become increasingly comfortable, accepting and possess a greater sense of safety

Another theme amongst participants’ responses was the positive change that they observed in both colleagues and students, as a result of their instruction on this topic. Participants found that through their instruction, and through the culture that they have created, colleagues and students have become increasingly comfortable, accepting and possess a greater sense of safety. With respect to colleagues, Sharon made note of the fact that with everything they do, it helps push people further towards acceptance, she says that nobody stays in the same place: “There’s a couple I thought were sort of holding back, but you know I feel like they’ve all moved, everybody’s all moved, like even if they were really homophobic, they’re neutral, you know like so I’ve seen everyone progress.” With the culture that has been created within the school and community, it moves people forward in their thinking. Sharon also adds that because of the identity that they have created, it becomes more of a normalized thing. The school has had staff leave other schools to join their staff team because they were looking for a safe place to be
and knew that they would find that safe environment at this school. Also with respect to colleagues, both participants noticed the LGBTQ community of teachers within the school has started to come out to meetings more and have shown a greater interest in the overall initiative, Sharon reported:

I find the LGBT community of colleagues they’re here which is probably 6 or 7, they’re like oh you know we’d like to be a panel at pink day next year...not all of them but they were coming out more, they’re just less fearful.

They attribute this to the normalization and the culture of acceptance that they have worked to create within the school. The participants are looking to hand off the GSA next year, and they are beginning to see interest from other teachers to take that over. This was not something that was always there, and so they also attribute it to the culture of acceptance and the normalizing of the idea that they have encouraged through their work in this area. Another demonstration of how teachers become more comfortable and accepting is through an example of a teacher who wouldn’t hold a student’s hand in an assembly which revolved around the topic, because he was uncomfortable with it. Later, when they had the transgendered speaker come in and speak to the school, his response was “it’s good, it’s good.” This demonstrates the change that can happen over time in terms of the level of acceptance and comfort.

When talking about students and the outcomes the participants perceived, Dillon noted that it is not an immediate change in the attitudes or acceptance: “It’s interesting in that you don’t necessarily see an immediate change, there isn’t necessarily that ah-ha moment the way you might have in science or math, it’s an incremental thing.” The students begin to see alternate ways of thinking, and are submerged in a culture of inclusion and acceptance; the teachers perceived this having an impact on their attitudes in a positive way. Another outcome that Sharon
perceived as a result of the instruction and overall school climate was: “There’s gonna be more integration, healthier relationships, they’re gonna be healthy themselves and they’re gonna develop healthy relationships.” Students are going to feel more comfortable and confident with who they are and have a better idea of what alternate forms of families/sexual identities there are out there. This was consistent with Dillon’s observations of students: “You see kids being more comfortable with who they are, being more comfortable being at school.” The well being of students is of utmost importance and these observations by the participants demonstrate that their teachings are playing a role in that. It was mentioned that some students take up more space, and that comfort levels range amongst students. Safety was observed as a perceived outcome, Dillon viewed students to feel safer and be willing to take more risks as a result of their instruction and culture of acceptance that has been created:

In very practical terms, not just coming out of a lesson, but coming out of a culture, we’ve had kids in Grade 8 that came out, right at the end of school and sort of came out to the GSA, we’ve had kids this year that asked for a gender neutral bathroom to be available in the school, and we have a kid whose transitioning, I believe she’s in Grade 7, and they voiced those realities in their life and the felt safe enough to do that because of the progressive incremental creation of a welcoming culture.

Through this excerpt, it demonstrates that students feel comfortable enough within the school culture and with their teachers to open up to them and be their true authentic selves. The literature supports these findings as reported by Toomey et., al (2012), that through fostering a LGBT-positive curriculum and other experiences can contribute to a welcoming and safe environment for students. If students do not feel safe in being who they are, and they are being inhibited from being their authentic selves, it can weigh heavily on their confidence and well being (Solomon & Russell, 2004). Given these findings, the outcomes for students’ comfort,
sense of safety as well as increasing acceptance, it validates the importance and need for this type of instruction and inclusive climate.

4.10 Factors that inform teachers confidence and practice in this area include personal relationships and high levels of student interest and response to the topic

Teachers confidence and abilities to take on work in this area were attributed to personal relationships as well as high levels of student interest in the topic. Both participants accredited their comfort to aspects of their personal lives and how they were brought up. For Dillon, his confidence in this area stems from his personal life:

*I'm a dad to 3 wonderful girls, none of whom see themselves as being heterosexual, and they're all sort of considering a wider horizon...and it's a trickle down effect from basically the rest of my life to my teaching and I feel very comfortable with handling issues around the gay and straight and exploring and finding yourself.*

Since this is his reality, he found comfort in this topic through areas of his personal life.

Similarly, Sharon’s comfort and confidence in this topic arises from her personal life, specifically her upbringing: “*I was brought up in a family where we talked about stuff like this, all the time, a very open environment, so you get more comfortable talking about things that might be sensitive.*” Both participants reported similar responses in that they are both comfortable with openness and change. Through their personal lives and their relationships with members of the LGBTQ community, as well as their openness to discussion and change, these are all factors that impact their comfort level with their work in this area. Participants mentioned their own sexuality as a potential factor in their comfort and lack of fear to take on this topic, as Sharon said:
I think that sometimes the hetero people seem to be more fearless about it because they
don’t have the same cost, there’s not the same risk. The fact that I’m hetero may make it
easier for me to do what I’m doing.

This finding is supported through the literature, as many gay and lesbian teachers
reported feeling challenged in addressing LGBT identity in their classrooms as it could be seen
as advancing a personal agenda (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). Furthermore, straight teachers
feared being labelled as gay themselves (MacGillivray, 2000). This was not a reported fear with
the participants, as they reported the opposite, however it could potentially play a role in other
educators decision to discuss this topic.

Teachers perceived students to have innate acceptance and a genuine interest in learning
about LGBTQ identity. Dillon thought of students to be accepting of their peers and reported that
they tend to be gender blind from the start:

To me the child is by nature accepting of its fellow human beings, as I said the level of
colour blindness I see similarly happening with gender and makeup with families unless
the bias comes in from the outside I think that kids are pretty flexible and pretty
accepting.

This is something that he has witnessed and observed from his students and he reports
that teachers must safeguard what they come in with. The innate values and sense of human
rights and fairness is something both participants see students bringing with them, and that it is
the teacher’s role to foster and continue this. This goes hand in hand with what Sharon observed
students to have, a need to be informed about the topic. She perceived students to be curious and
determined to be informed about LGBTQ identity and inclusion: “They want to understand and
they want to understand people and the diversity of who we are as people. They want to know
how it affects them and how it affects other people.” Sharon reported that students genuinely
enjoy discussions around this topic because they want to know about the world and they want to
be able to form opinions, and to do that they need the information. Teachers also perceived students to already have a strong sense of justice, and that it doesn’t take much to tap into that. Following the school’s pink week assembly where they had a transgendered woman come and speak to the school, the students responded positively according to Sharon: “The kids were just like: I would never ever consider that a transgendered person has any less rights or has any less opportunities than I would have, I would be so upset if I saw a transgendered person being bullied.” This positive and strong response from the students shows that they really do have an innate sense of human rights, and ideas around what is fair. The students perhaps wouldn’t get the opportunity to think critically and from a social justice standpoint had they not brought this speaker into the school. Another example of students’ innate acceptance and sense of justice is the initiative that students in the school take to make the school a safer space, Dillon said:

*The Grade 6 students and 7s and 8s are going to be congregating and the GSA is actually going to be addressing the Grade 8s because grade 8 students came to the GSA basically saying you know, the language and the gratuitous use of the word gay and other even more arcane words for homosexuals, in the hallways is just not acceptable and there’s a handful of Grade 8s that need to be sort of made aware of that.*

This excerpt demonstrates the sense of justice within the students and that they are striving to make their school a more accepting and inclusive space where all students can feel safe. The literature presents arguments that educators and administrators are responsible for managing school climates where bullying and harassment are evident (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002, 2003; Lipkin, 2002; Meyer, 2009; Puchner & Klein, 2011; Rofes, 2000; Uribe, 1994, as cited by Fredman et al, 2005). They speak to teachers being advocates for students to provide a safe learning space, but my findings here demonstrate that students are actually taking the initiative and intervening in appropriate ways. In the literature I did not come
across a mention of students playing a role in the advocacy for safe spaces. However, through the assistance of teachers, these students are contributing to building an inclusive climate which respects all students. The participants attribute a lot of credit to students for being advocates for change and standing up for what is right. Both participants believe students have this innate acceptance and strong sense of justice within them, and that they use this to better the school climate.

With respect to student interest and responses to the participants’ teachings, they have found this to be a contributor to their confidence around their work in this area. Both participants see student’s responses as validating the work that they do, reassuring them that the work they are doing matters, Dillon spoke to this:

*With students I mean the cohort that graduated Grade 8 this past year was the cohort that actually started the GSA, and they love coming back to their old school it’s just like silly but they’re now over at ... where there’s a really strong GSA as well, and they come back and I’ve had them come and search me out and say you know that was really important and what we did really made a difference, and that’s a huge positive reinforcer.*

When participants receive feedback of this nature, it supports the efforts they have made, and increases their determination. Sharon reported that student engagement plays a role in her comfort around teaching this topic. When the students genuinely want to learn about it, she finds it to make her more comfortable: “*It makes it easier because they’re really engaged...I find that they’re really respectful and they want to get it right.*” It was reported in the literature that some teachers reported being fearful of imposing values on students and that is the reason they chose not to discuss LGBTQ topics in their classrooms (MacGillivray, 2000 and Pheonix et al., 2006). Given these findings, it proves the importance of talking about LGBTQ identity in schools because both staff and students can learn and grow from these types of conversations. It was
noted by participants that teachers and students alike, both move forward in their acceptance and in their comfort through instruction around LGBTQ identity as well as through the culture of acceptance that has been created within the school.

4.11 Factors that influence the success of teachers work in this area are a safe and inclusive environment and committed members of the school community

The final theme identified amongst the data collected were the factors which influence the success of the teachers work in this area. The factors identified were a safe and inclusive environment as well as committed members of the school community. Space was one important factor noted by participants. Sharon attributes the GSA being so active to them having a lot of room. Dillon reported the need for safe spaces which assist in the overall inclusive atmosphere of the school community:

You have to have those positive spaces, you have to have the presence of a GSA where kids can go and hang out and feel okay about whatever is in their background or whatever they themselves may be starting to sort of grapple with.

The participants attended a set of workshops and what they learned was that there should be a physical space where kids can go to, with a comfortable couch, and a person that they can talk to if they want, or to just hang out. Dillon mentioned that the most they have currently is a gender neutral bathroom. He emphasized the need for this type of space within the school:

If it’s like a nook with a comfy couch and a rainbow flag, that to me broadcasts the fact that yah this is a safe spot to go to, and in an ideal world, we should have people manning the nook, well personning the nook and being there for kids.

The importance of a safe space, and members of the school who are willing to contribute and encourage this environment is crucial. Sharon spoke to the fact that GSA’s are important at
the level before high school because students should be aware that supports exist and they should have access to these groups:

*If you don’t have them in middle school (GSA), then sometimes it’s a lot harder for them to find that, and when I look back that’s what I’ve learned about high school GSAs is that it took kids a while to find them, and by that time it could be too late.*

Positive spaces and committed members that they can count on, were two key factors that informed teachers’ success and in turn, positive student outcomes. Both participants are seeing more colleagues become interested in getting involved in the work they are doing, and see this as being crucial to the success and sustainability of the GSA as well as the overall atmosphere of acceptance in the school. These findings are significant given the literature that reported teachers have the ability to protect students through fostering an LGBT-positive curriculum and climate which contribute to a welcoming environment for all students including those who identify as LGBTQ (Toomey et al., 2012). This leads to less LGBT bullying and harassment at school, when LGBT identity and topics are a part of the curriculum and environment Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laud and Manke, 2006, as cited in Toomey et al.,2012). The research supports these findings in that a positive, safe and inclusive environment, a long with committed members, makes a huge impact on the success of work in this area and on student outcomes.

### 4.12 Conclusion

To conclude the chapter, I will summarize the key findings and discussions that emerged through the various themes and sub themes identified. In response to my main research question, the findings were that teachers are creating opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity in their classrooms in three main ways: responding to student needs, integrating themes
of LGBTQ throughout the curriculum and creating an overall culture of acceptance by fostering inclusion through every day practices. In response to the sub research questions I found that as a result of teacher’s instruction, teachers perceived both students and colleagues to become increasingly comfortable, more accepting and possess a greater sense of safety. Teachers reported colleagues, administration, the school board (TDSB), student families and other groups as being main sources of support and resources. Another factor that supported teachers work in this area was their belief about student’s innate acceptance and interest in the topic. Teachers reported that the lack of pre-service-service training around this topic is a challenge as well as outside influences including parental bias, cultural assumptions and time constraints. It was found that teachers’ commitment to the topic of LGBTQ identity is influenced by both personal relationships and values. Next, in chapter 5 I will speak to the significance of my findings as a new teacher and for the educational research community as a whole. I will identify areas for future research given what I have found, and make recommendations based on my findings.
Chapter 5: IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will highlight the implications and recommendations that are a result of my research findings based on my main research question: how do a sample of elementary teachers create opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity and challenge heteronormativity in their formal curriculum? I begin by reviewing my key research findings and their significance to the work in this area. Then I describe the implications of these findings for the educational community as well as for myself as a teacher and researcher. I discuss the recommendations I have based on my findings for members of the educational community. A list of questions that were raised through my research and suggestions for further research will be explained. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of my findings and discussion, implications and recommendations as well as the significance of the topic.

5.2 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

To begin, I will provide an overview of the key findings and discussions that emerged through the various themes and sub themes identified in the previous chapter. First I will review the findings which address the main research question which is: how do a sample of teachers create opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity and challenging heteronormativity in their formal curriculum? Teachers are creating opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity in their classrooms in three main ways: responding to student needs, integrating themes of LGBTQ throughout the curriculum and creating an overall culture of acceptance by fostering inclusion through every day practices. Teachers reported that through these three approaches,
they are able to respond to students needs, and to foster acceptance amongst the school community.

Next I will identify the findings which address the sub research questions. The first one is: what impact do they perceive this instruction having on their students? As a result of teacher’s instruction, they perceived both students and colleagues to become increasingly comfortable, more accepting and possess a greater sense of safety. Participants noted that both students and staff are able to be their true authentic selves and attribute this comfort to their teachings. The second sub question is: what range of factors and resources support these teachers in their work? Teachers reported colleagues, administration, the school board (TDSB), student families and other groups as being main sources of support and resources. Another factor that supported teachers work in this area was their belief about student’s innate acceptance and interest in the topic. Lastly, teachers reported having a safe and inclusive environment as well as committed members of the school community to be a factor which impacts their success in this work. The third sub question is: what challenges do these teachers experience, and how do they respond to those challenges? Teachers reported that the lack of pre-service-service training around this topic is a challenge as well as outside influences including parental bias, cultural assumptions and time constraints. Teachers respond to these challenges through a human rights and equity approach. Through communication and understanding, they were able to overcome the challenges that they have experienced. The final sub question is: what experiences influence and inform these teachers commitment and competence to this work? Teachers reported that their commitment to the topic of LGBTQ identity is influenced by both personal relationships and values. Their competence and confidence is informed by their personal relationships as well as high levels of
student interest and response to the topic. The findings from my data may have implications on both the educational research community as well as my own practice. It is my hope that these findings will contribute to the existing research landscape related to this topic in several ways. My findings provide best practices from exemplary teachers doing work in this area which I will take with me in my future career and I hope that others can do the same.

5.3 Implications

In the following sections I will describe the implications of this study for the educational research community as well as my own professional practice.

5.3.1 Implications: The Educational Research Community

The findings from my study could have implications for the educational community, including the education system and a range of educational stakeholders. Students, administration, teachers, staff, parents, community members and school board members are among the individuals who are invested in the welfare and success of the school and its students. These stakeholders will be implicated by my findings in the following ways. First, I will discuss the implications of my findings for teachers and school staff. My findings indicate that the best approaches to incorporating LGBTQ identity and inclusion in the classroom are to respond to student needs and to create a culture of acceptance through every day practices such as fostering acceptance of different ways of being, and broadcasting that message through the GSA, morning announcements, and special events. These findings will help teachers and other school staff with ideas of best practices for navigating the topic. Teachers can learn from these findings how to
best support their students and how to overcome challenges that they might face in their work around this topic. Other implications for teachers and staff are understanding and being aware of the benefits and outcomes that this type of work has on students. The findings demonstrate that both students and staff became increasingly comfortable, accepting and possessed a greater sense of safety as a result of teacher instruction and approaches. As a result of knowing these outcomes, teachers and school staff may increase their commitment to inclusion of this topic which will in turn benefit all members of the school community. The findings from my study will have implications for students because teachers and administration will be aware of how to better support them and meet their needs. Students can benefit from these findings if teachers and administration put into practice what has been suggested by my findings. The findings from my study will have implications for school administrators as well because they will be informed about factors which influence the success of their teachers work in this area which include a safe and inclusive environment. This factor is in the hands of administration, they have the power to create this type of environment where students and staff feel safe and a part of the community, which may benefit both students and school staff. Administration can also learn from the finding that it is not common for teachers to have pre-service training around this topic, and can then take the necessary actions. As a result of the findings, administration will understand that they play a big role in the support of their teachers with work in this area. Community members and parents will benefit from the findings if teachers and administration acknowledge and put into practice what was found by these teacher participants. The implications of these findings for school board members will be recognizing they are relied on as a main source of support for teachers committed to work in this area. My findings indicate that teachers did not experience
any pre-service training on incorporating LGBTQ identity in their teaching. This finding may impact school board decisions for professional development opportunities or even at the Ministry or teacher education level. The educational community and educational stakeholders could benefit from the findings of my study and if put into practice, the outcomes could be favourable for all members.

5.3.2 Narrow: My Professional Identity and Practice

The findings from my study will have several implications for me as a beginning teacher. The strategies and approaches, perceived outcomes on students, resources, challenges and factors of support that were identified through my study will all influence my future practice. Some of the strategies and approaches that I will employ in my future practice around this topic will be heavily influenced by my findings. The most prominent finding that emerged was around the most effective approach to LGBTQ identity inclusion, which was responding to the needs of students. To go about doing this, the participants recommended to listen to the students and let them tell you what they are interested in learning, or what they have concerns about. The participants encouraged child-centered discussions, led by students but also the co-creation of open ended questions and facilitation of that with already established ground rules and most importantly with respect. The participants used a responsive approach by paying attention to the language used by students, being aware of it and being ready to call people on it and respond to it. The responsive approach is one that I will take into my practice as it was stressed by both participants as their main strategy of navigating the topic. It is important to know your students, understand what supports they might need, and in turn respond accordingly. Responding will be
a key approach I take, but I also hope to integrate LGBTQ identity and related themes throughout the curriculum in both explicit and implicit ways. I hope to create a culture of acceptance and foster inclusion through every day practice both within my classroom and the school environment. This could be done a number of ways including having open dialogue right from the start, and ensuring students feel okay with who they are, what their family structure or preferences may be. Another implication from my findings for me as a beginning teacher will be the supports available that have been reported including teachers, the school board, as well as external support groups. Being aware of the supports that are available and the resources that I can tap into including the Equity document from the Ministry of Education, will guide and support me with my work in this area. I will continue to be a reflective practitioner and to build a community that can support one another in these endeavors. From my findings I have an understanding and an idea of the challenges that I may face as a result of my commitment to work in this area ranging from parents, to cultural assumptions and time constraints. Acknowledging some of the potential challenges prior to beginning my career as a teacher will allow me to be proactive in my approach and to be open and aware of potential barriers. As a result of my findings, I now know how to prepare and respond appropriately to potential challenges. For example, with respect to my findings around parental bias, I am aware of some of the reasons why this might come forward, and will then tackle it from a human rights and equity perspective. Other implications for my own teaching practice as a result of my findings will be a boost in my confidence and commitment to including LGBTQ identity and related themes in my classroom. The outcomes that teachers perceived students developed as a result of their instruction, which included being increasingly comfortable, accepting and possessing a
greater sense of safety, will play an important role in my future practice. Understanding the benefits of including LGBTQ identity in my classroom validates and strengthens my commitment to this work. I aim to take these findings from my study with me as I embark on my teaching career, keeping in mind that this work matters for the students and the communities that I will serve.

5.4 Recommendations

There are several recommendations I have based on my findings for a number of educational stakeholders. The recommendations I will make will be geared towards schools, school boards, ministries of education, professional development, teacher education, beginning and experienced teachers, administration, and school partners. As my findings state, teachers did not experience any pre-service training on the topic of incorporating LGBTQ identity in their teaching. Based on this finding, the recommendation that I will make is for teacher education and professional development. I would recommend that there be changes made in teacher education so that teacher candidates have the mandated opportunity to learn about and explore LGBTQ identity and inclusion and its importance and relevance in the classroom. Both participants reported that they would have found it very helpful if they had some sort of pre-service training around this topic. As far as professional development, I believe that it would be beneficial for both beginning teachers and experienced teachers to attend workshops on LGBTQ identity and inclusion, specifically in the elementary classroom. If teachers were provided with more opportunities to develop their knowledge in this area, they might not be so hesitant and feel more prepared to incorporate these topics into the classroom. As well, it was reported that there were
no additional qualification courses for teachers to take around this topic area. I would recommend that the ministry develop AQ courses that focuses on equity and LGBTQ identity and inclusion in the classroom at all levels including primary and junior. This could also take the form of workshops and mandated professional development opportunities. Based on my findings, there are a lack of resources geared towards creating positive spaces at the elementary level. My recommendation would be for the Ministry to put out a document in addition to their Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools document (Ministry of Education, 2014) which focuses on practical ways for teachers and administration to create positive spaces and foster a safe and inclusive school climate. This document could focus on providing teachers with hands-on strategies that they can use in their classrooms and ideas for school wide initiatives. I would also recommend the document to portray possible scenarios that teachers might encounter and what they could do in response. Based on my findings around most effective approaches and strategies to including LGBTQ identity in practice, I make the recommendation that teachers respond to student needs and integrate themes of LGBTQ identity throughout the curriculum, not simply as stand-alone lessons. This can be done through Character Education, specifically around the topics of human rights, fairness and respect. The topic of LGBTQ identity can be woven into lessons of that nature. The next recommendation I will propose is geared towards administration and is around their policy for giving parents the option to opt their children out of certain topic discussions. As reported in my findings, parents who make the choice to opt their children out of lessons of this nature are not doing their children any good, and is in fact unnecessary because they will be exposed to the topic regardless of opting out of a lesson around LGBTQ identity as it should be woven throughout the school climate and classroom instruction.
anyway. The option of opting out should not be given to parents by administrators because it is a part of the curriculum. Although there are complexities involved here, the idea of equity and acceptance is something that should be integrated in everything schools do, this topic should be no different. Administration must navigate these potential tensions between parents in a respectful and reasonable manner. Principals must work with parents who are unconvinced of the importance of discussions around this topic, and understand their where their reservations are coming from. This should be looked at from an equity and human rights perspective, and administration must communicate this to parents so that they can gain a greater understanding of it’s importance. Ultimately this topic is a part of the curriculum, and should be treated the same way as Math, Science and Language. It is a requirement for students to acquire knowledge in those subject areas, just as it is a requirement for them to learn about multiple identities and orientations and through that, be open and accepting of their fellow peers, different family structures and ways of being. There are the recommendations I have made for a variety of educational stakeholders based on my findings.

5.5 Areas for further research

I will now suggest areas for further research based on the findings from my study. Several questions and gaps within the knowledge have emerged as I reported my findings. The first area where I believe further research needs to be done is around the long term benefits or outcomes of student acceptance, comfort and safety as a result of inclusion of LGBTQ identity in the classroom, specifically at the elementary level. My findings present data for the short term outcomes on students which were perceived by teachers. Given the limitations of this study, no
students were to be interviewed, and as a result, the findings are based on teachers’ perceptions of student outcomes, not the students themselves. In acknowledging this, future research should be conducted on students’ perceived outcomes on their own acceptance, comfort and safety as a result of LGBTQ identity being included in the classroom. As reported in my findings, teachers found many sources of support in this area of work. However, further research should be conducted regarding external supports groups that are available for teachers to access to assist in their work in this area. The main sources of support that teachers reported were internal, being colleagues, administration and the school board. External support groups were briefly mentioned and I feel there is a gap here which needs to be filled. Although there are many supports out there that exist, it would be beneficial to investigate how teachers learn about these external educational supports and resources and how they use them to support their work around this topic. Another interesting finding from my study that deserves further research is regarding student initiative and innate acceptance around the topic. Teachers reported students having innate acceptance and taking a lot of initiative as far as work in this area goes. The question that arose for me and that I believe needs further investigation is, did this initiative and innate acceptance come to be as a result of the positive and safe climate already established within the school and school community? Another area requiring further research is around the challenges that teachers identified when exploring LGBTQ identity in their teachings, specifically with parental bias. Further research should be done to identify the reasons for parental bias and how much of an impact that has on their children’s attitudes toward LGBTQ inclusion. This will be helpful for teachers to understand where bias is coming from so that they can address it and
respond accordingly. These are some areas of further research that I would suggest based on my findings.

5.6 Concluding comments

To conclude, I will underscore the significance of my research findings and for whom they matter in the short and long term. Given the wide range of sexual orientations that exist, this research matters for both present and future generations. According to Statistic Canada, the number of same-sex couple families in 2011 was 64,575 and the number of same-sex married couples was 21,015 (Statistics Canada, 2012). These numbers demonstrate that students and their families have a plethora of sexual orientations, and thus should be reflected in the elementary classroom. All children should feel safe to express themselves, and should have the opportunity to see themselves, and their family structure in the curriculum and classroom. There is a huge problem with the prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools today (Toomey et al., 2012). The exclusion of LGBTQ identity and themes in the classroom is a problem because incidents of this nature deteriorate the confidence and well-being of LGBTQ youth (Solomon & Russell, 2004). Lack of self-esteem, rejection, peer abuse, homelessness, unsafe sexual behaviour and self-injury and suicide are just a few of the outcomes they may face as a result. This research matters because if children are given the correct strategies for discussing homosexuality and other gender role questions, it can prepare them to resist homophobic ignorance, to avoid unsafe practices and to engage in mutual respect (Rofes, 1995 as cited in Bickmore, 1999). The main question that guided this research was: how do a sample of elementary teachers create opportunities for learning focused on LGBTQ identity and anti-homophobia education in their formal curriculum?
The findings from my study revealed strategies that teachers and school staff can put into practice to build safe and inclusive classrooms and school communities for the students and families that they serve. These findings are significant for a number of educational stakeholders as discussed previously. Teachers, students, administration, school boards, Ministries of Education and parents are all potentially impacted by my findings and can improve the quality of life and well-being of the children that are the centre of the education system. My findings matter for the students and families who identify as LGBTQ as well as for the next generation of students whose actions will set the stage for social change. Through my findings I have learned about how teachers are accomplishing this work, what impact they perceive this having on their students, factors and resources that support their work and the challenges they face and how they respond to them. These valuable findings will inform my own practice as I embark on my teaching career and I hope that my findings will assist other beginning teachers who are committed to equity and social justice find ways to enact their commitment to challenging heteronormativity in schools and society.


accountid=14771


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying how a sample of elementary teachers create opportunities for challenging heteronormativity and learning about LGBTQ identity through their formal curriculum for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Stephanie De Luca
Phone number: (647) 242-3227
Email: stephanieanne.deluca@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
Email: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Stephanie De Luca and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Intro
Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. The research question again is: how do a sample of elementary teachers create opportunities for challenging heteronormativity and learning about LGBTQ identity through their formal curriculum and what impact do they perceive this having on their students? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information
1. What is your name?
2. What grade are you teaching this year?
3. What grade levels have you taught?
4. How long have you been teaching for?
5. How many schools have you taught at?
6. How long have you been at the present school?
7. How did you develop this commitment and interest to including LGBTQ identity in your classroom as well as challenging heteronormativity?
8. What type of preservice training did you receive on this topic, if any?

Section 2: Beliefs
8. At what grade level do you feel is appropriate to begin engaging students in discussion around LGBTQ identity and inclusion in the classroom?
9. How would you define heteronormativity?
10. How do you respond to and challenge heteronormativity in your classroom?
11. In what ways do you think your students benefit from including LGBTQ identity in your teachings?
12. What do you hope to achieve by challenging heteronormativity and including LGBTQ identity in your teachings?
13. Do you feel that preservice training around the topic of LGBTQ identity and related themes should be mandatory for teachers? Why or why not?

Section 3: Practice
14. Can you tell me about a lesson you taught in which directly relates to LGBTQ identity/inclusion?
15. How do you perceive the impact this instruction has on your students?
16. Could you describe a change in attitude and/or acceptance that you saw from one of your students prior to a lesson and then after?
17. What factors would you say impact your comfort level teaching about LGBTQ identity and challenging heteronormativity in your classroom?
18. How does student’s reaction to your teaching impact your own comfort level in discussing this topic?
19. What range of factors support and hinder your work in this area?
20. What instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches do you find most effective in exploring LGBTQ identity and related topics?
21. What challenges have you encountered with your teachings of this topic and how do you respond to them?

Section 4: Support/Challenges/Next Steps
22. Could you describe the types of feedback you have received regarding your approach to teaching LGBTQ identity in your classroom, from either students, parents or administration?
23. Have you ever received any backlash from either parents or other staff with regards to your approaches and commitment to this topic? If so, how did you respond to this challenge?
24. In what ways are you supported by your colleagues and administration with respect to including LGBTQ identity and related topics in your teachings?
25. What are your future goals for teaching about LGBTQ inclusion in your classroom and how will you go about achieving them?
26. What resources would you recommend for new teachers who are interested in exploring this topic with their students?
27. Do you have any advice for new teachers who are committed to bringing these topics into the classroom?
28. Is there anything else you would like to mention that you feel is valuable which you haven’t already?