The Outliers: Educators Who Address LGBTQ Issues and Support LGBTQ Students

By:

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Abstract

Despite the existing educational policy and human rights legislation in Ontario, there continue to be many educators who fear addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms and/or supporting their transgender students. The proposed paper draws from a qualitative study that sought to identify common characteristics and strategies among educators who challenge widespread fears to support their LGBTQ students. Using data collected from semi-structured interviews with three educators teaching in Greater Toronto Area school boards, the paper will illuminate three key themes: knowledge of policy and curriculum, a positive relationship with administration, and experience either interacting or being a member of a minority group. The implications for pre-service teacher, connecting with parents in the community, and developing resources from within the School Board will be shared as well as recommendations for future studies.

Key Words: LGBTQ, Transgender Students, Trans, Students, Education, Openly, Support LGBTQ, Address LGBTQ.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

In 2014 the Ontario amended the Province’s Human Rights Act by passing the *Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression* which was the first policy to segregate transgender persons from the broad umbrella LGBT policies and identify their specific issues. Transgender or trans is a general term that refers to people with diverse gender expressions and identities that are different from society’s gender norms (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014). The *Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression* (2014) defines gender expression as how a person publicly presents themselves in regards to gender; this can be seen in the way a person behaves, looks and how they prefer to be called, such as their chosen name or pronouns. The Policy also defines gender identity as a person’s sense of being along the gender spectrum.

Transgender people are identified as “…one of the most disadvantaged groups in society” (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014). Trans youth across Canada on average rate their feeling of connection to their school at 4.9 on a scale from one to ten; this is accumulation of the low ratings from Atlantic Provinces, rating 3.7, and higher ratings from Quebec and British Columbia, rating 6.0 and 5.6 respectively. Transgender youth that feel connected to their school were twice as likely to have good mental health than transgender youth that felt low levels of connectedness to their schools (Being safe, being me, 2015). As many trans youth may not have support from their families the school needs to become a safer and more welcoming environment even before they notify school staff
of their gender identity and expression (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014; Being safe, being me, 2015).

All teachers have a role to play in ensuring that their schools are safe and welcoming for LGBT youth. (Margaret & Anne, 2008). Teachers can protect students who are experiencing anti-LGBT harassment and discrimination by directly intervening and contribute to developing a LGBT-positive climate in schools (Margaret & Anne, 2008). Ontario has made amendments to the Education Act and other Ministry of Education documents to help address the issues on bullying and school safety, but nearly half of transgender youth have reported that school staff members did not intervene when anti-LGBT comments were being made (Julia & Christine, 2012; Catherine & Tracy, 2014). Trans students experience higher rates of bullying, harassment and negative mental health other students (Laura, Alex & M. H., 2014); approximately 70% of transgender youth ages 14-18 years old, reported sexual harassment, 36% of these youth have been physical harassed or been threatened with bodily harm, and approximately half of transgender youth ages 19 – 25 years of age, have experienced cyberbullying (Being safe, being me, 2015). Many of these issues can be resolved by having a safe and welcoming school environment towards transgender youth before they publicly identify themselves (Laura, Alex & M. H., 2014; Catherine & Tracy, 2014).

By interviewing a small sample of secondary school teachers, whom are addressing LGBTQ issues and supporting transgender students, in my research I seek to explore why they help transgender students, and what resources and strategies have they developed. I intend to also look into: the specific barriers these teachers had to overcome and how they did so; how teachers address transgender issues into their classroom; and if these teachers are also educating their colleagues.
1.2 Reflexive Positioning Statement

During my time in high school I had a close friend who recently discovered that they identified as transgender and wanted to start expressing themselves as such. Unfortunately they did not have the support of their family and were often frustrated at their inability to be accepted or fit in the gender binary norm. One teacher was a strong supporter of my friend and created a gender-neutral washroom from a single stall facility that was originally for students with accessibility issues. Unfortunately there was another teacher who would rip the sign down and replace them with ones that said “Staff Washroom”. My friend attempted to bring this issue to the administration, but they said they could do nothing without any proof and refused to look at the school security footage. So my friend had to endure a “war” over their right to use a washroom of their choosing for their last year of high school.

It was not until much later when I was retelling this story in one of my teacher education classes, that my instructor brought to my attention that my friend had had their basic human rights violated. This struck very strongly with me, as I have seen the struggles my friend and others have gone through with the issues around transphobic harassment and discrimination. My hope is that with my research I will contribute to the existing gaps between policy and practice of teachers who wish to address transgender issues but who are afraid of other factors like parents, student reactions, losing their job, and lack of administrative support.

1.3 Preview of the Whole

To respond to the research questions I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview 3-4 teachers about their experiences with transphobia at the school and their own bias. In chapter 2 I review the literature in the areas of transphobia in schools and inclusive school environments. Next, in chapter 3 I elaborate on the research design,
which will include a transphobia bias multiple choice tests. In chapter 4 I report my research findings with respect to the existing literature. Lastly, in chapter 5 I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas of transgender students, gender nonconforming students, school environment or climate, and teacher roles. More specifically I review themes related to educators’ intervention for transphobic bullying and harassment. I start by reviewing the literature in the area of vocabulary with regards to the concepts of gender. Next, I review research on transgender students’ experiences at school in order to show the importance of this research. From there, I review the literature about suggested strategies and ideas to help create a more inclusive environment for transgender students. Finally, I address the research on why teachers choose not to intervene.

2.1.0 Terminology

In order to better understand the issues that transgender youth encounter, it is crucial for students, families, educators, and communities to obtain a clear familiarity with the vocabulary related to this issue. Transgender as defined by the Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression (2014) is “...an umbrella term referring to people with diverse gender identities and expressions that differ from stereotypical gender norms.” This means that transgender is a general term that encompasses many other terms used to identify gender nonconforming people, which refers to people who do not follow the male-female binary and view gender as a spectrum. The gender spectrum is a way to define gender along different forms than that of the binary system, such as gender expression, gender identity and one's personal sex. This allows people to experience gender in a different way and develop a new sense of self (Wool).
Gender identity is an individual’s internal experience of their gender (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014). It is stressed that this term is not related to someone’s sexual orientation, only their “…sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum” (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014). Gender expression is what an individual publicly shows, such as their dress, make-up, hair, voice and body language, to express their gender (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014; Rands, 2009). Some gender nonconforming people change their birth names to suit their new gender identity and help express their gender publicly (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014).

When people look at someone they take cues, such as physical appearance, power dynamic, and sexual orientation, to decide unconsciously to which gender (normally in the gender binary system) someone belongs; this is called gender attribution (Rands, 2009). This term differs from gender assignment, which is “…society’s official designation of some one’s gender” (Rands, 2009). Gender assignment differs based on culture, but in the United States a doctor assigns a gender at birth based on the genitalia of the infant (Rands, 2009). From the gender assignment society generally expects an individual to follow their gender roles. Gender roles are the expectations and beliefs that society has about proper activities and behaviours that a person from a certain gender should follow (Rands, 2009). “They consist of stereotypical behavior prescribed by assigned or apparent gender” (Rands, 2009) such as dress, games, or mannerisms. Understanding these terms can provide a better informed discussion of the experiences of transgender youth.
2.2.0 Transgender Students’ Experiences of the Education System

Understanding the transgender student’s experience as they go through the education system can help pinpoint problems and issues that they face. By understanding these problems, we can help to make students feel accepted, safe and secure while they attend school. This is important to my research to provide context and reasoning why it is important because all children, even transgender students, perform better when they feel safe and secure.

2.2.1 Harassment, discrimination, and bullying. Research has shown that transgender students experience higher rates of harassment from peers and faculty (Bowers & Lopez, 2012; Catherine & Tracy, 2014; EGALE, 2011; Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014). In comparison of trans youth to their LGB peers, they often have more negative experiences with regards to their gender identity than those having nonconforming sexual orientations (Catherine & Tracy, 2014). Many transgender students feel unsafe at school and face a disproportionate level of bullying and harassment (Rands, 2014), which “…can be particularly severe for gender nonconforming students” (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014).

McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell’s (2010) study on the school climate for transgender youth showed that focus group participants reported that school faculty contributed to the transphobic harassment they experienced. Gender-based harassment can include refusing to refer to another person by their chosen name and pronouns, conduct or comments based on the perception a person is not following gender-role stereotypes, or intrusive questions, insults or comments about a person’s body, gender-related medical procedures, mannerisms, physical characteristics, or other forms of gender expression (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014).
Transgender people are reported as “...one of the most disadvantaged groups in society.” (Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014). Our transgender youth are more at risk of mental health disorders like anxiety, depression and self-harming behaviors (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010). Transgender youth experience psychological and physical distress due to harassment, which causes them to feel unsafe (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010).

Some students who differ from stereotypical gender norms are assumed to be homosexual by their peers and are often targeted (Rans, 2014). Due to assumption of sexuality based on gender attribution, many transgender youth are subject to harassment and bullying due to homophobia and cultural ideas of gender conformity (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010). Transgender youth reported that they were more often harassed based on both sexual orientation and gender expression than either factor individually (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010).

Transgender students are faced with harassment, bullying and discrimination, and often receive a lack of support from the school administration and faculty. With a lack of support, transgender students develop their own strategies for coping: avoiding school due to fear, dropping out, or transferring to schools with a more accepting LGBTQ culture (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010). Despite experiencing harassment from teachers, transgender youth want for the school faculty to intervene and interrupt harassment when it occurs. Unfortunately, this support is rare from teachers (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010). In order for any student to succeed in school they need to feel safe, which the research shows the education system is failing to provide transgender students.
2.2.2 Dysphoria and other issues transgender youth face. Gender dysphoria is defined by the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5) as a difference between an individual’s gender attribution or assignment, to how they wish to experience or express their gender. This can manifest in a variety of ways, such as wanting to get rid of their sex characteristics or be treated as a different gender. Research states that a person’s gender identity is developed in their brain and is assumed to be determined before birth (Bowers & Lopez, 2012). As early as three years of age, children can start to identify with other genders than the one that they were assigned; this is shown by their preferences and behaviours to another gender (Bowers & Lopez, 2012; Nicholson & McGuinness, 2014). By the age of 10 children with gender dysphoria might have experienced peer-directed violence, depression, school departure, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and drug use that have put their mental health at risk (Nicholson & McGuinness, 2014). When youth start to explore their gender identity near the start of puberty it will lead the child to see a contradiction between their gender identity and physical body (Bowers & Lopez, 2012). This contradiction can result in a greater urgency to transition, self-neglect, self-destructive behaviours, a strong dislike for their physical sex characteristics, and depression in some transgender youth (Bowers & Lopez, 2012; Cohen-Kettenis & Klink, 2015).

Despite being included in LGBTQ community, transgender people face different issues than their non-heterosexual peers. These experiences are unique and need to be addressed and understood by faculty. Some issues that transgender youth face are gender dysphoria, being forced into gender binary systems and lack of resources. Unfortunately, the knowledge about treatment for adolescence with gender dysphoria is not widely known (Cohen-Kettenis & Klink, 2015) which can limit their access to treatment and support. By educating teachers and
counselors the education system could help students by providing resources for seeking treatment and dealing with specific transgender youth experiences.

When the discussion of transgender students and public facilities occurs, such as restrooms, many people do not fully understand the hardship that transgender youth are put through when forced into a gender binary system. Public restrooms can be a source of discomfort and anxiety, and they can impact cognitive and social-emotional growth for transgender youth due to the contradiction between a student’s gender identity and being forced into a group due to their anatomy (Bowers & Lopez, 2012; Luecke, 2011). The emotional discomfort this causes can make it difficult or impossible for them to focus on learning, which will affect their success in our education system. By educating faculty and administration and encouraging understanding of transgender issues instead of dismissing them, it is possible to create a more successful environment for this group of students.

2.2.3 Lack of visibility of our transgender youth. Transgender students’ experiences of the education system are marked by high rates of violence and harassment and a lack of visibility (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014). They receive a lack of access to information about their specific feelings and experiences because resources aimed at LGBTQ youth primarily focus on issues of sexual orientation (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010; Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014). Intersectionality research shows that people of colour experience higher rates of transphobic and gender-role related harassment than white transgender people due to racialized tropes that force them to navigate a very strict gender binary system (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014).

Unfortunately, the lack of visibility of transgender youth is echoed in academic research. Many studies lump transgender youth with their LGB peers even though they face different
issues and problems (Rands, 2009; Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014). With less than 10% of transgender participants in research involving LGBTQ identified participants and the data collected in these studies is often not disaggregated, most research conclusions and results of specific transgender issues and experiences cannot be determined (Rands, 2009; Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014). This scarcity of research leads to a lack of understanding and acceptance across society.

2.3.0 How to Support Our Transgender Students

With a scarcity of research on transgender youth and their unique experiences, many educators and administration are finding it hard to locate resources. This is especially true during the time a student is transitioning to live their gender identity full time (Luecke, 2011). During a transition a student will be showing changes in their gender expression and many people will not know how to respond to this. It is crucial that students who are transitioning have the support of the entire school faculty and staff to provide a safe and welcoming environment needed for learning; a key component of this support is educating them on policy and language, which in turn will provide them with the skills and tools to respect fully address the student, consistently create and maintain positive spaces, appropriately address transphobic comments, harassment, and/or bullying.

2.3.1.0 Policy and the Law

2.3.1.1 Canadian and Ontario law. In 2014, the Canadian government passed the Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression which was the first policy to segregate transgender persons from the broad umbrella LGBT policies and identify their specific issues and needs. Even before this policy came into practice, Ontario had already placed laws protecting gender identity and gender expression from discrimination back in 2012
Ontario Human Rights Committee [OHRC]) along with Manitoba, Nova Scotia and the Northwest territories which provide explicit protection for gender identity and gender expression (Bowers & Lopez, 2012).

2.3.1.2 Policy to support transgender youth in schools. A strategy that is strongly supported by multiple works of research is to protect transgender students with anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies (Wernick & Inglehart, 2014; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Transgender students felt more at ease when these policies were in place and they are suggested to be a key component in providing a positive LGBTQ climate (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). When students felt protected they were able to focus on learning and being part of the school community.

2.3.1.3 Protecting out transgender students against other groups. Despite having policies in place, transgender students may still face harassment and discrimination due to beliefs of others. The issues of harassment and policy “places school boards in a position of balancing transgender students’ rights to freedom from discrimination and freedom of expression with the rights of other students and parents to freedom of religion and expression, among others” (Bower & Lopez, 2012). The TDSB guidelines for the accommodation of transgender and gender non-conforming students and staff (2013) states that many factors affect a school board’s decision to accommodate, such as cost to the board, safety and health risks to the requester of the accommodation and others and the need for the board to follow the Education act and policies. Such a case may involve a request for a transgender student to use the public restroom denied for their own protection against bullying and potential sexual assault. It is important to recognize that each nonconforming and transgender student is unique, just as all students are, and as such accommodations request should be done on a case by case basis.
There has been plenty of research to support why policies to protect transgender students should be implemented. Despite this fact there is a scarcity of research measuring the effectiveness of these policies in regards to transgender students and faculty feeling protected, lowering transphobic harassment and bullying, and school wide awareness of these policies.

2.3.2.0 Strategies and training of faculty and staff.

2.3.2.1 Educating faculty and staff.

One issue that transgender people face are being forced into the gender binary due to society’s views of gender. It is important to note that while “people have a right to their own opinions; people cannot harass others in school” (Luecke, 2011). This expectation is not only pertinent to students, but also to staff. In their research on overcoming homophobia, Case and Colton (2014) have shown that people who had contact with non-heterosexual people are less likely to have anti-gay prejudice and attitudes. They suggest that bringing people in contact with transgender people may also reduce anti-trans prejudice and attitudes, similar to their findings on homophobia.

A lack of vocabulary is also cited as another issue that stops people from addressing the non-gender-binary system. For future educators to approach gender in complex ways, such as challenging gender conformity, they must first develop the vocabulary of gender (Rands, 2009). From there they can discuss the many issues of gender with their students and also be better educated on becoming allies of transgender people.

2.3.2.2 Effects teachers and faculty can have for transgender students.

Teachers have important roles to play when creating a safe environment for their students, including their transgender students (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). This could be in the form of providing support to their needs, becoming an ally or intervening to stop transphobic behaviour.
or comments. Unfortunately many teachers are not addressing the problem of homophobia and transphobia in their schools: 75% of LGBTQ students reported that administration and teachers did nothing when they reported the harassment and bullying (Kitchen & Bellini, 2011). It is strongly believed that teachers should be educated on interventions, creating safer climates for their transgender students and how to become an ally to transgender youth (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010).

There is sadly a scarcity of research in the effects of training educators and faculty in intervention, and becoming allies. Research addressing how teachers and faculty to overcome their conflicting beliefs with educational training would be beneficial in creating more efficient training and possibly applied to schools with strong anti-transgender climates. Researching new ways educators are altering their school climates to be more transgender-positive could also increase the amount of resources available for educators on the issue of supporting their transgender students.

2.4.0 Why Teachers Choose to Not Intervene

Despite the change in laws and school board policies, teachers still refuse to stop homophobic or transphobic remarks (Catherine & Tracy, 2014). This is surprising due to the fact that sexual orientation has been protected longer than gender expression and gender identity. Which begs the question: why are educators not intervening?

2.4.1 Teacher harassment. Transgender youth reported that school faculty contributed to the harassment they experienced due to being transgender. 25% of Canadian teachers do not plan on calling their students by their chosen name or pronoun that reflect their gender identity (SARAVCY trans youth health report, 2015) and 22.5% of trans students across Canada reported that “they heard teachers using language [such as negative gender-related or transphobic
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comments] daily or weekly” (Every Class in Every School: Egale final report on the first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools, 2011). Some teachers harass students by not calling them by their preferred pronouns and name, “coaching” students into conforming to their assigned gender, believing things such as “transgender youth bring the harassment on themselves”, clothing checks, mocking or name calling at students and sexual comments or gestures (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010).

When educators remain blind or silent when harassment occurs they send a message to transgender youth and other students that the harassment is acceptable and will not be reduced (McGuire, Anderson, toomey & Russel, 2010; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). Eliminating harassment caused by educators and faculty should be one of the school system’s highest priorities.

2.4.2.0 Teachers’ fears when addressing LGBTQ issues.

2.4.2.1 Losing their jobs. Despite the support of policy and the law, many educators who want to address LGBT issues are afraid that they will lose their jobs if they do so in their classrooms; even though there have been no reports of such a case (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). According to André P. Grace (as cited in Schneider & Dimito, 2008) a noteworthy amount of administrators and educators are not accepting of the importance in addressing LGBTQ issues. This may justify the fear that some educators have and silence those that may otherwise want to address the LGBTQ issues in their schools (Schneider & Dimito, 2008).

2.4.2.2 Parents. Many educators that fear the repercussions of integrating LGBTQ issues into the curriculum are afraid that students and parents will be closed-minded towards these issues (Schneider & Dimito, 2008; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). It is true that parents and
students with transphobic views can potentially make life difficult for teachers, but by furthering our understanding about “the range of risks that educators might anticipate, it would be possible to develop buffers and supports to ameliorate the risks” (Schneider & Dimito, 2008).

2.4.2.3 Not feeling safe. Schneider and Dimito found that the “most common [anti-LGBT] behaviors were students verbally harassing other students and bullying other students, anti-LGBT graffiti on school property, and students harassing teachers” (2008). It is known that teachers are responsible for creating and maintaining safe and welcoming schools for their LGBTQ students, but this responsibility is put in jeopardy when they are not feeling sufficiently safe. Despite these fears there are the rare teachers that are teaching LGBTQ issues and creating safe trans-positive spaces for their students. There is a scarcity of research on these powerful individuals and how they overcome these fears: if researched it could be possible to help develop these qualities in other educators that have a willingness to be allies to LGBTQ students.

2.4.2.4 Lack of understanding. Many teachers worry about addressing LGBTQ issues due to a lack of knowledge and training (Kitchen & Bellini, 2011; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). This is easily remedied with professional development days, incorporating LGBTQ issues into teacher education and having resources available. Despite having knowledge and training, these educators will continue to face the fears discussed above if nothing is done. Research needs to happen to help discover why teachers intervene, the traits that empower them to do so and how they have overcome the several fears that have stopped so many potential allies.

2.5 Conclusion

Transgender youth are still being harassed and bullied despite policies and the laws that are in place to protect them. Educators are known to be one of the key contributing factors in creating safe spaces at school, but either do not want to help transgender youth or are too afraid
to intervene or attempt to change the school climate. Teachers that do wish to help have a fear of parents, of losing their jobs, of a lack of knowledge and training or are not feeling safe themselves at schools.

There is a scarcity of research about the traits that allow some teachers to overcome the fears that hold back other educators who also want to address LGBTQ issues. Due to the lack of research in general about transgender youth, there is also a shortage of available strategies and resources for educators. With the findings of my research, I hope to investigate the traits possessed by teachers who address transgender issues and actively support their gender nonconforming students, and the strategies they have for supporting the unique needs of their transgender students. These findings can be used to inform and inspire other educators who wish to support and address these issues.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will describe my research approach and the procedures. Next, there is a description of how data is collected. Third will be a description of requirements needed by participants. Then there will be a reasoning for data analysis and the method used to examine the data. Next will be a review of procedures that consider all ethical issues. Lastly, I will address the limitations and strengths of my chosen research methods and explain why it is best suited for this study.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

For this study, I used a qualitative semi-structured interview approach. Due to the lack of quantitative and qualitative research on the topic of how teachers overcome fears of addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms or supporting transgender students, I feel this approach is best to begin exploring ideas and perspectives of the few educators that pursue this work and develop my own hypothesis in characteristics that they all share, which could later be tested by a quantitative study (Carr, 1994). A semi-structured interview is a scheduled interview between a researcher and participant with the conversation being organized around predetermined questions by the researcher and other questions that may emerge from the conversation between researcher and participant (DiCiocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews will allow me to develop a deeper valid understanding of participants and allow the research to have flexibility based on content the participants present during the interviews (Carr, 1994). Due to the limitations of the ethics board I was given by the University of Toronto I am limited in my sample size to three participants with no observations of the classrooms. Participants of this study are given copies of the transcriptions after the interview is completed allowing for
member-checking to make sure their ideas are understood (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

For my data collection, I used semi-structured interviews with three participants which will be audio recorded. Semi-structured interviews use predetermined open-ended questions and other questions that will emerge from the dialogue between the participant and I. Through this method, I will be able to explore deeply into participants’ personal and social matters (DiCiocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

3.3 Participants

3.3.1 Sampling criteria.

Below is a list of criteria used to select my participants:

- Are teachers that have either worked by supporting transgender students or addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms openly.

It is important to my research that these teachers openly address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms or help any of their transgender students. This demonstrates to me that despite or regardless of fears they are doing this work when others will not.

3.3.2 Recruitment procedures.

During my recruitment process, I used the following three procedures:

- Through word of mouth I recruited colleges of my professors that are known to fit my sampling criteria.
- From my transgender friends, I was able to be directed to a teacher they felt helped support them during high school.
Family friends who I know do this work and are teachers

3.3.3. Participant biographies.

3.3.3.1 Participant one. Mary is a kindergarten teacher and has been teaching for 27 years in the Peel Board. She has worked with a variety of grade levels and at 4 different elementary schools. Mary addressed LGBTQ issues in her kindergarten class through the use of story books that use metaphors to address these themes and issues. She has not had a student that identified as transgender during her time teaching, but she has a son who identifies as transgender. Said son is a good friend of mine and introduced me to Mary for the purpose of this research study.

3.3.3.2 Participant two. Travis teaches in the Toronto District School Board. He has 6 years of experience teaching, with 6 different teachables, which are Family Studies, English, Dance, History, Guidance and Special Education. Travis is currently teaching at a specialised school in the TDSB. This school is a treatment program for youth that are experiencing challenges with their gender identity or sexual status. While teaching, Travis incorporates icons, tects and media content that focus on LGBTQ community and people. He is involved with the Gay Straight Alliance Committee at OSSTF and has offered professional development for teachers to learn about LGBTQ vocabulary, explore LGBTQ issues, and how to support students. My thesis advisor, who had worked to run a professional development workshop with Travis, introduced us.

3.3.3.3 Participant three. Bill has taught in the Peel Board for 24 years and has recently retired. His teachables are English and Music. His previous school had a specialist high skills major program for Music Vocals and Instrumental, which Bill taught a few classes for in the
program. Bill also managed and directed both school choirs. One of my friends who is transgender identified Bill as a large support during their time in the choir.

3.4 Data Analysis

For the analysis of my data collected from semi-structured interviews, I will be using thematic analysis. Thematic Analysis is the process of searching data for patterns and developing explanations for those patterns (Saldana, CODING). For this study, I will be using a method of coding and analytic memos. Coding is the process of finding patterns in the data and connecting them to larger themes. During the coding process, I will make notes to myself that will become analytic memos, which I will also use to develop overarching themes. I will go through the process of coding approximately three times for each interview and will gather a total of three overarching themes.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Each participant was given a consent letter to sign. A blank version of the letter can be found in the Appendix section. As the letter states participants are given pseudonyms and other types of content that could identify them would be taken out in order to maintain their anonymity. This would apply to written work, oral presentations or other publications in reference to participants. Any identification of the school or students are excluded from this paper.

By participating in this study, participants are at low risk due to the nature of the data collection. Participants are asked to talk about their work and actions that they practice daily during the interview process. Participants are also given the right to refrain from answering any question and are able to withdraw from the study at any time, even after providing consent.
Data will be stored on my password protected computer for up to 5 years. Myself and professors are the only individuals who will have access to the data.

**3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths**

With any study comes limitations and strengths of the methodology chosen. For this study an ethical protocol was pre-approved by the Masters of Teaching program which limited the sample size to three participants and allowing only one interview with each. Due to these limitations on sample size the findings of this research study are not generalizable (Carr, 1994). Despite this, the qualitative semi-structured interview process is the ideal method for this study.

Based on previous quantitative research (citations from chap 2 lit review), participants in my study are outliers as they openly address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms or help their transgender students. Qualitative semi-structured interviews are ideal for investigating outliers of quantitative research as they allow for participants to elaborate on their stories and direct attention to parts that they feel are most important (Carr, 1994; DiCiocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

**3.7 Conclusion**

This study will find common characteristics shared among three teachers who openly address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms or help support their transgender students by conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews. These methods are ideal as they are considered outliers when compared to previous quantitative studies on teachers providing support to their LGBTQ students or wishing to address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms. Through a thematic analysis common characteristics or themes will be found and analyzed further in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of my study is to discover common characteristics in teachers who address transgender issues and support transgender students, despite the common fears of parents, losing their jobs and lack of resources. I obtained my qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with three teachers in Peel or Toronto District School Board. I then conducted a thematic analysis that investigated various fears educators have with addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms.

Mary is an elementary school teacher in the Peel Board and has been teaching for 27 years. She has worked at 4 different schools with varying grades. Currently she teaches a kindergarten class. She works with addressing LGBTQ issues by introducing her students to books that address these themes metaphorically. She has not had any transgender students, but is the mother to her transgender son. I was introduced to Mary by her son, who is a close friend of mine.

Travis is a secondary school teacher in the Toronto District School board and has been teaching for 6 years. He has 6 different teachables, which are English, Family studies, history, dance, special education and guidance. He currently is working at a specialized school in the TDSB that is a treatment program for youth who have issues with regards to their gender identity or sexual status. When Travis teaches he presents icons, texts and media content that focus on LGBT. He is the chair of the Gay Straight Alliance Committee at OSSTF and has offered professional development for other teachers to help explore LGBTQ issues, supporting students and introducing people to the vocabulary. I was introduced to Travis through my thesis advisor who had worked with him running professional development programs.
Bill is a retired secondary teacher from the Peel board and has taught for 24 years. His teachables are Music and English. The last school he taught at had a specialist high skills major program for Music vocals and instrumental. Bill taught a few music classes in the specialist high skills major program and was in charge of the school choirs. I was introduced to Bill as one of my friends who was transitioning during high school stated that Bill was a big support to them during their time there.

The findings of this research will be organized into three sections that relate to the research questions in exploring the over-all research topic. The first section relates to the question: why are these teachers not afraid of parents’ reactions to what they are teaching or openly supporting? This section is broken down into 3 subsections that explore educators’ sense of job security, knowledge on legal and curriculum policies related to addressing transgender issues in the classroom, and lastly how educators view the teacher-parent relationship. The second section relates to the question: do educators who support or address transgender issues in the classroom share common views or experiences? This section is broken down into three subsections that explore educators’ opinion about diversity, mental health of their students and account personal experiences that influences their opinion about diversity with regards to transgender issues and students. Lastly, the third section explores the sub-question: do these educators receive support from colleagues or other sources? This section will look at three places educators from which they could receive support; they are administration, colleagues and other resources.

By understanding how the few educators are overcoming the common fears we can better educate teachers to overcome these fears themselves and help support their students by
addressing “sensitive” topics such as transgender issues or openly supporting transgender students.

4.2 Parents and Guardians of Students

Many new teachers are concerned with the effects that parents can have on their ability to teach students the way they wish to about equity issues. If parents take issues with subject matter they are covering these participants were unshakable with their sense of job security, knowledge, and understanding.

4.2.1 Job security. There is a relationship between job security and sense of certainty in addressing sensitive issues in the classroom that may upset parents and guardians of students. The participants that I interviewed had a clear confidence that came from their experience. Travis stated that losing their job is “[…] not something I’m afraid of.” Their reasoning was that “[…] if I’m addressing student needs and addressing diversity there’s no way about it.” Bill also had similar feeling, that “[i]t wouldn’t have occurred to me [that I could lose my job by supporting students].” Mary was also unshakable in the idea of losing their job. They stated things very strongly.

Well you can't lose your job. There's zero chance you can lose your job. And the political area right now is good for moving forward. […] Politically you will be backed.

The curriculum backs you.

Teachers are also supported in their work that address diversity and students’ needs. The fact that politically we are moving towards equity that also encompasses transgender youth is shown in changes to the curriculum, and law (Bowers & Lopez, 2012; Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression, 2014). Despite this many
teachers are choosing to remain silent or “neutral” rather than discuss the controversial topics that are expected of them (Case & Colton Meier, 2014; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). Improving teachers’ sense of job security with education of policies and curriculum expectations may be one way to improve educators’ sense of security.

4.2.2 Knowledge of education policy and Ontario law. All participants had a strong understanding of curriculum expectations, the union and Ontario Law. This helped when having to defend their choices to others.

Mary was knowledgeable in the sex education curriculum despite not having to teach it at her grade level. When she experienced a backlash from parents when discussing different types of families to include a student who had two moms, she referred back to the new sexual education curriculum that does not allow parents to remove their students from discussions about LGBTQ issues. They used that knowledge to support their decision and defend themselves against the resistance of parents. Travis was very aware of legal contracts and educational programs supporting work to help LGBTQ youth.

[T]he safe school act legally mandates us in the province of Ontario. Bill 13 legally mandates us to do this work. So (pause) I can't see a scenario where if you did it you got in trouble I'm not saying your life is going to be made easy, but that legally you wouldn't lose a court case against any sorta institution that tried to put you down, in terms of doing this work.

Travis was aware that some parents or guardians may take issue with what they are teaching, and in retaliation would make their life difficult, though he personally had never experienced this form of retaliation.
Many teachers fear that parents will be closed minded to transgender issues and cause enough of an uproar that they would lose their job despite the fact that there is no known case of a teacher losing their job due to these circumstances (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). It seems that one way to counter this fear, based off of the data collected from my participants, is for teachers to have a strong understanding of curriculum expectations, Ontario law and Educational Policies to defend themselves against retaliation of parents.

4.2.3 Understanding parents and guardians. All participants were understanding or had experienced negative reactions from parents. They were understanding and accepting of parents having different viewpoints and their protectiveness towards their children when met with resistance. They understood that parents wanted what was best for their children and that working with them, either by educating parents on issues covered in class or having an open discussion about what bothers them when discussing sensitive issues, is often best.

These teachers did not have a fear of parents’ reactions, they understood that they might react negatively, but did not allow that to stop them addressing LGBTQ issues and supporting their transgender students. As Mary puts it, “[i]n theory, it's supposed to be partnership like between school, child and parent, it's supposed to be everyone working together for the good of the child.” These teachers want to provide support to parents. Travis is lucky that at their school they have outside help.

[T]wo queer identified social workers work with the student and their families to help ease them in terms of any questions the family may have with regards to their sexual status or their gender identity or just helping them along as well as helping the student along.
Mary also wishes to help parents learn to better advocate for their children by learning about these issues and what it means to advocate.

I think the one thing is the advocacy parents are told, you need to advocate for your child, you need to you know look at your child's rights, you need to be an actively involved parent. But no one teaches them how to do that. So, their way of doing it is to be angry and yell. Because they don't know another way to do it. And they think that "I'm advocating for my child. I'm looking out for my child by reporting the teacher to the superintendent." So, they don't have the knowledge to know how to deal with issues, I think. And that's on us. Cause we need to educate parents better. Which is another thing that needs to be, parents need to be more educated about all the issues, not just transgender or gay and lesbian issues.

With parents and teachers working together towards what is best for a child, the student will be able to fully grow into an identity that they are comfortable and safe in. These participants had either plenty of experience or special supports in place to deal with parents on these conflicting view points.

There is a lack of research on creating partnerships with parents and community about transgender issues despite the fact that many educators indicated parents as the major barrier for addressing LGBTQ issues (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). My data shows that either having supports or professional experience was contributed to confidence when dealing with upset parents. By having professional development on dealing with parental conflict about teaching practice would be beneficial to new teachers. With this special training, teachers who lack professional experience interacting with parents will feel more comfortable in defending their educational practices and overcome the common fear of parental retaliation.
4.3 Empathy Towards Others

Empathy is the ability to relate to what another person is experiencing by validating their emotions. By accepting diversity, having knowledge of mental health and from one’s own personal experience it is possible to be empathetic to others and try to validate what they are feeling.

4.3.1 Understanding through a racial lens. Many of the participants equated transphobia with racism. It was their way of using a widely-known minority issue and using the ideas to counter racism and translating it to the issue of transphobia. Bill stated that

I put it [transphobia] in the same category as racism. It's like for me I don't understand someone who would be racist. It's a concept I can't possibly identify with. I don't understand how a person could get to think that way. So, this is in the same category. If this is who they say they are then I have to figure out how to work with them.

Despite being an older teacher, Bill is able to equate an unfamiliar theme of transphobia to something he is familiar with, racism. He is able to see that the treatment of individuals for their race or gender is something that should not be tolerated, but sees that many people may have a conflicting viewpoint. Travis also compared racism to transphobia during the interview.

I wouldn't stop talking about race issues just because there are no kids of a particular racial status. I think the TDSB has a lens of cultural-norm in response to pedagogy and we have to adapt that to be our assuming of our community and our like Canadian culture. And certainly, people of minority no matter what, whether it's gender, ability, sexual status, anyone of those fits into the curriculum. And so yeah… No ignoring one
over others is problematic. But I think a good teacher should have access to bring in all those themes in and through their courses.

Diversity is an important part in education as Canada has a wide range of minority groups. By relating transphobia to a more commonly known issue, such as racism, it will create an easier bridge in understanding with others who disagree with supporting transgender issues that effect their students.

In contrast, research indicates that a comparison to initiatives in combating homophobia should be applied to initiatives about combatting transphobia (Case & Colton Meier, 2014). Based on the data, it may be more beneficial to make comparisons to racism to reach a wider audience.

4.3.2 Mental health and wellbeing. Many students who are transitioning or questioning have issues outside of the classroom that may affect their ability to perform academically. All participants were aware that students would bring their “outside world” into the classroom. Bill integrated this belief into his teaching philosophy. He made the point of stressing that you need to accept whatever students bring into the classroom, whether good or bad, and work with them to move forward. Mary attempted to relate the issues she brought into her classroom related to the students’ lives and development level. Travis had Child and Youth care workers help develop students’ resiliency by providing strategies for dealing with parents or peers and coping strategies. Despite not being fully aware of the issues that transgender youth face, such as gender dysphoria, these educators all encompass the acceptance of students with “the good, the bad and the ugly.”
One of the many fears that educators have is that they feel they do not know enough to discuss these issues or support their students (Kitchen & Bellini, 2011; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). The data shows that the knowledge is not needed to provide support so long as the teacher is accepting of the student and understands that they have lives outside of the classroom.

4.3.3 Personal experience. Many participants had an experience that influences how they interact with students. Each experience was unique but allowed them to relate to others who are from a minority group in some way. Travis identifies as a gay man, which allows him to easily relate to his students who are questioning their sexuality or identify as non-heterosexual. Mary had experience with a co-op student who identified as transgender and later her son also came out as a transgender person. Bill had an interesting situation when he attended a primarily white university in a town that was primary population was black. Unlike some of Bill’s peers, he saw nothing wrong with going to town to buy groceries. Upon reflecting on the experience, he stated

I was all of a sudden in the minority and it occurred to me this is what they feel like when they go to other places sometimes, I thought "hmm well I don't want to make people uncomfortable". So, I don't want to feel uncomfortable, so I should treat people that way. And I guess I've been that way ever since.

With these experiences, participants are able to empathize with other people, including their students. By having these situations where they are exposed to people who are from minority groups or are from a minority group themselves, they are able to humanize the issues and from that comes compassion (Brown, 2013).
4.4 Support

Relationships with administration, colleagues, and other resources are used by teachers to support their work in supporting their transgender students.

4.4.1 Administration. Two of the three teachers interviewed had a positive relationship with their administration based on mutual trust and respect. This founded them to feel supported and comfortable in addressing issues that may cause discomfort or faced with opposition. Bill was the only teacher to not seek support from his administration or mention them during the course of the interview. This may be due to the fact that Bill was close to retiring when he encountered his transgender students and felt confident enough to deal with the situation alone.

Mary had gone through a situation with a parent making a former complaint to the Principal about her teaching regarding a lesson on modern families which included families with two moms or two dads. Her principal later came to talk with her and said “Keep doing what you’re doing because it’s appropriate to your situation. You don’t need to be censored by this parent.” Mary noted that she felt a lot of support from that administration which she assumes is not the general experience of most teachers.

Travis had a strong relationship of trust with his principal, which was tested when he attempted to change the host school for the Section 23 school he would be running. It was a difficult process to find space, and when one became available at Host School A Travis wanted to change it due to the homophobic, biphobic and transphobic climate at the school. He provided evidence through the Gender based Violence Prevention department at the TDSB and a switch to Host School B was made.
Both Mary and Travis felt a strong sense of trust and reliability to their administrations. This seems to be an important factor for newer teachers, as administration is the first support available to them when dealing with retaliation from parents. Teachers want to address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms or openly support their students, but feel unsafe at their schools (Schneider & DImito, 2008), which is the responsibility of the administration. Fear of repercussion from administrators (Kitchen & Bellini, 2011) is another barrier to teachers wanting to pursue this work. To overcome this fear, providing training to educators on how to get further assistance from people above the principal in the board or union will help overcome this fear.

4.4.2 Colleagues. Having the support from other colleagues, aside from the administration, helps by having extra support with resources and not feel isolated. Travis strongly advocates for teachers to find colleagues to help with this work. He states

I think networking with your colleagues is a great thing. Having allies in your school. Space like guidance should always be supportive. If you don't get it there, admin team. If you don't get it there, usually English and Humanities. So building an ally network of people who can do this work with you and support you through doing this work. Collaborating with folks outside in your board or in whatever district you might be in.

Travis is also known to his fellow colleagues as a source of knowledge when they have issues with a student who is struggling with their sexual or gender identity. Many of his colleagues will come to him wanting to know how to better support their students. This is not always the case.

Mary has a different situation. She only has one supportive colleague, the librarian of the school. The rest of her colleagues think that she is “weird” for her use of a male washroom, despite there being no male faculty on that floor. She also is an advocate for the Day of Pink,
which is a specially dedicated day to combating homophobia and homophobic bullying. Many of her fellow teachers say that the day is about “anti-bullying” which takes away from the intended meaning of the day.

Bill did not receive any support from his colleagues as he felt he did not need it. He did not hear of any incidences where a student who was transitioning experienced harassment from other students or faculty, but admits that doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. He hypothesized that a reason a teacher may react poorly to a student transitioning or other LGBTQ issues is due to their own personal set of beliefs. Based on his philosophy of teaching, he feels that these educators need to put their own beliefs aside and work with the student on their learning.

Support from colleagues varied among participants. There is also a lack of research on the effects that support from colleagues can have on teachers wishing to support their transgender students or address LGBTQ issues in their classroom.

4.4.3 Resources. Many teachers feel that a lack of resources prevents them from addressing LGBTQ issues, but despite this the participants were able to find an alternative by developing their own resources. Bill found there to be a lack of information and exposure during his time as a teacher. He feels that today and in the past many transgender students lacked support from other educators.

Mary stated that it was very challenging for her to acquire resources for her age group, as many resources are intended for middle school or high school students. When working with a younger age group Mary finds working with metaphorical references, such as a red crayon wrapped in blue wrapping to address transgender issues with her students, best for her age group of students. This type of literature is difficult to find as it is rarely published and when it is, the
intended message such as transgender issues is metaphorical and not directly reference in the book’s description.

Travis experienced a different situation when it came to finding resources. He mentioned that there is no shortage of resources available to educators. Travis feels that the shortage is in people’s desire to locate these resources and do the work. Despite the supply of resources the TDSB is not taking full advantage of the resources available to them.

There's a lot of really really passionate and educated teachers who are doing this sort of work. I know three myself who have PhDs in gender studies who are teachers teaching. That is really a wealth of resource and knowledge that you have and they don't build capacity or an opportunity for them to be able to kinda show off this work and really expose this work to the rest of the school board.

Each participant experienced a difference of opinion on whether there was a shortage of resources available. It seems to be dependent on grade level and possibly board. The research states that educators feel there needs to be more resources and training available (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). A way to fix this would be for boards to use the resource pool available to them in the form of educators’ personal research or developed resources.

4.5 Conclusion.

This research study has found several common characteristics and experiences shared by educators who support their transgender students and address transgender issues in their classrooms without fear of the common myths shared by many. The first section analyzed why these teachers were not afraid of parents’ reactions about their teaching practices to address transgender issues. The second section analyzed common experiences or view points the
participants had about transphobia, minority groups and mental health of transgender students. Lastly, the third section explored if these educators received supports from administration, colleagues or other sources.

The largest concern for most teachers wanting to address LGBTQ issues in their class is the fear of parents’ negative reactions resulting in them losing their jobs. The three participants were very confident that they would not lose their job from addressing these issues in their classroom. Knowledge about education policy, curriculum and Ontario law were the tools two of the educators used in defending their educational practices to others. All participants were understanding that parents may have different view points, but should still be better educated on LGBTQ issues and how to advocate for their children properly regardless of personal values or beliefs.

All three participants shared several common view points and experiences that they felt inspire them to do this work. There were several comparisons of transphobia to racism, rather than the common comparison of homophobia. There was a collective understanding that students would bring their “outside” world into the classroom, and that it needed to be acknowledged. Lastly, all participants had experience with a member of a minority group.

Many educators feel that there is a lack of resources available in preparing them to address LGBTQ issues and support their transgender students. Mary and Travis shared a positive relationship with their administration, while Bill did not mention requiring the help of his administration. All participants had different experiences with colleagues that ranged from positive to negative. There was also a discrepancy on whether there were enough supports available to educators, which was dependent on grade level, the era spent teaching and a willingness to look for resources.
I will continue this overview of the key findings in the following chapter. There I will discuss the implications of this research for the educational community and my own personal practice. I will then make recommendations for how best prepare teachers who wish to pursue this work but are scared to do so. Lastly, I will state areas for future research.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This study discovered common characteristics among teachers who address LGBTQ issues and support transgender students, despite the common fears, such as losing ones’ job or reactions of parents and students. I interviewed three educators from the Greater Toronto Area who either were supportive of their transgender students or openly address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms. The findings of this study, as stated in the previous chapter with more detail, will direct specific concerns to address when supporting educators who wish to better support LGBTQ students but are too afraid to do so.

This section will be divided into four parts that will summarize my key findings, state implications, make recommendations and address areas for future research. First, I will summarize my key findings in relation to my three research questions and state their significance. Second, I will state the implications for the educational community and my professional identity and practice. Next, I will make recommendations for pre-service teachers to develop better community relations with parents and improve on available resources for teachers wishing to address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms. Lastly, I will state possible extensions of my work related to research and development of policy.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

In chapter four I discussed the three themes I found in my research. In the following section I will summarize these findings as how the relate to my research questions and state their significance.

The first question I explored by interviewing the three participants was: Why are these teachers not afraid of potentially negative reactions from parents’ regarding their support for
LGBTQ issues? These educators had a strong understanding of educational policy and Ontario law, felt secure in their jobs, and did not view parents or guardians as a threat when addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms. Many educators fear that by addressing LGBTQ issues, like my three participants have, they are at risk of losing their jobs. Clearly educators need more than just policy changes to feel comfortable doing this type of work.

The second theme explored common characteristics or experiences shared among the participants by addressing my second question: Do educators who support or address transgender issues in the classroom share common views or experiences? All participants had experienced being in a minority group while also comparing the issue of transphobia to racism, rather than homophobia. These educators would use the widely-known issue of racism and apply similar approaches to address transphobia, such as explicitly stating that they will not tolerate homophobic or racial language in their classroom. This has great importance as homophobia is still a large issue in schools today, but by comparing transphobia to a generally well understood issue, such as racism, it is possible to gain empathy from groups who are opposed to lessons on LGBTQ issues.

The last theme I explored was: do these educators receive support from colleagues or other sources? The support offered by administration, colleagues and other resources was mixed between participants due to the different grades they taught, areas the schools were located in and personal motivation to find resources. From these findings, it is clear that more work needs to be done in providing educators proper resources for addressing LGBTQ issues in the classroom, regardless of the age group that they teach.

5.1.1. Gender Roles in Music. During my time with Bill, he mentioned an issue with assigning students who are transitioning to certain vocal roles in choir. As the TDSB has
developed a policy for addressing the issue of washrooms, change room and other gender-segregated spaces or activities for their transgender students; there was no mention of vocal roles in choirs (TDSB Guidelines, 2011). In choirs, there are four main singing roles, soprano, alto, baritone and tenor. Typically, females sing soprano and alto, while males sing baritone or tenor; though before puberty some boys can sing alto or even soprano. Unfortunately, due to physical issues of transgender students, they may not be assigned to a role that fits with their gender identity. Bill mentioned that he assigned the students based on their vocal range, which could be altered with hormone therapy for some transgender students, but one student did not want to be assigned a female-singing role as they identified as male. This institutional imposition of gender creates an oppressive situation for the student and provided insight into a serious policy gap. For the future of other students who are transgender and wish to sing in the roles of their gender-identity, a policy must be created to reduce the risk of hurting transgender students.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 The educational community. The findings of this research, as summarized in the above section, lend itself well to three different groups: pre-service teachers, Policy Development, and School Board Resources. As many established educators still fear addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms and supporting transgender students, it would be advisable to improve pre-service teachers’ knowledge of educational policy and Ontario law so they will be less afraid and more informed.

My research also I discovered a possible gap in policy. A majority of research and policies attempt to diminish transphobia by comparing this discrimination to homophobia. My research discovered that educators do not compare transphobia to homophobia; they compare
transphobia to racism. With this comparison, it is possible to develop an intersectional lens through which to develop policy.

Lastly, my research discovered a gap in available educational resources for educators who wish to integrate or address LGBTQ issues into their classroom, particularly those in primary and junior grades. Many teachers struggle to find age-appropriate material for the younger grades, as many of the available educational resources’ target audiences are intermediate and senior grades. Despite the idea that LGBTQ issues are only of concern in the intermediate and senior grades, as LGBTQ rights develop our social culture is changing where younger children are encounter and curious about LGBTQ community. For example, one child may have two moms or two dads, which is different from most children’s experiences of family. The school board needs to provide adequate resources for the changing world to foster inclusivity at all ages.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. From conducting this research study I have learned why teachers are afraid to address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms, and some strategies in which they can overcome these fears. I feel that from this experience of research I would be open to serving as an equity representative or be a support person to my students and other educators who wish to learn more about LGBTQ issues. One day I do hope to create a professional development day dedicated to inspiring teachers educating them about policy, developing bonds with their administration or colleagues, and show them the strong impact that their efforts can have on students’ lives in the future.

My professional development would involve having teachers develop their personal reason for wanting to do this type of work. From knowing what motivates teachers, we can determine how they will defend their choices against administration, parents and students
through education on policy, Ontario law and current research. Teachers will also be asked to develop networks of resources or people they can rely on for support and collaboration. Support from others is a contributing factor in starting and continuing this type of work, and educators attending this professional development will be asked to connect with another attendee from a different school to help widen their support network. Lastly, I will go over case studies of students who feel their lives were changed because of a teacher who addressed LGBTQ issues in their lessons or supported them in order to motivate attendees.

From conducting my research and by extension learning about educational policy, I am informed on how these factors can support my choices to incorporate LGBTQ issues into my lessons. I also learned about the implications that qualitative research can have on the field of educational research. As my background is in physics, I never considered qualitative research of any importance. I now know that despite not being able to generalize my findings to the greater population, such as quantitative research, my qualitative research has discovered new areas of study for future research.

5.3 Recommendations

In this section I will refer back to my implication section by elaborating on a possible course of action. I will first look at developing a way to diminish the fear in pre-service teachers by suggesting a possible course for teachers’ colleges to include. Next, I will address the issue of creating acceptance and tolerance among parents and guardians in the community. Finally, I will address the lack of resources available to all age groups by having school boards tap into teacher-researchers within their schools.

Now that Teacher Education is a two-year program in Ontario, there is space to provide pre-service teachers an elective course on addressing LGBTQ issues in the classroom and
supporting LGBTQ students. It would be aimed towards pre-service teachers who wish to address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms and support their LGBTQ students. The course would cover the common fears educators have in doing this type of work, how to overcome these fears, specific examples for incorporating LGBTQ issues into a pre-service teachers’ teachable subject and provide several resources. This course will include resources, knowledge on policy and procedures for dealing with others who are openly negative towards this work and provide an opportunity for pre-service teachers to network with each other to develop allies and fellow supportive educators.

One of the largest fears of educators who address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms is parents’ and guardians’ potentially negative reactions. One solution could be a school-wide initiative for parents who are uncomfortable with certain topics being taught in the classroom. This could provide a chance for teachers to explain why these topics are important and underline the type of educational space the school provides. It could also give parents a chance to voice their concerns and have them addressed by the principal or teacher of their child. With an open communication with parents the number of complaints would diminish and increase the sense of security for the teachers.

Another potential workshop for parents with younger children would be educating them on how to advocate for their child should they feel they are at risk of discrimination. This workshop could show parents how to navigate the different systems of the school board, how to launch a complaint and what is or is not considered a valid complaint at a Canadian school. This workshop would help empower parents and also inform them on what is an appropriate complaint.
Teachers feel that there is a lack of age-appropriate resources for addressing LGBTQ issues in the classroom for grades in the primary and junior groups. For example, the TDSB does have a K-12 resource guide, but it requires updating to address more intersectional identities and transgendersed people. School boards have several educators who have masters’ level training and may have several educators trained as teacher-researchers capable of conducting pedagogical research in their classrooms and developing resources from their findings. It would be easy for boards to tap into their potential by providing a place for these teacher-researchers to showcase their work. By providing a chance for educators to present their work to other educators to provide information and resources for particular issues, the board would easily create a wide range of potential resources and encourage future work in other areas of interest.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

In this section I will address future directions for research and policy development within a school board. First, I will explain how my research findings could be used in future studies. Next, I will revisit an issue that arrived during my research and make specific recommendations relating to gender presentation in school choirs.

5.4.1. Future research. With the findings of my research I came across three different characteristics and experiences that may contribute to why these educators are not afraid to address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms or support their transgender students.

First, these educators had a strong knowledge of educational policy and Ontario Law. This idea could be further explored by interviewing educators who wish to do this work about their teaching practices and experiences at their schools. To add another layer to the study, teachers could receive professional development with one group receiving training to increase
knowledge of educational policy and Ontario law and the other group receiving training with no information regarding educational policy and Ontario law. After the training, participants could be interviewed again to hear their accounts of the success of each training program. The findings of this study could prove that knowledge of education policy and law about LGBTQ issues needs to be included in the education of teacher candidates to help develop inclusive and safe educational environments.

Lastly, due to participants equating transphobia to racism, which differs from the comparison in research on transphobia equating it to homophobia, a study of this phenomena would be of significance in policy development when addressing transphobia and acceptance of other minority groups. A quantitative study could be conducted to see which comparison to transphobia would help change participants’ view points. Participants could be given a multiple-choice test to measure their levels of homophobia, transphobia and racism. Then after a few sessions or readings with comparing transphobia to homophobia, transphobia to racism or not receiving any sessions or reading, participants would be asked to re-take the same multiple-choice test used to measure their levels of homophobia, transphobia and racism. A comparison in the measurements before and after could show which comparison would be best used in reaching a wider audience in accepting other minority groups.

5.5 Concluding Comments

My participants who openly addressed LGBTQ issues or supported their transgender students shared common characteristics: understanding policy and law to feel secure in their job; an experience as a member from a minority group that better helps expand their empathy and understanding of their students and varying supports from administration, colleagues and resources. Pre-service teachers can be offered an elective course for those interested in
supporting and addressing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms now that the Teacher Education program is 2 years. It can address the common fears on why educators do not do this work and ways to overcome these fears. Community Relations need to be created between the school and parents. Many parents of younger students need to learn how to properly navigate the school system and how/when it is appropriate to advocate for their child. This will help increase the feeling of safety for teachers who wish to address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms. Boards can access the wide range of research already conducted by its members by providing a chance for them to showcase their work and transform it into resources that other educators can use. This could provide a solution for the lack of resources available that are only available for certain age groups.
References


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Appendix

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date:

Dear ________________.

My Name is Jennifer Pham and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how individual educators overcome fears about teaching about transgender issues and supporting their transgender students. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have had a transgender student in their class and have helped support them in the classroom and school or teachers who create inclusive environments for their transgender students. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Cristina Guerrero. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Pham
EDUCATORS OPENLY ADDRESS AND SUPPORT LGBTQ ISSUES

Phone Number: XXX XXX XXXX

Email:

Course Instructor’s Name: Cristina Guerrero

Contact Info: cristina.guerrero@mail.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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Jennifer Pham and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching for?
2. What are your teachables? What have you taught for a majority of your career?
3. Where have you taught?
4. What was the first time you were in contact with people that identified as transgender (not necessarily in the classroom)?
5. This study is taking perspectives from educators that address transgender issues in their classroom or provide support to transgender students. Which of these have you done?
6. What is the climate for transgender and gender nonconforming students like at your school? Do they face harassment/bullying from students? Faculty?
7. What does transphobia look like in your school?
8. Do you feel there are a lack of educators that support their transgender students and issues?
9. Why do you feel there are only a few educators supporting their transgender students or addressing transphobic bullying and harassment?
10. Do you feel there are adequate amount of training opportunities and resources available to teachers about transgender issues and how to support transgender students? Do you feel teachers actively seek out resources and training?
11. Do you feel the union and administration adequately protect teachers who address transgender issues?
12. Are you afraid to lose your job by addressing transgender issues and supporting an anti-transphobic environment?
13. Many educators are afraid to address these issues and support their transgender students due to losing their job, student and parents’ reactions, a lack of knowledge and not feeling safe at their schools. Did you face any of these fears or others? How did you overcome these feelings to be the educator you are today?
14. Is there anything in particular that you feel allows you to address transphobia and support transgender students in ways your colleges do not?
15. Have you developed your own strategies and resources based on your experience?
16. How do you support your transgender students in your classroom when they are come “out”? How do you continue to support your transgender students when they are transitioning?
17. How do you address transphobia in you classroom? How do you address transphobia at your school?
18. Do you still challenge transphobia and gender conformity if there is no identified transgender students in your classroom? School?
19. At your school what is the greatest issue that hinders the support of transgender students?
20. Are there any resources you have privately purchase or make reference to that the school board does not provide?
21. Do you have any advice for teachers who want to address transgender issues and support their transgender students, but are too afraid to do so?
Appendix C: Sample E-mail

Hello ____________________.

I was referred to you by one of your previous students ___________, my name is Jennifer Pham and I am in the Masters of Teaching program at OISE. A component of this degree program involves conducting a qualitative research study. My research will focus on individual educators who support their transgender students and/or address transgender issues. ___________ has stated that you were a big support to him while he participated in choir while transitioning. I think your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you. Attached is a letter of consent that has more information regarding you participation.

Would you be interested in being interviewed for this study?

Thank you for your time,

Jennifer Pham