LGBTQ-Inclusive Classrooms: The Benefits and Challenges to a Sample of Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract

Research has showed that youth do not see themselves reflected in the texts they read, and teachers should create a classroom setting that promotes critical thinking and support for social change (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) concerns have not been fully addressed in the education system until recently. This is an issue that has required educators to acknowledge that the needs of these students are not only being met but they are affecting the way students learn in the classroom. This study focuses on strategies of integrating anti-homophobia education in schools, but also emphasizes the challenges that educators face in the education system. The questions guiding this study are what range of instructional strategies and approaches have teachers used to integrate the topic of LGBTQ in their teachings? What challenges do these teachers encounter in the education system? And lastly, what efforts and resources are being used to incorporate LGBTQ identities into kindergarten to grade eight classrooms? Through the use of qualitative methodologies, this research strives to raise awareness about this educational gap and provide insight that may help teachers to integrate LGBTQ studies into their classrooms.

Key Words: LGBTQ, Anti-homophobia education, Equity, LGBTQ-inclusive
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Homophobia is used to describe the stereotyping, intolerance and victimization of people who identify other than heterosexual (Goldstein, Collins & Halder, 2008). It can also be shown through "hostile feelings towards LGB people such as contempt, fear, or hatred. [It is] often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence, homophobia can target anyone who is, or is perceived as being, LGBTQ" (Taylor, Peter, Campbell, Meyer, Ristock & Short, 2015, p. 7). Gender normativity and anti-homophobia are efforts that aim and serve to counter these negative impacts to those that identify with LGBTQ. Throughout this paper I will use anti-homophobia education interchangeably with the term LGBTQ inclusive. Anti-homophobia education has only come into the light of research in recent years. Previous to this, topics surrounding LGBTQ rights were hidden as there was much controversy between whether or not these issues should be addressed in classrooms (Reece-Miller, 2010). Under the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), the Ontario Human Rights Code (1962) has expressed that discrimination and harassment based on gender identity or gender expression is against the law. It further states that everyone should have the freedom to express themselves and be treated with equal dignity and respect. New policies were put in place in August 2015, through the Ontario Curriculum of Health and Physical Education which specifically focused a section on educators acknowledging and respecting the students in their class based on their individual differences of sex or gender identity and encouraging inclusivity into their classrooms. Due to the change in the Healthy Living section in the education curriculum, there are both positive and negative outcomes when addressing Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) identities in K-8 contexts.
1.1 Research Problem

The prevalence around LGBTQ issues has been particularly concerning and silenced considering the current education system in Canada. While Canada has promoted itself as a multicultural country with an inclusive citizenship (Government of Canada, 2016), the school system has failed to address LGBTQ issues in a large number of classrooms (Kuvalanka, Goldberg & Oswald, 2013). On a similar note, Bill 13 on Safe and Accepting Schools is to prevent and address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour, such as offensive language or bullying among students in school, yet little is being done to combat or address these issues in a majority of schools (Accepting Schools Act, 2012). Canada promotes multiculturalism, and in fact according to Flores (2015), multiculturalism programs in schools have done well in implementing various themes and culture that represent a pluralistic society. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about LGBTQ themes in schools. Thus saying that school programs marginalize or rather eliminate topics that surround LGBTQ individuals altogether. In relation to this, little research has been done on LGBTQ-inclusive classrooms and the impact it may have on students, both heterosexual and those who identify with LGBTQ. Just as inclusiveness and diversity is important for students to learn, creating an LGBTQ-inclusive classroom is critical in creating a comfortable and welcoming space for all students to share their views and identities without judgment (Kuvalanka et al., 2013).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the practices of Kindergarten to grade eight teachers that support the development of LGBTQ-inclusive classrooms. The focus is particularly in the strategies that educators use to address LGBTQ rights as well as challenges and implications they may face addressing these concerns. The goal of my research is to look at how
teachers are committed to anti-homophobia education and their communication with parents to mitigate their concerns, and if educators feel well equipped, comfortable and have a sense of willingness to teach their students about LGBTQ individuals. My further investigation for this study are what kinds of resources are teachers using to implement LGBTQ-inclusiveness into their classrooms and from where they are obtaining these resources.

As previously stated, multiple research is being done to look at the implementation of LGBTQ topics in K-8 classrooms and my goal is to look beyond research and find real-life experiences with LGBTQ-inclusive classroom educators. I aim to report and share practices Canadian K-8 teachers are using to develop LGBTQ knowledge advocacy and acceptance in their students, so that these practices may be disseminated and thereby inform the instructional practices of more educators, and support them in their teaching of this aspect of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. It is my hope that these findings may also support teachers in a broader context, as LGBTQ rights extends into other aspects of the curriculum.

1.3 Research Questions

The primary question which has guided this study is: how is a small sample of Canadian K-12 teachers integrating anti-homophobia education in their classrooms. Subsidiary questions to further guide this inquiry include:

- What range of instructional strategies and approaches are teachers using to integrate the topic of LGBTQ in their teachings?
- Where in the curriculum do these teachers locate this work?
- What challenges do these teachers encounter in the education system and how do they respond to these challenges?
- What resources and factors support these teachers in this work?
How did these teachers develop their commitment and preparedness for teaching this topic?

This project also aims to raise awareness of the importance of LGBTQ-inclusive classrooms and inspire teachers to be mindful of their own beliefs and practices in the teaching of LGBTQ issues.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

The topic of LGBTQ-inclusivity is particularly interesting to me, as someone who has never had the opportunity to learn about LGBTQ themes through my education, I am curious to see if it is being implemented in schools today. The reasoning behind this is because as our society is evolving, there is more than one type of family. There are various families structures and I want to know if teachers are educating their students on this particular topic, and feel knowledgeable and comfortable teaching it. My concern is that educators are not being adequately taught how to integrate these themes into their lesson plans. I believe in inclusive classrooms, and I developed a strong interest in finding out more information about LGBTQ-inclusiveness and the research to support this.

I was always an enthusiastic learner for most of my life, and became particularly interested in multiculturalism and diversity in classrooms as it was promoted much throughout my education. I grew up in Scarborough, in a very multicultural and diverse neighbourhood, under a household that was very religious and unknowledgeable and unaccepting about the topics of LGBTQ. In my youth, I personally never had an interest in LGBTQ rights, as it was something I never thought about. I had this passion for education and teaching. As I grew older and attended high school, topics around diversity were very prominent, and as I attended my undergraduate studies, diversity was also a large part of my education. Over time I started to
realize something was missing, and that was LGBTQ rights. Although I majored in Youth and Children’s Studies, I came to recognize that LGBTQ issues were not being addressed both in my post-secondary education and also in classrooms from K-8. This became a large concern for me as diversity and acceptance is so largely promoted; yet we forget to acknowledge a group of people that make up a percentage of our population. As stated previously, I had a passion for teaching and educating others, so I decided to get my teaching degree. Through the promotion of acceptance of everyone in not only a classroom community but outside it as well, have I developed an interest in learning more about LGBTQ rights and how to integrate this theme into classrooms. For myself, as a future educator and as a human being, acceptance and inclusivity are both important parts of being a good educator. Acknowledging that there are people out there who are diverse in sexuality and gender and accepting them for who they are is so important to me. This is what drove my interest in LGBTQ-inclusivity, as it was not being acknowledged in classrooms, which is where all students need to find a sense of belonging. Through this research I hope to find educators who have the same drive I do in creating an inclusive environment for all to learn and develop and to eliminate the stigma around LGBTQ individuals.

1.5 Overview

This research project is organized into five chapters. To respond to the research question, I have conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three teachers about their instructional strategies in regards to educating students in regards to anti-homophobia education in the classroom and if they are implementing it in their classrooms. In chapter 2, I review the literature outlining the effects and importance of inclusivity, knowledge and acceptance of LGBTQ individuals as well as teacher and students attitudes, best practices, challenges and implications. In chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In chapter 4, I
report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in chapter 5, I identify the implication of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research finding and point to areas for future research. References and a list of appendixes are found at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I literature regarding individuals that identify as LGBTQ, focusing on strategies and their benefits highlighting how this theme is being incorporated in kindergarten to grade eight contexts. I will also be discussing how children’s literature can be an easy way to address the idea of different family structures to children, and the impacts from this. I will also be focusing on the challenges and implications that educators face integrating LGBTQ into schools and will be discussed alongside some strategies that have been made by educators.

2.1 What is Anti-Homophobia/ LGBTQ Inclusive Education?

In August 2015, the school board implemented a new Healthy Living section within the Ontario Curriculum of Health and Physical Education, which focused on assisting teachers but also acknowledging the diversity of students within the school board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). After the implementation of these policies, more initiatives have been made to create an inclusive environment for students. Anti-homophobia education or LGBTQ inclusive education focuses largely on respecting all identities of students whether they identify with LGBTQ or not. These efforts within the curriculum give students the opportunity to feel represented within the texts they read and the positive conversations that happen within and outside the classroom (Goldstein, Collins & Halder, 2008). Anti-homophobia education aims to provide student with a positive classroom environment, where they can freely share their experiences, thoughts and have the freedom to express who they are without judgement (Kuvalanka et al., 2013).

The Toronto District School Board has implemented an anti-homophobia policy, which gives educators the freedom to teach without feeling they are breaking any rules or going against
any laws (Kuvalanka et al., 2013). The *Equity Foundation Statement* expresses a commitment that “the ideals related to anti-homophobia and sexual orientation equity be reflected in all aspects of organizational structures, policies, guidelines, procedures, classroom practices, day-to-day operations, and communication practices” (Toronto District School Board, 2000, p.13). Through these initiatives, both students and educators can feel supported in their work and through their experiences. In order for there to be an inclusive learning experience, the classrooms must reflect the life experiences of LGBTQ-identified community members (Goldstein et al., 2008). It is important that all students feel safe and respected in their school community, and with this being said various strategies must be implemented, literature must be present, as well as the positive discussions and language within the classroom.

### 2.2 Strategies and Their Benefits for Integrating LGBTQ Rights in the Classroom: Anti-Homophobia Education

In the last few decades, research on those who identify with LGBTQ have been significantly absent, but in more recent years it has gained significant consideration, and has become at the forefront of interest for not only researchers, but educators, students and parents (Kuvalanka et al., 2013). As the new health and physical education curriculum has come forth in Ontario, teachers are expected to integrate topics and discussions about those who identify with LGBTQ (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). As this is a new expectation for kindergarten to grade eight educators, many do not feel as if they are prepared and do not know how to go about teaching sex education in their classrooms (Flores, 2015). As previously stated, more research has come to light on the topic of LGBTQ, and research has identified strategies that teachers can use to incorporate the topics of LGBTQ in their classrooms. A study conducted by Kuvalanka et al. (2013) states that using real-life LGBTQ examples, whether through class activities,
assignments, guest speakers and movies can help students as well as the educators approach the subject of LGBTQ and create a more inclusive classroom setting. During this study by Kuvalanka et al. (2013) a teacher provided an example of the strategy she used and why it was effective. The best way to approach this topic is by bringing in a lesbian identified mother of a heterosexual adolescent male, and ask her to speak on child-rearing. The result of this is that heterosexual students were able to understand gay families as normative and it allowed them to deconstruct their own ideas of homophobia so that students could see the similarities between family structures (Kuvalanka et al., 2013). These findings suggest that having real-life experiences can allow students to reflect on their own personal feelings and previous judgments they may have made on those who identify with LGBTQ. These results also found to have improvements in the overall classroom, as students were able to see the correlation between same-sex families and heterosexual families (Kuvalanka et al., 2013).

As it has been noted that a teacher’s enthusiasm to integrate discussions about those who identify with LGBTQ in the classroom are likely to have higher and more positive results from their students, as teachers who “create a more inclusive environment, by reflecting their own privilege and taking responsibility for teaching about family diversity and sexual orientation, rather than leaving these discussions to sexual minority instructors” (Kuvalanka et al., 2013, p. 701). This goes to say that teachers are the leading step in integrating and creating a comfortable space for their students to learn. Educators that are more willing to teach and who are enthusiastic about LGBTQ rights are more likely to create LGBTQ acceptance within their students (Kuvalanka, et al., 2013).

In relation to inclusive classrooms, an organization known as Egale are dedicated to assisting teachers in creating and sustaining an environment that all students with various
identities can learn and develop. Egale Canada is an organization founded in 1995, that promotes LGBTQ human rights through research, education and community engagement (EGALE, 2015). Its sole vision is to eliminate gender stereotypes, homophobia, bias and hatred to those who identify themselves with LGBTQ. Their core values are based in anti-racist and anti-oppressive (ARAO) practice, to try and communicate in the best way possible about LGBTQ human rights. This organization not only provides resources and curricula for clients and teachers but also responds to the needs and experiences of the LGBTQ community. The efforts in which they have made towards the LGBTQ community are remarkable in providing various programs, housing and support to youth who may feel as if their identity is not accepted. In parallel, Egale Canada has done much to assist educators on how to create an inclusive classroom that fosters the rights of LGBTQ students. Through numerous research studies, Egale Canada has come up with the Every Teacher Project, which is an LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canadian K-8 schools. This specific project focuses on how and if LGBTQ identity has been addressed in classrooms, and if educators are aware of the identities of their students. Through this research, teachers are aware of their student’s identities and the stigma they get for it, and teachers are trying to combat this. An example of this is a grade four boy wore nail polish to school, and was teased by others who were calling him gay. The principal of this school discussed in every classroom how it should not be used and to combat this, male teachers wore nail polish to school; thus showing support for those who identify with LGBTQ (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 3).

In relation to Egale Canada, there are ways educators can advocate for the LGBTQ community by creating spaces for students to feel secure and respected for their identity. My GSA, also known as Gay Straight Alliance, is a group that allows students to open up about their gender and sexuality freely and tackles homophobia in and outside the classroom. Students of
any sexual identity or exploration can be apart of this. My GSA, which is a resource that can be found off the Egale website, provides the public and schools with resources to integrate this club into the school community step by step. In-class resources can also be obtained from this website, such as LGBTQ inclusion pocket guide, DVDs that provide information on students that have faced hate for identifying with LGBTQ, youth suicide prevention reports on outcomes and recommendations, and lastly My GSA education resource kit (Egale Canada, 2015). Not only are these resources great for schools to have, but also are very affordable. These are just a few strategies in which educators can make the first initiatives to developing and creating an LGBTQ-inclusive classroom and eliminate the homophobia around LGBTQ students.

Thus, it has been made clear that the influential works of Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013), Flores (2015), Reece-Miller (2010) and Egale have brought LGBTQ-inclusive classrooms to the forefront of research over the last decade, and now should be analyzed from the perspective of an educator. Children’s literature, discussion and language are strategies educators use to implement anti-homophobia education in classrooms and they will be further discussed, as well as challenges educators face in the education system. This research should ultimately lead K-8 educators to understand that implementing various strategies both in the classroom and around the school community will allow for a better relationship between themselves and their students.

2.2.1 Children’s literature

For many years in the field of research, literature based on LGBTQ individuals have remained under the radar, as addressing these topics in K-8 classes were controversial (Flores, 2015). As the new health and physical education curriculum has come out, teachers are expected to integrate themes of LGBTQ into their lessons and “create an inclusive and welcoming
atmosphere in the class by supporting all students to be active participants” (Health & Physical Education Curriculum, p.54). As the job of teaching comes with many roles and responsibilities, creating opportunities for positive development is included. Providing resources for students to feel reflected in is crucial for development. According to Dodge and Crutcher (2015), LGBTQ youth do not see themselves reflected in the texts they read, thus saying that there are no resources available for students to feel like their identity is respected amongst their peers or by their teachers. As the LGBTQ community is growing, educators have to acknowledge their students and what they identify with. A teacher’s responsibility is to accommodate their students, and one way this can be resolved is by providing students with literature that they can relate to, and if not relate, then informed and aware of the various family structures and sexual identities.

In relation to Dodge and Crutcher’s (2015) ideas about reflective texts (2015), Bishop (1990) believes that all children deserve to have access to books that are reflective of who they are and reflective of their culture. Having these texts as “mirrors” for them, in the sense that students who identify as LGBTQ find themselves reflected in the texts they reads, and it is not only self-affirming, but is an important factor for developing empathy and understanding in cross-cultural interactions. Students that are able to find meaning in the texts they read and relate to them on a personal level have a higher tendency to excel in their education (Bishop, 1990). Both Dodge and Crutcher (2015) as well as Bishop’s (1990), ideas of self-reflective texts are an important stepping stone for acceptance and inclusion in the classroom of LGBTQ individuals. Both researchers demonstrate an understanding and a need for more teacher involvement in advocating and opting for literature that best reflects the demographics of their students and representing their cultural and diverse backgrounds.

Aside from the previously stated researchers, not many studies have been published on
the integration of LGBTQ literature in K-8 classrooms. Although not much academia has been published, there are websites that provide educators with literature to best represent those who identify with LGBTQ. British Columbia’s Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) came up with a book list and videos that address LGBTQ youth for K-8 classrooms. This resource by far gets down to the nitty and gritty details of what books are appropriate for what grade level, as well as what videos should be shown pertaining to the age of the students in the classroom (BCTF). The provided book list is quite vast and includes some of the more common literature such as *And Tango Makes Two, Heather Has Two Mommies*, and *It’s Okay to Be Different* are all examples of primary level books that can be read from K-2. As the grade increases, the literature and videos provided address more concepts such as sex and sexual health, safe environments, and coming out stories. Although there is much literature based on LGBTQ youth, not all the literature might be applicable to a particular classroom, hence why educators should identify who their students are, and what families they come from. In doing this, teachers are able to address particular concepts in the classroom, but also build discussion around their students and their familial lives. From research by Smolkin and Young (2011), there are many commonly held misconceptions about LGBTQ families and children, and with the integration of literature in K-8 classrooms, students will be able to examine the similarities between heterosexual family structures and LGBTQ family structures. Nothing but positive results have arisen from integrating and informing students about LGBTQ individuals, and as this topic of LGBTQ-inclusive schools begin to develop more, hopefully more in-class research can be done to look at the specifics of the long term effects of educating youth on LGBTQ individuals and how this will combat homophobia in schools.
2.2.2 Discussions and language within the classroom

Discussions and language are a large part of implementing an LGBTQ inclusive space in a classroom setting. Educators that advocate for LGBTQ individuals are more likely to be a support system for these students who identify themselves, than educators who are not. Creating an encouraging and supportive community, whether a school has LGBTQ individuals or not, is significant, through the integration of positive discussions around LGBTQ individuals, will students as well as staff be more welcoming and thus eliminate homophobic views towards those to identify with LGBTQ (Kuvalanka, 2013). Alongside this, a study conducted by Reece-Miller (2010) revealed that teachers and staff that are more supportive of LGBTQ individuals, as they create a sense of belonging to the school community by using positive language, and also have an easier time integrating discussions around this topic. It is crucial that educators model and demonstrate positive language in order to get their students to engage with positive discussions. In addition to this, Egale provides a blog for educators specifically to support creating LGBTQ inclusive schools. This resource is a remarkable as it not only provides steps to create inclusive schools, but also how to integrate LGBTQ discussions into the classrooms. Addressing language through discussion in and outside the classroom is an important step towards creating a safe environment for all students. As stated previously by Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013), a teacher’s motivation and willingness to integrate an inclusive environment and respectful behaviour inside the classroom, are more likely to have students follow this same behaviour. This is highly similar to the results from the Every Teacher Project, as educators who show leadership in an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, students as well as staff followed in demonstrating this. This research should ultimately lead K-8 educators to understand that implementing topics and discussions around LGBTQ can not only have the possibility of
reinforcing the relationship between themselves and their students (Flores, 2015), but also positively inspiring the classroom setting, making their students more aware and comfortable addressing their own sexuality and needs but also eliminating the stigma around LGBTQ topics.

2.3 Challenges and Implications that Teachers Face

As the job of teaching comes with many roles and responsibilities, it is no secret that teachers come across challenges and implications that might hinder their position as an educator. Addressing topics of LGBTQ in K-8 classrooms has only recently been a change in the Ontario curriculum, but previous to this, educators have faced many challenges of creating an LGBTQ-inclusive classroom. Case, Stewart & Tittsworth (2009) and Fletcher and Russell (2001) study addresses a big challenge that a majority of educators face, being their own personal ignorance or discomfort regarding sexual orientation and gender diversity. They go on to say that educators who lack knowledge in this area are more uncomfortable with teaching topics on LGBTQ. Although this is a large issue, there are ways in which school boards can provide teachers with workshops to help them feel equipped to teach topics on LGBTQ.

Allen (1995) also agrees with the face that perhaps these challenges of being uncomfortable derive from the lack of formal teacher preparation. Various institutions that offer teacher education programs do not address LGBTQ rights, and if they do, the courses are optional to take. On a similar note, Brauer’s (2012) study focuses on institutional climate, and how it can be a barrier for teachers in practice. His study looks at the lack of pre-service teacher support in relation to teaching about LGBTQ identities. Brauer (2012) looks at how schools focus on inclusiveness in classrooms and diversity, but fail to address LGBTQ rights specifically, and thus marginalizing students who identify with being lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender or questioning. From these findings, it is clear that there is a lack of institutional
support for teachers, therefore result in feeling unsure and uncomfortable with teaching such
topics due to the lack of knowledge provided.

Incorporating LGBTQ topics and discussions into K-8 classrooms is solely relied on the
teacher, but previous to the Ontario curriculum educators faced difficulties in incorporating
LGBTQ themes into family courses. Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013) discussed in their study
that although educators are keen to teach about LGBTQ individuals, students may have the
unwillingness to learn about it because of their religious beliefs, their hesitancy to share ignorant
or negative viewpoints and their lack of familiarity and comfort with LGBTQ issues. This can
cause a challenge for educators because they might not gain much discussion around this topic
creating “dead space” and teachers inevitably eliminating LGBTQ conversations from the
classroom entirely. Reece-Miller (2010) opposes this idea of “dead space” in a classroom and in
his study focuses on why it is important to address LGBTQ issues and although it creates a
challenge for teachers to discuss based on their own beliefs, it is a topic that must be addressed in
support of individuals who identify with LGBTQ. Reece-Miller (2010) goes on to say that
educators who advocate for LGBTQ issues are afraid they are taking up a “gay cause” and their
colleagues and administrators will assume they also identify themselves with LGBTQ. As
previously stated, the Every Teacher Project looked at some challenges teachers faced trying to
address LGBTQ rights in their schools, and has resulted in not only harassment from colleagues,
but also from student who attended the school because of their willingness to advocate for
LGBTQ students.

In this same study, teachers who identified with LGBTQ were afraid to come out openly
as gay because they feared losing their position as an educator (Every Teacher Project). One
educator stated that one of the biggest barriers for educators addressing LGBTQ issues are not
any formal barriers, but rather their own perceptions and attitudes. They feared getting in trouble or having parents complain about an LGBTQ individual teaching their child. On a similar note, teachers expressed that they would be out of a job if they addressed LGBTQ issues in their school because of the religious beliefs of the students they taught or the community they were in. In relation to this, a study done by Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013) provided some strategies that educators can use to integrate LGBTQ into their classrooms, but this same strategy can come with negative repercussions from parents. This specific strategy focused on having a lesbian mother of a heterosexual male come in and talk about their family structure. This can cause problems with particular families based on their beliefs about LGBTQ individuals. One way to combat this would be to let parents know about the guest speaker ahead of time and stress that learning about LGBTQ is now part of the school curriculum and that it will be beneficial for their child to attend. Although this may seem like a great idea, not all parents will be accepting of this, therefore parents have the choice of having their child attend school or not for that specific day. It is important to remember that educators can only do so much in teaching their students about issues that may be relevant in the school setting.

These findings are critical, as it is an issue that has been arising within the last few years. Educators are faced with a variety of challenges that cannot only perhaps be harmful to their students but to their own teaching positions as well. Teachers feel as if this task of teaching LGBTQ issues in a classroom is a large one and the consensus is that they do not feel prepared to teach on such topics based on their teacher education programs. Thus, a significant relationship has been noted to exist between academia that the willingness to teach about LGBTQ issues derives from the institutional climate of the educator. Further research should be taken to assess the current situation of how the Ontario curriculum has either benefitted or challenged teachers
and what effects does it have not only on the teachers practice but on the minds of the students.

2.4 Conclusion

As noted with the vast findings of previous research listed above, topics of LGBTQ are critical for not only educators but for students, as it will diminish the stigma around LGBTQ individuals and create this sense of inclusivity amongst students and schools. It is also crucial to note that there are a variety of resources for educators to use to assist them with teaching on topics of LGBTQ and how to address issues students may have about coming out or creating a support system for them to feel comfortable in their school. This will not only help them be their true self, but also enhance their performance level academically, as in previously noted studies, creating an LGBTQ-inclusive classroom had a higher academic performance level for LGBTQ individuals. Along this note, there are a variety of other resources for teachers to use such as literature to introduce discussions around family structures for K-8 classrooms. Many of these resources have been available within the last few years, but have remained under the radar due to the views on LGBTQ individuals, and also the new Ontario health and physical education curriculum. Although there are numerous strengths to incorporating LGBTQ-inclusive strategies and literature into the classroom, there are also several challenges educators face in trying to implement LGBTQ education in their classrooms. Some of these challenges derive from their own lack of knowledge, the difficulties of having no interest from students and lastly the negative repercussions from parents or colleagues. However, although these studies have shown various pros and cons to implementing LGBTQ-inclusive education, more and more research is being done to look at the impacts of the Ontario health and physical education curriculum and also the benefits of the students from more Canada wide schools. The relationship between students and teachers is crucial as a teacher’s willingness and enthusiasm about topics of
LGBTQ rights are more likely to create LGBTQ acceptance within their students.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I explain 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. Relatedly, I identify a range of methodological limitations, but I also speak to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

The study has been conducted using a qualitative research study approach, including a review of the existing literature pertinent to the research questions and purpose of the study, as well as the conduction of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two or three teachers. It is suggested by Carr (1994) that qualitative research has faced major obstacles in achieving recognition for its ongoing contribution to knowledge. In retort to the negative bias around qualitative research, Carr (1994) also sees that both these types of research (qualitative and quantitative) serve various purposes and neither one is better than the other. Yilmaz (2013) agrees with Carr (2013) in the sense that both these research methods differ in terms of their epistemological, theoretical and methodological underpinnings, but are both useful in their own way. More specifically, Yilmaz (2013) states that qualitative research is not based on one methodology or a single discipline. They are more focused on cause-effect relationships through deductive reasoning. It is also stated by Yilmaz (2013) that qualitative research methods are “effective to study a highly individualized programme in which learners who have different
abilities, needs, goals, and interests proceed at their own pace” (p.315). This goes to say that qualitative research attempts to understand phenomena from the perspective of the participant, instead of that of the researcher’s (Jones 1995).

Broadly, all quantitative research focuses on statistical procedures and various techniques, which are used to collect and analyze data, ignoring aspects of research design.

Merriam (2002) discusses meaning within qualitative research, and that it is constructed by humans in which they have had social interactions with the world and there is not one fixed, agreed upon experience. Rather, in light of this, there are many ways in which one can have various social experiences, in which they are unending (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Qualitative research has become more widely accepted as a legitimate mode of inquiry according to Creswell (2013) and he argues that there is an increasing fragmentation and diversity of perspectives, which currently exists through qualitative research. Furthermore, this research is specifically focused on discovering new types of knowledge about the feelings of others, their thoughts, experiences and the validity of them (Thorne, 2000).

Unlike in quantitative research, where the researcher relies on fixed questions, numerical data as well as forced-choice responses (Jackson II et.al., 2007), qualitative research is based on a constructivist epistemology and explores a socially constructive, holistic, and context sensitive from the perspectives of the people involved (Yilmaz, 2013). Therefore, given my research purpose and the various questions that I have created, a qualitative research study as it is an appropriate approach for me to take, as it gives me an opportunity to inquire about the LGBTQ inclusive strategies, as well as challenges a small sample of teachers face. Suitably, I have not only looked at how a sample of teachers integrate LGBTQ themes into their classroom, but also what are some valid resources that are found to be effective through lessons and discussion in
kindergarten to grade twelve classrooms.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Interviews, observations and documents are three valid sources of data for a qualitative research study (Merriam, 2002). There are a variety of strategies used for the purpose of a research study, and having a diversity of sources will produce the best data and response to the questions. When it is possible, using a variety of sources and methods can enhance the validity of the findings (Merriam, 2002).

Interviews provide detailed, descriptive data, which is needed to deepen ones own understanding of individual variation (Yilmaz, 2013). As I am most interested in teacher’s experiences of teaching and integrating LGBTQ themes into their classrooms, interviews with a sample of teachers who demonstrate this practice would therefore yield the most relevant information. Interviews can vary from highly structured interviews, to semi-structured and lastly to open-ended interviews, but the interview design I have chosen for my research study is a semi-structured interview protocol as it allowed for more flexibility and responsiveness for the interviewee and the interviewer (Jackson II et.al.,2007).

Semi-structured interviews are often focused on the singular source of data, which include a set of pre-determined questions, which are not limited to the specific set of questions, rather additional questions can emerge through conversation during the interview process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews also provide the opportunity for the interviewee to discuss their own lived experiences and it gives the interviewer the opportunity to provide a design as well as plan questions attending to their research focus. This also allows space for the participants to elaborate more on their own ideas and give attention to areas that were previously unforeseen (Creswell, 2013). This is beneficial in the sense that I have
come across information that was unexpected, and therefore I was prepared to depart from the planned protocol slightly, if it is not effective in producing the required information. These interviews have been conducted individual and face-to-face, which has allowed me to inquire about more personal matters and strategies. I organized my protocol (located in Appendix B) into four sections, which begins with the participant’s background information, followed by questions based on their interactions and experience teaching LGBTQ themes in their classroom, then strategies and lastly, concluding with questions regarding challenges that were overcome and next steps for teachers. Examples of questions include:

- What range of instructional strategies and approaches do you use to integrate the topic of LGBTQ in your teachings?
- What does LGBTQ mean to you in a classroom setting?
- What are some challenges that you have faced in teaching about LGBTQ in your classroom?

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I review a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section where I introduced each of the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria will be applied to teacher participants:

1. Full-time teachers who have had at least 5 years experience
2. Teachers who have taught about LGBTQ themes prior to the new health and physical education curriculum
3. Teachers who show a demonstrated commitment to teaching anti-homophobia
education

4. Teachers working in the Toronto District School Board

5. There will be both male and female participants

Due to the detailed nature of these studies, qualitative research usually encompasses a small, selective sample (Carr, 1994). In order to address the main research question, the participants I have interviewed have experienced to some degree of integrating LGBTQ themes and discussions into their classrooms. Additionally, participating teachers have been working in the field of education for at least five years prior to the new release of the health and physical education curriculum. This is because I am interested in learning about the results and attitudes of students who have learned about LGBTQ prior to the new curriculum, and those who have been newly introduced to it, in hopes of seeing a benefit in implementing LGBTQ themes into the classroom. Furthermore, to explore the strategies and challenges of teacher experiences on teaching topics around LGBTQ, both male and female participants will be interviewed, varying in age and teaching specialty, in order to increase potential richness of the data obtained. Lastly, in order to maintain a geographical focus, teachers have been employed within the Toronto District School Board to demonstrate the diversity of teaching methods in various classrooms.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures/recruitment

The strategy used in recruiting participants for a study solely depends on the aim of the research, and the specific questions being answered (Marshall, 1996). Getting the opportunity with a random sample may generalize the information to the entire population, and thus may not be effective in developing more in-depth issues about LGBTQ themes (Marshall, 1996).

There are three over-arching methods to selecting a sample for a qualitative study. This includes convenience, purposeful and lastly, theoretical sampling. Convenience sampling
looks to the most accessible participants, and is also the least challenging between the three techniques (Marshall, 1996). Purposeful sampling looks to the most productive participants that are able to provide richer information, and show a clear understanding to a particular subject (Marshall, 1996). Lastly, theoretical sampling, is building theory from data that emerges, and then further obtaining new samples to elaborate on these theories (Marshall, 1996). Due to the parameters of my research study, I have interviewed based on both convenience and purposeful sampling. This has allowed me to go more in-depth and find the richest possible data. As a pre-service teacher who has completed both elementary and secondary education in Canada, convenience sampling with participants has also been obtained through existing connections with other pre-service teachers and working teaching within the country. I have also provided my information rather than ask these individuals/organizations to provide me with the names and contact information of people they think may be interested in partaking in the study. This has helped ensure that teachers are volunteering to participate rather than feeling pressure or obligation to participate.

3.3.3 Participant bios

Mark

My first participant was Mark. At the time of the research Mark was a Kindergarten to grade four physical education and French immersion educator, who identified as a cisgender bisexual male. He had been teaching for fifteen years prior. He has taught all grades from K-8 and been a teacher librarian for eleven years. At the time of research he was teaching at a school in the TDSB. Mark showed a commitment to teaching as he specifically emphasized the importance of positive and inclusive language within the classroom and the school community. He has demonstrated his love and dedication to teaching anti-homophobia education by starting a
GSA within his school and making sure all students feel welcome and safe.

*Penelope*

My second participant was Penelope. At the time of research Penelope was teaching in a gifted program in the TDSB. Penelope taught between kindergarten to grade eight and has taught in the TDSB for eleven years. She has dedicated a lot of her time to developing her own knowledge as an educator and remaining current in relation to anti-homophobia education and integrating LGBTQ topics cross-curricular. She does a lot of her own research, is an activist, advocates for all students and believes that every student should feel represented in their classroom. Penelope teaches with an inquiry focus and believes it is an innovative way to teach students. Penelope showed her dedication and commitment to her practice by starting the GSA at her school and being a life-long learner.

*Christina*

My third participant was Christina. At the time of research, Christina was a teacher for the last seventeen years and taught in the TDSB for the last thirteen of those years. She has taught only the primary grades one to three. Christina showed a commitment and dedication to her practice by using her own personal experiences to combat the negativity and stigma around LGBTQ individuals in a classroom setting and a school community. She approaches every teaching situation by self-reflecting and reaching out to allies and looking for resources in order to further her own learning.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is similar to data collection, which allows researchers to evolve in an understanding of research questions, which are created to better inform the interview sample and protocol (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). There is also an approach to data analysis with
open coding strategies that allow themes and patterns, which can emerge from the data (Yilmaz, 2013). With the process of data analysis, it is difficult to distinguish the actual data obtained (Thorne, 2000).

The procedure of data analysis looks at common patterns of information and sorts them into various categories, which are major themes found within research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). During my analysis I have drawn on this, as it has much to do with the research I am conducting and the questions I am creating. Finally, I have focused on specific themes and categorized them appropriately, while looking at the discrepancies in the research, and discussing the significance of it.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

There are several important aspects when looking at the ethical review procedure. Issues surrounding consent, confidentiality and having the right to withdraw are all examined by DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006). More specifically, they discuss the four ethical issues that are linked with the interview process, which include safeguarding participants’ information, the risk of unforeseen harm, informing participants appropriately, and lastly decreasing the risk of exploitation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Given the topic of LGBTQ themes within a classroom, some risk with partaking in this study is that questions may trigger an emotional response if the participant identifies with LGBTQ, and may cause them to feel vulnerable. I have minimized this risk by informing the participant before beginning the interview, that way they know they have the right to refuse to answer any questions that may trigger an emotional response. Furthermore, I have reduced this risk of an emotional response by sending a sample of the interview questions prior to the interview, and reassuring them throughout the interview that they have the right to refrain from
participating in the research as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) state that as an interviewer, we have to establish and create a safe and comfortable environment for the participant, as they will be more free to discuss more personal issues thus producing richer and valid data. Participants in my study will be provided with pseudonyms and their identities, and any identifying indicators will not be released. All the data collected will remain on a private, password protected external hard-drive and will be erased after five years. Participants will also be asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provides an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation (1 40-60 minute semi-structured interview).

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The limitation within this study is that the data provided will not be generalizable to the population, as there are a limited amount of participants (Jackson II et. al./2007). On the other hand, the strengths of this methodology is that narrowing down participants who are an expert in this field will produce more understanding of the subject of strategies to implement LGBTQ into classrooms (Carr, 1994). When looking at the ethical parameters of this study, it has allowed me to interview teachers who have had first-hand experience with teaching LGBTQ topics in a classroom. These interviews have allowed teachers to share their experiences, have their voices heard and provide them with a platform which focuses on what issues they are passionate about and allow them to articulate how they conceptualize particular topics in theory and in practice. I have conducted three short, 45-60 minute interviews, at a pre-determined time and location outside of the participant’s day-to-day activities, thus giving them time to collect their thoughts and speak honestly and passionately about their insights.
3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I justified the research methodology. I started off with a discussion of the research approach and procedure in which I examined the significance of qualitative research, which stressing the importance of some major disparities from quantitative research. I further described the instruments of data collection, in which I identified the interviews as being the primary and most important source of data within research. I looked at a variety of interview designs that are conducted in qualitative research, and identified the benefits of using semi-structured interviews. I then identified the participants in which I am interviewing, listing the criteria and providing a brief introduction for those in whom I have selected. I then identified the recruitment procedures, which discussed ways in which one can sample and what types of sampling are most effective for data collection. I proceeded to explain how I have analyzed the data, which was obtained from my interviews and looking for common themes and patterns. Ethical issues such as member-checks, right to withdraw, risks of participation and consent were also discussed. Lastly, I focused on the methodological limitations of this study, such as only involving teachers and using a small sample, which does not generalize for the entire population, while also looking at the strengths of using first-hand information with teachers specialized in this area of research. Next, in Chapter 4, I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this Chapter I report and discuss the findings that resulted from my interviews with three TDSB teachers who are committed to teaching anti-homophobia education. I explore the following four themes: Challenges participants encounter in their work involve misunderstanding and judgment within both their school and home communities, while integrating LGBTQ topics, educators utilize a variety of school and community engagements to teach and educate their students, in relation to LGBTQ topics, educators realize that there are various resources and support systems that give them the opportunity and provided them with a willingness to teach and educators realize that their passion and willingness to make universal change proves commitment and preparedness to teaching.

4.1 Challenges Participants Encounter in Their Work Involve Misunderstanding and Judgment Within Both Their School and Home Communities

All three participants shared their experiences and spoke of unique and various challenges within both their school and home communities in regards to teaching LGBTQ themes in their classrooms. This extension allows for not only teachers to communicate with their students’ parents and staff about LGBTQ issues but gives them the opportunity to create a more inclusive space. Specifically, participants highlighted the misunderstandings and fear demonstrated by students, parents and teachers. They agree that many of these challenges are difficult to overcome, but these challenges gives them the opportunity to think beyond their own knowledge and practices and try new strategies to implement within their school and classrooms.
4.1.1 Participants indicated that negative student interactions can lower student self-esteem and set a precedent for poor behaviour

All three participants identified that inappropriate language is present in schools that are still transitioning into more inclusive schools. All participants indicated that their current schools are largely inclusive, but they still occasionally hear inappropriate language around the school that perhaps would hurt someone who identified as LGBTQ. Penelope stated,

Kids are always saying inappropriate things and I think that what’s important is as teachers they are kids and they’ve existed for 10 years, 12 years and they are going to learn things but you have to allow them to make their mistakes…kids will chuckle.

Penelope justifies that although there is inappropriate language being used in the school, it is also important for students to make mistakes and learn from them. It is also mentioned within the three interviews that educators have encouraged their students to stand up for themselves or have encouraged students to stand up for their peers. These educators have mentioned that there are a lot of students who are afraid to come out due to the stigma around LGBTQ youth. Penelope went on to say that “there is a correlation between safety and learning” and that youth who feel protected will succeed in school in comparison to those who do not feel safe in their school and home environment.

Mark shares his experiences working with children and hearing inappropriate language in the schoolyards more specifically. Mark stated,

I’ve had it come up with younger children, often in the schoolyard, it is often a social thing where for instance homophobic language is used reflexively to criticize another person. I usually find that they don’t fully understand the import of what they are saying.

Mark added to that by saying he would hear the phrase “that’s so gay!” and it derived from
students not fully knowing the meaning or the effect it can have on students who identified with LGBTQ. Penelope mentioned a similar experience of students standing up for one another.

You started to hear the language changing in the hallways and kids started to police kids like you can’t say that or that’s not cool! And kids started to come out and so you wont let anyone offend you friends because you want to protect your friends.

Mark, Penelope and Christina add that the challenge with students is that they are not fully aware of the effects that their language has on other students and that their words can be hurtful.

Through research, Brauer (2012) looks at similar experiences and focused largely on the inclusiveness of student interactions. Some classrooms fail to address LGBTQ rights and marginalize those who identify with LGBTQ, which can set a precedent for poor behaviour in students.

4.1.2 Participants indicated that fear of judgment and backlash can hinder one’s approach or depth of teaching

All three participants indicated that there is a challenge and a hidden fear and uncomfortableness amongst teachers in educating their students on LGBTQ topics. Penelope, Mark and Christina shared their experiences in the education system in situations where they felt most vulnerable. Penelope and Christina both had experiences where they felt their lack of knowledge hindered the quality of their teaching in regards to teaching about LGBTQ when they first started teaching. Penelope stated,

I know some teachers feel very challenged because they don’t understand the topic. I think for me, when I started doing some GSA work, my experience with transgender issues with subjectivities was limited, so that as a challenge for me to talk and integrate a subject that I didn’t know a lot about… When I was out of work for a bit and when I
came back as a new teacher I wasn’t sure how it was going to be taken, but you don’t know when you start in an organization, and it was my job and it was my career.

Likewise, Christina also mentioned that her lack in knowledge of terminology has created a fear of not knowing, as she did not want to give her students the wrong information. She states, I think there is some fear of using the wrong terminology. My challenges have been around my own fear about not doing it right, and also there is a lot of fear around the health curriculum, and that fear is definitely homophobic, and misguided…[it] is also about working with colleagues who may be homophobic, who may not join me.

Penelope and Christina were able to evaluate their own teachings and used their lack of knowledge as a way to reach out to other educators and resources that were invested in this work as much as they were. Penelope and Christina expressed their experiences and feelings of self-consciousness when teaching LGBTQ themes due to the fact that they are still learning in their teaching journey, and are not completely knowledgeable in the area. Christina and Penelope are motivated to learn more as they continue in their teaching journey. Not being completely knowledgeable in the area of LGBTQ is a challenge that most educators face, but also is a way that many shy away from teaching these topics in their classrooms. Educators who decide to teach LGBTQ topics to their students fear judgment from their colleagues as well. Research by Stewart & Tittsworth (2009) support this notion that a massive challenge comes from educators own personal fears and discomfort. Similarly, Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013) discussed this challenge that many educators face. Much anxiety around LGBTQ topics roots from teachers’ own fears and their lack of knowledge plays a substantial role when teaching inclusiveness to their students. Through research and support systems, educators are able to find resources that can assist them in their work and give them confidence to teach LGBTQ topics within their
classrooms. The importance of teaching about LGBTQ and addressing various concepts will contribute to students’ learning in being more inclusive and accepting.

Previously, Penelope mentioned the fear of teaching LGBTQ topics in schools, as she was unsure of how accepting the school was going to be. Mark, Penelope and Christina revealed the fear many educators have for their positions. Mark stated,

I’m going to be brutally honest, [and] that bad things still happen to gay and bisexual male teachers in elementary schools working with young children…I’ve had many conversations with many teachers and there is still a residual fear that somebody might come after you, and so I’m aware of that.

Christina and Penelope both had similar responses in regards to educators who may feel like their position may be at steak depending on the community of the school and how open and accepting the staff were. Educators are constantly being conscious of their actions and what they reveal about themselves to others in their school community. Reece-Miller (2010) goes on to support this, as educators who advocate for LGBTQ issues are afraid they are taking up a “gay cause” and their colleagues will assume they also identify with LGBTQ. In the same study, educators on the other hand who do identify with LGBTQ feared losing their teaching positions if they came out, or participated in this work in a school that was not supportive.

4.1.3 Participants face challenges from parents who disagree with LGBTQ inclusivity due to religious beliefs

All participants recognized the challenge within the education system in terms of LGBTQ themes being presented in the classroom. Parents play a substantial role in the education of their children as well as their religious and cultural values. Penelope stated,
When I was at my last school, I started the GSA there and so a couple of parents were not happy with it, although it’s a club so kids come if they want [and] it’s really their choice if they want to take that opportunity… I’ve had some of those value letters that come in and say their children have to be pulled out of anything that has to do with homosexuality.

Penelope expresses that students are missing out on a large learning opportunity, but also their religion and culture hinder their learning experience. Mark and Christina also mention similar experiences within their schools or schools they have been apart of. Due to the fact that all three participants work in the TDSB, students of all religions and cultural backgrounds are present. Culture and religion is one of the greatest challenges educators who teach about LGBTQ face. Mark specifically mentions an experience where parents addressed that teaching LGBTQ rights as inappropriate for their children and students in the school, specifically in the primary division. He stated,

I’ve had parents come to me, shake my hand and hug me for doing this work I’ve had parents outright say that this is inappropriate and they’ve said that this is age inappropriate and should be talked about at a later age [and] I’ve also had parents say this is not appropriate at all and this goes against my religion… I did have a parent who was quite concerned years ago when my GSA went from classroom to classroom and did presentations for Day of Pink and the parent felt that it was inappropriate to have GSA students in grades 5-8 going into primary classrooms and that it was way too early. She brought this complaint to other parents as well… I think it was based on a perception that we were having a conversation with children that was inappropriate sexually, and we certainly were not… what I’ve found across the board is an assumption that if I’m
introducing LGBTQ topics I’m going to be talking about intimate sexual acts.

Mark identifies that parents play a large role in what their children participate in but also that parents assumptions of what LGBTQ topics encompass, therefore leading to much more challenges. Those that are unaware of the topics and how beneficial they are for children of all ages, assume that these discussions are not only inappropriate but make assumptions based on what they think they know. One of the largest problems participants indicated with LGBTQ topics is the stigma around it and the misunderstanding that many parents have about the new curriculum. All participants have mentioned the misunderstandings some parents have about the new curriculum and how their children are not ready to learn about it, when really students are more aware of their body than parents think. Mark goes on to say, “at a young age students will be able to know all the parts of their body and that people are terribly misinformed about what is in the curriculum”. This misunderstanding has created much of the challenges that educators have had to face.

Through research Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013) have discussed similar experiences to Mark, Penelope and Christina where educators are keen to teach about LGBTQ, but parents religious/cultural beliefs affect their child’s willingness to learn about these topics. Their preconceived notions and their lack of familiarity are the reasons behind educators’ challenges in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

4.2 While Integrating LGBTQ Topics, Educators Utilize a Variety of School and Community Engagements to Teach and Educate Their Students

Teaching is an ongoing process, and as a result, educators must be able to reflect on their practices on a daily basis and expand their teachings. These participants shared their experiences and spoke about various school and community engagements that allowed for students to be
exposed to LGBTQ topics in a positive way. More specifically, participants mentioned these integrations involved the curriculum as a support for their own learning as well as the learning of their students; they developed a more safe and inclusive classroom as well and involved community members to enhance students’ learning. They agree that many of these strategies are an easy way to introduce this topic, and it gives them the opportunity to reflect on their own knowledge and practices and try new strategies to implement within their school and classroom.

4.2.1 Participants are using the curriculum to connect various in-school activities

All participants identified that the curriculum was an essential and supportive tool to integrate LGBTQ topics in the classroom. They all teach with an inquiry focus and mentioned that inquiry was an informal way of getting students to be in charge of their own learning. Penelope stated,

I teach questioning and inquiring then we delve into the projects…I think a big part of inquiry is asking questions, there’s a big component in research. I intentionally want to infuse subjectivities that I know they may not naturally go towards. If I wanted to look at gender or at a particular cultural group that I know would be interesting for them and that I’ve got a diversity in that inquiry, I notice they pay more attention.

Penelope focuses largely on her students’ needs and caters her teaching to what not only will educate them about things they might not have known prior but also create an engaging environment to learn in. Mark and Christina have also taught with the same focus stating that there must be freedom when asking questions and then exploring those questions. All participants have noted that inquiry allowed students to learn about things they specifically had questions to and gave students the opportunity to be diverse in their research.

All participants identified that while using an inquiry perspective, it created a pathway for
them to teach subjects with a cross-curricular focus. Christina largely believes in teaching with the exact same focus and allows for students to learn about LGBTQ and inclusiveness through various subject areas. Christina shared,

LGBTQ issues integrate nicely into different parts of our curriculum. I’ve used media literacy around Halloween costumes, and looking at websites to see how costumes are marketed to boys and girls, and then doing some predicting and inferring. I’ve used it to explore math, especially around sorting and how we sort toys, games and colours based on gender. I’ve used it around data management in terms of collecting data from students about what activities they are choosing during recess. In terms of social studies, its easy to tie into families and community, and I think historically, you can use inquiry to explore any issues in history. For gym we can explore athletes, for outdoor education we planted different coloured carrots and seeds to represent diversity. I told them that diversity makes an ecosystem stronger. Yeah! So there are lots of possibilities for arts, music and drama as well.

Christina provided many concrete examples and strategies of integrating LGBTQ issues within several subject areas. Similarly, Mark and Penelope use a cross-curricular approach when addressing LGBTQ topics within their classroom. They see it as a way to normalize it but also create awareness that those who are identified as LGBTQ take on various roles in society. As ongoing learners, Penelope, Mark and Christina focus a lot of their attention on being co-learners. Penelope specifically highlighted that

[As an educator] you realize you’re going to be a co-learner with the students and you put yourself next to them and you learn with them. I think it is a big weight off your shoulders because you’re not expected to be an expert in anything…you’re not an
encyclopedia, so whenever my kids ask me something I say I don’t know, let’s look it up and figure it out together.

Penelope addresses the fear that many educators have, and it is the fear of not knowing. Instead of being fearful, Penelope looks at it as a learning opportunity to grow and expand her knowledge. Christina and Mark have similar approaches when they feel they do not know the answer to something. Christina mentioned, “it’s okay not to know the answer,” while Mark suggests that “it takes the heat off [as an educator]”. This goes to say that co-learning is an essential part of the learning process for both the teacher and the student. Learning is an enduring process that allows for growth academically and socially where students and teachers can learn together to create a classroom environment that is open to learning but also willing to accept their lack of familiarity with the topic.

As an extension of the literature review, inquiry has become a large part of what educators teach in regards to LGBTQ topics. This gives the opportunity for teachers to teach with a cross-curricular standpoint but also learn with their students as well.

4.2.2 Participants involve students through community engagement

All three participants believe that community engagements has been a great approach to integrate LGBTQ topics within their teachings. Not only does it allow students to see the larger picture but it also creates a safe and healthy school community. Mark indicates the importance of having real-life examples both in the classroom and school-wide. He stated,

I brought outside speakers and done more on a school-wide basis more than a traditional basis, so for instance, two years ago I brought in a couple of parents from P-Flag Toronto and they did separate assemblies for primary and for junior/intermediate so they could tailor their talk…last year for Pride I brought in a children’s author who read several of
his stories and probed children for their understanding of discrimination around LGBT issues.

Mark recalled students being engaged throughout the assembly and were “buzzing” with questions about gender and identity. He also mentioned that many students got the opportunity to share about their family or community who identified with LGBTQ. Similarly, Penelope used this strategy when discussing various subject areas creating real-life experiences for her students. Penelope stated,

> When you’re talking about scientists, you can bring in or call in someone who is a queer scientist, and because you go through their biography they may be out about it. Whenever they talk about their partner, it is a way of infusing it without making it an in your face issue.

Penelope indicated that her school is queer positive and she can see that community engagements have had a positive effect on her students as well. Penelope mentioned how the language between her students changed once she started bringing in more people who identified with LGBTQ. Penelope also noted that whether it was art, math or science it was also a good way for her to bring in someone who belonged to that area who was non-traditional and a person who did not necessarily represent the traditional face of that profession. Aside from this, Penelope reflected on numerous experiences that she has had with her students that take them beyond the classroom walls and expose them to themes around LGBTQ acceptance. Penelope mentioned,

> If I am going to take my kids somewhere for a field trip on something we are doing, I am careful in choosing places that [the students] haven’t been to before. Last year I took kids to Supporting Our Youth (SOY), which is a great organization that supports LGBT youth.
Penelope goes on to say that she did not take her kids on the trip specifically for LGBTQ themes but to look at other aspects that have integrated LGBTQ themes within their work. Regardless of where students are going, all three participants are conscious of places that are welcoming of the LGBTQ community, but also ensuring that the topics are integrated within other subject areas so it is not “forced” upon students but rather meshed nicely so it can be applied to all people who either do or do not identify with LGBTQ.

Kuvalanka et al. (2013) support this notion of using real-life LGBTQ examples to put things into perspective for students, whether it be through bringing in guest speakers who have done LGBTQ work for years or parents who identify or have a child that does. In this same study, it is mentioned that real-life experiences give students the opportunity to reflect on their previous judgments and their own personal feelings about those who identify with LGBTQ. Community engagements are a viable strategy for students to be engaged with familiar or unfamiliar themes in an appealing way and open them up to various identities present in our society.

4.2.3 Participants support their work by creating a safe and inclusive classroom

All three participants indicated that in order to build a classroom that is a safe learning environment for their students, there are steps involved to get the students to build that classroom community and respect amongst one another. Christina, Mark and Penelope have all set expectations with their students in regards to language on the first day of school. Christina mentioned,

It is helpful to remember to remind kids about the norm or the expectations. I put a list of vocabulary as an anchor chart, so as we are referring to things such as gender identity or gender expression, the definition is right there. So when you are using vocabulary it is
helpful to pre-teach it or post it.

Christina focuses a lot of her work on applying positive vocabulary amongst her students early on in the school year to promote acceptance. She also mentioned setting up classroom agreements where “there is space for there to be differences and tolerance or safety for those differences”. Similarly, Mark and Penelope share correlated responses where “gentle teaching” comes into effect. Mark notes that having signs up on the wall to show students that the school and the classroom are a safe place is a great way to start enforcing the use of respectful and positive language. He mentions “[having] a visible symbol on the wall everyday is a reminder of the expectations of the space” he also goes on to say,

I would say no put downs, respectful listening, and I think that is a big one because it is just learning to listen to things you disagree with…it is also a place where it is okay to make mistakes and learn from them as well.

With his extensive experience in this profession Mark has been able to create an inclusive space for his students and an environment where his students feel safe. In relation to this, Penelope uses similar strategies to ensure her students are using the proper language. Penelope states “it is making sure that you’re differentiating and it’s also the language that you’re using in class. I try and stay away from pronouns and try not to separate kids by their gender”. This goes to say that language is an important factor in these participants’ inclusive classrooms. Giving students the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and correct them appropriately will ensure that respectful language is used.

Language is a first step in creating a safe environment for students, but the next is creating discussion around acceptance and diversity. Mark identifies that having discussions around LGBTQ people is important. He mentioned,
When you’re talking about LGBTQ issues, you’re not talking about the other, you’re talking about humanity and history. Trans people aren’t new, transgender people are found in every culture throughout history and we are talking about our own community. Mark shares his feelings about how crucial it is to have these conversations within the classroom. Penelope shares similar values when discussing LGBTQ issues with her students. Penelope shared her experiences stating,

We started to talk about transgender issues and people, what does it mean and how we are fluid in our gender identity, and the kids really open up to it. I always ask my students if they feel comfortable discussing these topics, and they are always eager to learn. I try and use situations that are as real for them as possible and I try and make it real for their lives so its not something fake…we have these discussions around gender identity because I want [my students] to be informed and know everything they need to be a good global citizen when they are an adult.

Penelope shared ways in which she has discussed topics around gender and gender identity with her students, while Christina integrates it within various subject areas to normalize these issues. Christina discusses the importance of normalizing LGBTQ issues with her students. She shared,

I started by asking kids to introduce themselves and shared their preferred pronoun to get into that idea of why it would be important and how that would make someone feel more included. So I think that it is important to remind students about your expectations, but your expectations shouldn’t be different around these conversations than they are about any other conversations in the classroom.

Christina says this as a way to normalize topics around gender and gender identity and mentioned that it is a seamless way so that students do not even notice it and it just becomes part
of their learning experience. Similar to Christina, Penelope shared the experiences with her students that normalized topics around LGBTQ. Penelope revealed that she does not inform parents when she is teaching LGBTQ issues or topics due to the fact that it is part of the curriculum, just like math, social studies, and language. On the other hand, Mark mentioned having LGBT issues and topics out there everyday as opposed to giving one lesson or unit. Thus creating a normal environment for this topic to be discussed. Penelope, Christina and Mark all created an environment that normalizes LGBTQ issues both within the classroom, but also within their school community, and students feel safe to talk about their experiences and share their thoughts.

Egale Canada and their Every Teacher Project support Mark, Christina and Penelope in their claim of addressing language in and outside the classroom, as it is an important step towards creating a safe and healthy environment for all students (Taylor et al., 2015). It also supports the idea of creating class discussion that students can relate to or reflect on, but also normalizing LGBTQ topics for students, as it is present and has been present in our communities for many years now.

4.3 In Relation to LGBTQ Topics, Educators Realize That There are Various Resources and Support Systems That Give Them the Opportunity and Provides Them With a Willingness to Teach

Educators today are heavily supported by a variety of resources and support systems within the school and outside of the school community, especially around topics pertaining to LGBTQ. These participants expressed their experiences in regards to being supported by a variety of factors. More specifically, participants highlighted in-school support systems that allow them to do this work safely, resources that go beyond school capabilities and supports
through relationships that have been built with other people. They all agree that without these factors put in place, they would not be where they are at today and are thankful for the resources made available to them as educators.

4.3.1 Participants stated that there are a variety of support systems that allow them to initiate classroom discussions pertaining to LGBTQ topics

All participants indicated that in-school supports have been beneficial for them as educators and it gave them the opportunity to teach what they want in a safe and accepting environment. One word that was said by all participants was that the curriculum allows for flexibility in their teaching. Mark mentioned that “it takes the heat off and allows the teacher to answer the question… and it opens the discussion and makes it possible for teachers to safely, authentically answer the questions the children are asking”. Mark gave several examples when explaining the conversations he had with his students, and the questions they posed during these discussions. Mark also discusses the importance of the equity policy, and how it is an expectation within the TDSB. Penelope shared her insights into this policy by reinforcing the notion that “as long as you follow the curriculum, and you understand the law policies, bill 13, safe and caring schools act and DPMs and all that stuff then you can always defend yourself with the curriculum”. Similar to Penelope and Mark, Christina mentioned,

I know we have an equity policy in the board and in the province that protects educators [in] doing this work and that the health and physical education curriculum gives teachers permission to talk about these issues without fear and it also encourages educators to talk about these issues because it is written very explicitly how some of these conversations can be structured. So I think it’s just more explicit and hopefully people will use that as an opportunity to have some of these discussions.
All participants have expressed their confidence in teaching LGBTQ topics within their classroom knowing they are being supported in their work.

Mark and Penelope shared their involvements within school initiatives such as the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) which allowed for students to talk about sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and work to end homophobia and transphobia. Mark shared his experiences within the GSA at his school and states that “our rule is that there is no expectation to disclose, so that everyone feels safe and respected”. He also shared a personal story of interacting with students who knew someone that came out, or was coming out themselves, and saw the GSA as a safe place to do that if they felt comfortable. He also mentioned “many young people identify in multiple ways and are being supported while they figure out who they are”. In addition to Mark’s statement, Penelope addressed the GSA and had similar remarks stating that the GSA is a safe environment, which allows students to feel comfortable with themselves and feel open to discussing topics they may not elsewhere.

As an extension of the literature review, the Ontario Ministry of Education supports the work of teachers who engage in topics around LGBTQ but also gives them the freedom to teach with an inclusive focus.

4.3.2 Participants stated the diversity in resources permits them to be creative when teaching LGBTQ topics

All participants indicated that using resources both within the school community and outside of the school community allows them to teach LGBTQ topics creatively and integrate these themes in an engaging way. Penelope indicates her versatility when educating her students. She mentioned using a lot of literature, media and online resources to assist in her teaching. Penelope mentioned,
It is so easy to just go and grab a book, and there are a lot of great books out there that you can integrate into any literacy program or any lesson. With the older grades, you can bring in some great websites, for example queer bios, which is a fantastic website that you can go into and there are many people from the past and present who made different types of contributions in all kinds of sectors. From there you can bring in these people to talk to your class, and it is great because your students know the background of the person coming to visit because of the website.

Penelope also stated that media, such as the Emmy awards or television shows like Degrassi and Orange is the New Black address gender identity and sexuality. Penelope shared how great these resources were, as students are exposed to these topics both at school and when they get home. Similarly, Mark expressed how advantageous the school library could be in terms of finding resources. Christina indicates various strategies that have got her students to think about gender and sexuality using songs like True Colours or Williams doll. Christina also mentioned poems as a great way for students to not only show creative expression, but also to analyze them in ways where they see gender or sexuality present. All participants have indicated their experiences using a multitude of resources that are both available to them, or ones that they had to seek out. These resources have given them the opportunity to teach creatively and engage their students in LGBTQ topics.

Much research has supported this notion of resources as a helpful tool to create an inclusive classroom. Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013) have supported activities, movies, and literature to engage students on LGBTQ topics. Dodge and Crutcher (2015) indicated that many LGBTQ youth do not find themselves reflected in the texts they read, so creating a space with a multitude of books will make students feel represented within their classroom community.
Bishop (1990) also believed that all children must have access to book that are reflective of who they are and their culture. This ensures that all students are feeling like they are welcome in their classroom space.

4.3.3 Participants stated the diversity in relationships with others have given them the support to teach LGBTQ topics in their classroom

All participants have indicated the importance of having diverse relationships with others who are part of the school community. Building a relationship with colleagues and administration is key when it comes to supports in teaching LGBTQ topics and issues. Christina mentioned the significance of having administration that is on board with what you are teaching. She expands on this by saying “teachers do not need permission to do this work, but it helps if you have administration supporting you”. Penelope adds to this by stating,

The systems within the TDSB have different departments who can support you, so I would bring the equity department, the Gender-Based Violence [Prevention] Department. People that I knew were working in different culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and looking at them and asking to come support and help you create lessons. It also helps to know that you are supported by the board. It is expected for you to teach it, so you will have that support behind you. It is important to develop a network of professional that you can stay connected with and share ideas.

Christina and Penelope understand the support they have behind them in their teaching journey, and it has comforted them when they come into situations that need to get administrations support. Although building relationships with colleagues and administration is important, constructing relationships with students and their parents is just as crucial. Mark indicated that “some parents have come up to me and shook my hand for doing this kinds of work”, while
Penelope shared that some parents send their children to the school she is at because of the initiatives they have and how happy they are that educators are teaching about gender and gender identity. Mark also adds to this point by mentioning student support in stating that “you hear the language changing in the hallways and kids are starting to police kids saying “you can’t say that” or “that’s not cool”. Christina adds to Penelope’s statement by saying that students within her school have told other students that “its okay that boys wear dresses and wear nail polish”. This demonstrates that having support from parents as well as students makes an educator’s job much easier when teaching LGBTQ issues and topics. Just as networks and connections are important in a teaching career, so is seeking outside resources to assist in one’s own learning. Penelope indicated that there are a variety of professional development opportunities for both new and experienced teachers. She stated,

Especially as a new teacher, you can always get two or three days off and they will pay you for jelly days and you can self-direct your own learning and so you can look for exploration classrooms around these themes and how to integrate these types of subjects into your lessons.

Christina supports the same notion as Penelope,

There are allies all around you. If you aren’t sure where to begin with, start doing some research and collect materials. Our teachers union has produced a lot of really great material. Our provincial teachers union ETFO have a lot of workshops and resources and professional development opportunities. So I think educators need to find a community where they feel supported to do this work and that it’s out there, so it’s just a matter of reaching out.

Both Penelope and Christina mentioned the importance of professional development and how
there are resources available for educators who are willing to expand their knowledge in regards to LGBTQ topics.

According to Reece-Miller (2010) supported the idea that educators and their colleagues, who are supportive of LGBTQ concepts, create a sense of belonging and build a strong school community, thus making it easier for educators to teach this topic within their schools, as the support system is strong and reliable.

4.4 Educators Realize That Their Passion and Willingness to Make Universal Change Proves Commitment and Preparedness to Teaching

Learning is a never-ending process, and participants feel that those who show promise and enthusiasm when teaching are able to make great change in the classroom and school community. All participants have indicated how necessary it is to be passionate about what they do and reflect upon their own learning. Penelope, Mark and Christina have shared their insights into their own teaching practice, and highlighted where their commitment and preparedness to teaching comes from, which derives from various experiences and following through with their values and beliefs.

4.4.1 Participants stated their passion and personal experiences have shaped their preparedness and commitment to teaching LGBTQ

All participants have indicated a passion for teaching and doing the work they do. Their personal experiences have shaped their way of teaching and ensured their students feel safe and welcome in their classroom. Penelope shared her personal experience where her passion for teaching derived from. Penelope mentioned that she had always been an activist and grew up in a family of activists, so it was in her blood. As an activist, she wanted her students to also become little activists who would stand up for what they believed in. Mark discussed his experiences as
“seeing children of different ages in different stages of development”. Mark enjoys being a witness to a child’s development and working with them to figure out their place in society. Christina on the other hand shared her experience as a child growing up with a father who was blind and deaf and a mother who later came out as a lesbian. Christina witnessed a lot of discrimination growing up and that sparked her determination to talk about these issues in the open and address it and work with students who fell into similar situations like her. She stated, “I understood how painful silence can be and the impact of homophobia and wanting to confront that”. Christina, Mark and Penelope all became passionate about teaching LGBTQ because of their own personal experiences. This was not the only reason why they teach these issues, as student experiences were just as important to them. Mark identified that having conversations with children who had family members who identified as LGBTQ was another reason to address these issues in schools and the stigma that comes along with it. He also shared,

I think it is really helpful that children see themselves and see the world around them reflected in what they are learning. It is not a question of if the child might be gay or trans, and therefore they need to have this in the classroom, but that child might already have an uncle that is gay, and this child may have seen gender unconforming behaviour. This child has already expressed an interest in an activity not normally assigned to their gender.

Mark focused a lot of his attention on the students’ experiences and preparing them for things they may see or experience at some point in their life. Penelope adds to this by mentioning her experiences with children and being conscious of who they are and what they identify as. She mentioned, “Teachers need to ensure that the name [the student] wanted to be addressed as is on the report card”. Penelope takes care and shows her passion for teaching this subject by really
getting down to the nitty gritty of all the student’s needs.

Kuvalanka and colleagues (2013) support this notion of a teacher reflecting on your own needs and experiences and then looking at your students and being diverse with their teaching strategies. In this same study, it is proven that educators that teach LGBTQ topics in their classrooms have had an experience that created them to be passionate to teach it in the first place. Bishop (1990) discussed this notion that personal experiences create empathy and educator are more willing to address problems based on their previous experience.

4.4.2 Participants stated that their preparedness and commitment to teaching LGBTQ topics derived from self-reflection and going beyond their comfort zone to further their own knowledge.

Throughout an educator’s career, preparation is key when teaching any topic. In regards to LGBTQ issues and topics, participants indicated it is important for teachers to assess their own teaching and what their students are picking up from these teachings. With this being said, self-reflection contributes to self-growth. Christina indicated reflecting on her own teachings and ensuring that her students are growing intellectually but also find growth within herself.

Christina stated, “I do a lot of self-reflection, so it is very easy to capture students’ understanding about some issues at the beginning of a lesson unit inquiry, and then at the end, so you can measure whether there’s been some growth”. Mark and Penelope also reflected on their own practices to determine how much their students are learning but also how effectively they are teaching LGBTQ issues. Although self-reflection is the first step in assessing their own teaching strategies, expanding their knowledge is also a great way Mark, Penelope and Christina stay prepared teachers. Penelope shared her experiences with developing as a teacher and networking to learn more. Penelope revealed,

I try and get involved, I consider myself a learner all the time, so for me I try and get
involved in communities that I am representing. I was very much involved in the LGBTQ community. What I mean is that I wanted to learn more about the community…I created a network of learners and I spoke to experts.

Penelope’s urge to know more has derived from her interest and experiences with the LGBTQ community. Similarly, Christina shared her experience on expanding her knowledge about the LGBTQ community. She reflected “I approach any topic like I approach any new topic which is by gathering resources, reaching out to allies, looking for guest speakers or looking for resources to support me in my classroom”. Christina showed her preparedness by going beyond her own knowledge and seeking more assistance to ensure her students are learning accurately. She addressed this by using an inquiry approach in situations where she was unable to find resources.

As previously mentioned, teachers and students are co-learners and support one another in learning something new. Christina claimed that “you don’t have to know all the answers all the time”, and that there are resources out there to help you find those answers. Lastly, Christina mentioned that not knowing something might give an educator a feeling of uneasiness and push them out of their comfort zone. Christina revealed that it is important to open yourself up as a teacher to new things, whether they make you feel comfortable or not, as it expands your knowledge and puts things into perspective for you as an educator. Many teachers are put in situations where they do not feel comfortable teaching something, but there are ways and support systems that assist with helping educators feel comfortable in their teaching journey.

Stewart and Tittsworth (2009) as well as Fletcher and Russell (2001) address teacher discomfort in teaching subject areas they are not familiar with. On the other hand, Egale has supported educators in giving them the tools and resources to support their own learning and also the learning of their students. They promote learning through research
by providing them with information kits and step-by-step procedures, which allows teachers to feel comfortable in their classrooms.

**4.4.3 Participants stated that their preparedness to teaching LGBTQ topics originated from their commitment to inclusivity by addressing issues and remaining current**

Educators who are following through with their own personal values show commitment towards their students. Those who teach with a purpose and allow their students to learn from their mistakes show promise and validity in their teaching. Mark demonstrated commitment to his teaching practice by intervening on situations where he felt students were being inappropriate. He reflected,

I once heard a child say “that’s so gay” in the schoolyard, I would sit down and talk with the child and I’ll precisely talk about what’s gay about it, if it’s not about two people of the same sex or gender who are connected romantically or sexually then that’s not gay at all. It has nothing to do with being gay. I also point out that these remarks can be extremely hurtful. It is a question of contextualizing it and helping children to understand that these slurs are harmful and socially justice inappropriate as any other.

Mark identified that students may not always know the meaning of what they are saying, and that intervention is key so that students are not inappropriately using the slur again. Christina also has similar remarks in regards to a situation that happened to her. She mentioned,

You have to intervene right away, because I think when we don’t confront the comment it has a huge impact, not just on the person for whom the comment was directed at, but the people who also heard that it went unchallenged. It is good to have little sayings that you can pull out of your pocket really quickly like “put downs are not welcome here” or “we all deserve respect”, “I don’t like the way you are using that word, it sounds like you’re
using it as a put down and I find it offensive” and I think by responding to that behaviour you send a message to the victim that you’re an ally and you send a message to the bystanders that that behaviour will not be tolerated.

Christina has much experience in addressing problems and situations of discrimination, that she knows having sayings can be an effective tool to send a message to a student who is being inappropriate. Penelope had a similar response saying, “You can’t walk by and pretend you didn’t hear it”. All three participants approach similar situations in very different ways, but are sharing the same message. Addressing problems within the school environment are important, for teachers to be allies. Christina reflected on what really mattered for teacher education in terms of addressing issues that may arise. Christina noted,

Teachers need to have a really good understanding of how much power they have in the classroom. Teachers need to be willing to engage in conversations around privileges and power, and really be honest about how our schools are failing many of our students. We as educators need to be responsible to those students and make sure they feel successful. Christina addressed that the lack of conversation within the classroom was a large issue in the school system today and that educators need to remain current and focus on problems their students are having in order to make these students feel and be successful in their learning experience. In terms of remaining current, Penelope suggests that as an educator doing social justice work, it is important to remain current, and also knowing the policies that are set in place. This will guarantee that the students are learning about the day and age they live in, but also knowing that protects educators in this work. Through teacher commitment, students will be successful in their learning, but also educators will be successful in teaching them.

The Every Teacher Project supports educators in combatting problems that come up with
students. This project comes up with strategies that ensure teachers are dealing with situations effectively and creating a safe environment for their students.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my research findings, which I sorted into four main themes and sub-themes as well. Through my first theme, challenges that teachers encounter and their responses to these challenges, I found that teachers emphasized evaluating their own discomforts and finding resources that assist them in feeling more confident when addressing LGBTQ issues, but also remaining positive in situations of negativity. Through my second theme, participants each forefronted the importance of using various strategies and being experimental with these approaches. I found that with various resources that come from several outlets, and in turn engaged students in a positive way but also informed their own teaching practice as well. With my third theme, teachers expressed the in-school and community support systems that encouraged them to continue in this work. I found that these participants felt supported by their colleagues, administration and had some parent and students support. A large finding was that although teachers were knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues, they wanted to seek out more opportunities to learn. My fourth theme looked at the commitment and preparedness educators have when addressing LGBTQ issues and topics. I found that much of their feelings towards social justice issues derived from their own personal experiences or experiences they had with students. Their commitment and preparedness are also demonstrated by intervening when necessary and being willing to take risks. With all aspects of social justice, more specifically LGBTQ issues, remaining real and being willing to expand one’s knowledge beyond limits is key. In Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of my research study and my recommendations for the educational community.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter/ Overview

In this chapter I discuss the implications of my research study. I begin by providing an overview of the key findings of my research and their significance. I discuss the broad implications of these findings for the educational community as well as the implications for me as a teacher and as a researcher. I make recommendations for policy and practice, including various stakeholders in the educational community (e.g. teachers, administrators, school boards, professional development and teacher education). Next, I identify important areas of further research. Finally, I conclude by summarizing my findings and speaking to the significance.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

I organized my key findings in four main themes, my first theme is the various challenges that participants encounter in their work which involves misunderstanding and judgment within both their school and home communities. All three participants mentioned the challenges they have had to face from parents, students as well as staff. They spoke about the misunderstanding and stigma around LGBTQ youth and the challenge that comes with making others understand the importance of implementing these initiatives in the classroom and school-wide. They also spoke about the variety of school and community engagements that they used in order to educate their students about LGBTQ themes. All three participants emphasized lifelong learning in that is important to reflect on their practice in order to teach LGBTQ themes effectively. They also discussed the multitude of resources and support systems that are available to educators, which provides them with a willingness to teach. They highlighted the importance of building relationships with those who think like mindedly and even seeking out resources that go beyond the school community, which allows them to be flexible in their teaching. Lastly, all participants
indicated that their passion and willingness for teaching LGBTQ themes allows for them to make
universal change, which derived from personal experiences. These personal experiences have
shaped their preparedness and commitment to teaching.

Participants each foregrounded the significance of teacher identity in their approach to
LGBTQ inclusive education. Christina discussed her motivation behind teaching LGBTQ themes
and how it was important for her to teach others about being inclusive and ensuring all her
students felt safe. Penelope and Mark discussed their identities and how it is critical for students
to be exposed to different family structures, but also the importance of children being familiar
with themselves and knowing who they are as individuals and appreciating uniqueness and
identities. All participants identified the challenges that come along with talking about people,
who identify as LGBTQ and that although parents, students and even colleagues may prove
judgment, there are a variety of resources and supports that allow for teachers to do this work
and it gives them the flexibility to teach it with comfortableness and confidence.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications of my research findings. I begin by discussing the broad
implications of my research findings for the educational community (as a whole). Next, I discuss
the implications of my findings for me both as a teacher and as a researcher.

5.2.1 The education community

The literature on LGBTQ themes, as well as my participants’ experiences, has
emphasized the recommendation to implement school-wide initiatives and efforts. All three
participants spoke to doing this work with passion but have noticed that many educators do not
implement these themes and practices due to fear. As we understand the importance of
inclusiveness, more efforts need to be made and not simply occurring in a classroom or two. In
addition, the implications of my research study includes the large variety of resources and supports that school boards provide for teachers, which gives them practical and effective strategies and resources that can be used in the classroom to implement everyday LGBTQ inclusiveness education.

The research literature also spoke to the fact that students become more engaged and achieve at a higher level when they feel represented in their classroom, or see themselves being reflected through the curriculum. (when the curriculum is relative of their identities and lives). A key component of LGBTQ inclusiveness education is ensuring that students and their identities are being reflected in the classroom. As educators, we want our students to feel comfortable, safe, be successful and to achieve at a high level. Therefore, educators recommend that their students bring in and share all aspects of their identities and experiences so students feel a sense of belonging and will thus provide all students with the best opportunity to succeed academically and socially.

5.2.2 Implications for myself as a teacher and researcher

In this section I identify and discuss the implications for me as a teacher and as a researcher. I have gained deeper understanding of what it is like to be an educator teaching LGBTQ themes in school today. I am aware of the fact that when I do have my own classroom, I understand that I may have students that perhaps identify as LGBTQ and I am aware of the possible push back, and challenges that I may face doing this work. Mark, Penelope and Christina all mentioned the fear surrounding teachers that teach LGBTQ themes in their classroom. They discussed the importance of teaching these themes in schools, and how some educators are not on board with these initiatives. The participants also spoke about having to look beyond their respective schools for support for their LGBTQ inclusive initiatives in terms of
resources, research, strategies, people to talk and to collaborate with, etc. In terms of my own practice, it is critical that I have a strong support system with like-minded people who are committed to being inclusive in their teaching, and people that I can go to for advice, to share ideas with, and to reflect on my own teaching. I am also aware that at my school I may not have access to reflective texts necessary for doing this work, so it is my responsibility to advocate for these necessary resources. It is also my responsibility to search for the necessary resources on my own as I know hoe beneficial and important it is for students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in the texts they are given. Through my research, I have learned about the importance of being inclusive in my teaching and ensuring that all my students feel welcome and safe both inside my classroom and with the school community.

What I have learned will impact my own classroom practice. In the classroom, I always make it my priority to get to know my students in terms of who they are as individuals, their home life, their interests, etc. In terms of my own practice, it is crucial for my to ensure that my students are able to bring in and express their own identities in the classroom, so this will be something that I will continue to do through my teaching. I also believe how important it is to create a safe and welcoming environment where my students feel comfortable enough and are encouraged to share who they are, their experiences and to express themselves in whichever way they choose.

What I have learned will also impact my research practice. Mark, Penelope and Christina spoke to the importance of being lifelong learners and how teaching is an ongoing process. As an educator, I understand the importance of research and I will continue to do my own research in order to find more strategies and ways that I can effectively implement LGBTQ themes into my own classroom. I believe it is a matter of being open and staying committed to doing this work,
which requires me to stay updated and to continue to find ways to improve and evolve in my teaching practice. Therefore continuing to do my own research will help with this.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to create transformative change in the education system as a whole, changes must be made at all levels.

5.3.1 Faculties of education

- It is important that teacher candidates be taught the importance of creating a safe and inclusive classroom by continuing to include and have discussions around those of various family structures, or who identify as LGBTQ.
- A mandatory one-year anti-discrimination course that critically analyzes issues of the stigma around LGBTQ youth, the importance of recognizing different families and strategies to give teacher candidates the confidence to teach these topics.
- It is important that teacher candidates are taught how to critically engage their students in conversations around LGBTQ themes and the importance of recognizing that they are very much prevalent in our culture and society.
- It is critical that the admissions process of teacher education programs makes an effort to be diverse in terms of the applicants chosen. This means working to have a diverse group of teacher candidates. In addition, the admission process can also involve asking applicants why they think addressing LGBTQ themes in the classroom is important as well as how they would address the challenges of discrimination in their own classroom.
5.3.2 Schools

- It is essential that schools hire staff (teachers, administration, support staff, etc.) that are diverse and reflective of the students within them.

- It is critical that LGBTQ inclusiveness and themes are discussed and represented through in-class and through a school-wide and board-wide approach. LGBTQ themes should be present in every classroom.

- It is critical that schools hold their staff accountable for incorporating LGBTQ education and equity work as this would result in school-wide approaches. As the leader of the school, the principal would be responsible for ensuring and outlining necessary guidelines in terms of what issues should be discussed and taught in classrooms regarding themes around LGBTQ. The principal must be clear in terms of what is expected and the consequences for those who are not doing this work. In addition, the principal should be meeting with teachers regularly, individually and collectively, to find out from the educators themselves what they are teaching and discussing in terms of LGBTQ themes, and some challenges that may have arisen within the classroom so they can deal with it appropriately. Regular staff meetings are important not only because they allow for the principal to have an idea of how the teachers are implementing LGBTQ themes in their classrooms, but they also allow teachers to share ideas, lessons and strategies.

5.3.3 Teachers

- Learning about your students’ identities, cultures, families, experiences, etc. and using this knowledge to inform your teaching practice (in terms of decision-making, classroom management strategies, the curriculum and instructional approach) will make a difference in the lives of your students and their achievement.
- It is important for teachers to create a variety of opportunities for their students to authentically learn about and engage in their own identities in the classroom. This could perhaps include having students write their own autobiographies and sharing with the class, allowing students to research and discuss their own experiences, and reading books that reflect the identities of the students in the classroom.

- Ensuring that curriculum and classroom materials are reflective of students’ identities is critical to authentically implementing LGBTQ themes and inclusiveness.

- It is essential that teachers do not avoid discussion around LGBTQ themes and engaging their students in critical conversations about identity and acceptance.

- Participating in regular professional development opportunities will assist teachers in learning how to implement LGBTQ themes in their everyday classroom instruction.

- Teachers who regularly reflect on their own instruction and teaching practice are more likely to be culturally relevant and responsive as they are constantly checking themselves and what they are teaching.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

In this section I outline areas of further research based on my research findings and what I have learned. One area for further research is a focus on providing specific strategies for addressing LGBTQ themes in classroom instruction. Through my exploration of related literature, I found that there is a lack of research providing specific lessons about how to teach with an LGBTQ inclusive perspective, but also how to address challenges within the school system. Although I did learn about specific strategies and approaches from my participants, I do believe that these two areas should be researched further. All three participants spoke to challenges they faced while teaching LGBTQ themes in their classroom in terms of parents,
other teachers and administration. As a result, I believe that another area for further research is a focus on providing strategies and solutions for teachers who are challenged and encounter conflict for doing this important work.

All three participants showed a true commitment to teaching LGBTQ inclusive education. For various reasons, my participants have been motivated to implement LGBTQ themes in their classroom instruction. Christina spoke to how her experience growing up inspired and informed her practice as an educator. Mark and Penelope both spoke to their experiences and why teaching LGBTQ inclusive education was important. As a result, I believe that further research should look at school-wide approaches and examine all aspects in order to provide strategies for schools to shift from an individual teacher/classroom LGBTQ inclusive education to a school-wide one.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research study has helped me to better conceptualize LGBTQ education and what it encompasses, such as its aim to eliminate the stigma around those who identify as LGBTQ. Through my exploration of the research literature and my interviews with Mark, Penelope and Christina, I have become more aware of the challenges that I will probably encounter doing this work. Some challenges more serious and difficult than others, such as encountering backlash from parents, other teachers and administration, finally, this research study has further cemented for me the importance of addressing LGBTQ inclusive education. I understand how students’ identities can impact their education experiences positively and/or negatively. Specifically, students who identify as LGBTQ feel like they do not belong if they do not feel reflected and represented in the texts they read or through the classroom environment. These challenges can be addressed through the implementation of LGBTQ inclusive education in terms of improvements
in areas of teacher and administration diversity, curriculum and materials that reflect all students and are accountable for all acts of discrimination. This study, particularly the research process and the insight from my participants, has inspired me to go out and do this important work.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: March 29, 2016

Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Nicole Rodrigues 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 a sample of K-8 teachers are integrating LGBTQ advocacy into their classroom. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have taught the topic of LGBTQ in their classroom and the strategies they have used. 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 Angela MacDonald. 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,

Nicole Rodrigues
Email: nicoleann.rodrigues@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Angela MacDonald
Contact Info: 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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Nicole Rodrigues 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 Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how a sample of teachers is integrating LGBTQ themes into their classrooms. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on LGBTQ inclusivity. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A – Background Information

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. What grades have you previously taught?/currently are teaching?
3. What is the demographic of the classroom? (ethnoculturally)
4. What was your degree in?
5. What aspects of teaching do you enjoy? Which aspects do you find challenging in relation to teaching about LGBTQ rights/advocacy?

Section B – Perspectives Beliefs

1. How would you describe teaching LGBTQ rights to someone who has never taught it before?
2. Why do you believe that teaching/advocating for LGBTQ students is important?
   a) What benefits does it have and why?
3. In what ways have you/can you teach about LGBTQ in all subject areas?
4. From your observations and interactions with other teachers, do you believe that LGBTQ themes and topics are represented in every classroom? Why or why not?

5. Do you believe that it is important to have conversations with parents about what you are teaching in your class in relation to LGBTQ topics?

6. How do you develop your commitment and preparedness for teaching this topic?

7. Do you believe that teaching about LGBTQ can have better long-term effects on students? Why?

**Section C – Teacher Practices**

1. What range of instructional strategies and approaches are teachers using to integrate the topic of LGBTQ in their teachings?

2. How do you integrate LGBTQ topics into your everyday teaching?

3. Can you give me some examples of how you integrated topics of LGBTQ into your teaching subjects?
   a) What were your learning goals for the lesson?
   b) What outcomes did you observe from your students?
   c) What kinds of outside resources did you use to teach your lesson?

4. Have you always talked about/taught LGBTQ topics or anything around that? Or have you slowly integrated into addressing this topic?

5. How did you introduce LGBTQ topics in your class? What tools did you use? Did you set rules? (in terms of language) If so, what are they?

6. What do you think the new health and physical education curriculum can provide for students that the old documents/policies could not?

7. What strategies do you feel are effective for teaching about LGBTQ and why?
8. How do you assess your students after educating them about topics around LGBTQ?

9. What matters for teacher education?

Section D – Supports and Challenges

1. What kinds of challenges do you encounter when educating your students about LGBTQ?

2. How do you respond to the challenges you face, and why?

Section E – Next Steps

1. How do you see the new curriculum being used in the future?

2. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are interested in teaching/educating their students on LGBTQ rights?

Thank you for your time and participation in this research study.