What it Takes for Literature to Impact Student Attitudes

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Abstract:

In this capstone, I investigate how anti-bias education can be used to teach LGBT-inclusive curricula and examine the degree to which classroom teachers incorporate anti-bias scholarship into their practice when teaching an LGBT inclusive curricula. I identify seven key practices that educators should employ in order to teach an LGBT-inclusive anti-bias curriculum. Teachers should establish a classroom culture that empowers queer students, target instruction to the dual challenges of homophobia and disrupted psychological development, integrate intersectional LGBT perspectives throughout a yearlong curriculum, show students how prejudiced norms are constructed and how they impact students’ worldview, develop students’ capacity to analyze social systems for prejudice, and facilitate student action against prejudiced systems, while leaving students the freedom to construct their own knowledge. I identify the gaps between this vision of LGBT-inclusive anti-bias education and the classroom reality of five teachers, and conclude with recommendations for how third party resources could help close the gaps I identify.

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Introduction

A few months ago, an old friend of mine reached out to me about a nonprofit he’d just started called Hope in a Box. We had collaborated on projects related to education and rurality before, so he thought the organization’s work, donating LGBT inclusive books to rural schools, would be “right up my alley.” It certainly was. Growing up as the “gay kid” in our respective rural schools, Joe and I had both experienced plenty of discrimination and ostracism. Both of us became avid readers, turning to Young Adult literature, where there is no shortage of characters
who navigate complicated identities and social dynamics. Neither of us, though, ever came across the wealth of young adult novels featuring queer characters, which would have provided a more explicit mirror for our own experiences.

Hope in Box aims to help give more queer students access to these mirrors, but with another goal in mind. We hope that straight students will also read the books we donate, and through reading about LGBT characters, build empathy toward the queer people in their own lives. Along with giving queer students a place to turn when they experience it, LGBT-inclusive books can work against homophobia at its source. (Hope in a Box, 2018)

This sounds simple, right? Donate a few books with LGBT characters and end homophobia? Not quite. It turned out that Joe and I had inadvertently taken on a much more complicated project than either of us expected. The teachers who received our initial donations were excited by the possibilities the books opened up, but the donations brought challenges too. Many teachers expressed nervousness about teaching LGBT content. Would students react with homophobia and juvenile prejudice? If they didn’t, should a teacher just skirt the queer themes altogether? What would sensitive, productive engagement with LGBT themes even look like? In their feedback, teachers asked for guidance on instructional strategies that could bring out the books’ full potential while limiting any negative consequences.

With this capstone I hope to gain insight on this phenomenon. By synthesizing scholarly research on anti-bias education, I answer the question of how findings from anti-bias education research can be applied to an LGBT inclusive-curricula and identify the following key practices: Establish a classroom culture that empowers queer students, target instruction to the dual challenges of homophobia and disrupted psychological development, integrate intersectional
LGBT perspectives throughout a yearlong curriculum, show students how prejudiced norms are constructed and how they impact students’ worldview, develop students’ capacity to analyze social systems for prejudice, and facilitate student action against prejudiced systems, while leaving students the freedom to construct their own knowledge. By analyzing teacher experiences with LGBT inclusive curricula and the resources which aim to improve such experiences, I identify the gaps between the knowledge known to scholars and the knowledge put into practice by teachers. Finally, I suggest strategies for groups like the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) which work to bridge those gaps.

**Literature review**

*Dual Struggles -- Homophobia and Queer Students’ Mental Health*

LGBT students face the related but distinct problems of homophobia and mental health difficulties. (Almeida et. al., 2009) (Pascoe, 2011) These issues pose serious and harmful challenges to LGBT students and combating them should be an important goal for educators and school leaders. Large-scale studies of homophobia provide insight into the scope and impact of this problem. One such book, Hatred in the Hallways, published by the Human Rights Watch, uses anecdotes from schools around the country to paint a picture of homophobia in schools. Data from a study conducted in Des Moines, Iowa suggests that students there hear anti-gay comments every seven minutes and that teachers intervene three percent of the time. As the title suggests, one of its key themes is that a great deal of homophobia occurs outside of classrooms, in places like school hallways, cafeterias, and other less structured spaces. (Bochenek, M., & Brown, A. W., 2001)
While the book suggests that most high schools are filled with rampant homophobia, it also identifies the pattern that homophobia against individual students tends to follow. Harassment usually begins with verbal and nonphysical aggression such as students yelling slurs and making hateful comments. Then, more students join in the harassment creating a hostile school climate for the targeted student. Students reported that large-scale discrimination of this type created significant mental health problems and sometimes led them to drop out of school or transfer. (Bochenek, M., & Brown, A. W., 2001)

Homophobia is a well-documented feature of high schools and middle schools. But while many studies investigate how it fits into sociological and anthropological systems operating in middle and high schools, few honor the complexity of these systems, and almost none center the lived experiences of students. (Plummer, 2016) (Peter and Taylor 2015) However, CJ Pascoe’s book, *Dude, You’re a Fag, Masculinity and Sexuality in High School, 2011*, is the exception. Pascoe spent a year and a half in a large public high school that was in large part demographically representative of the United States and conducted formal interviews and observation. She offers a rigorously researched and in-depth portrait of adolescent homophobia. (Pascoe, 2011)

The key theme of Pascoe’s book is that understanding high school homophobia as simply as anti-gay bias is too simplistic. Homophobia functions as two distinct but overlapping types of discrimination: one which polices sexual orientation and one which polices gender conformity. This discrimination plays out differently along lines of race and gender. Pascoe and other researchers have noted that acts of homophobia are most commonly perpetrated by male students, with other male students as the most common target. Further, homophobic incidents are
more common among white students. (Fisher and Komosa-Hawkins, 2013) (Kimmel, 2004)
However, constructing homophobia as a white male issue obscures its nuance and does a
disservice to the non-white, and non-male students who experience it. (Pascoe, 2011)

Pascoe shows a version of homophobia that is rooted in the hatred and
subjugation of femininity. This finding is not unique to her work (O’Neil et al, 1986) Young men
use homophobic put-downs to construct, defend, and reinforce their own masculine identity by
challenging the masculinity of other boys. This is a complex process, because it involves both
insult trading between boys who are understood to be straight, along with attacks against boys
who are perceived as gay. Put-downs that are framed in homophobic language are often directed
at feminine behavior, with “gay” and other slurs being synonyms for “un-masculine.” This does
not mean that homophobia is unlinked from anti-gay discrimination. Same-sax attraction is
viewed as a deeply un-masculine thing. This comes in part from the misogynistic view of women
as passive objects in sexual situations: the boys Pascoe interviewed saw men as sexually
dominant, so therefore, in their eyes, desiring sex with a man is to put oneself in a passive, sexual
role. In this way, homophobia is part of a larger male struggle for dominance, in which boys
constantly seek to position themselves as dominant by proving their masculinity. They do this by
positioning other boys as submissive through accusations of femininity and homosexuality.
(Pascoe, 2011)

Male jockeying for dominance invokes homophobia differently based on the
identities of those involved, specifically along lines of race and gender. While gender policing in
the service of male dominance is the defining theme, it plays out differently depending on the
identity of the person perpetrating the harassment and that of the person who it is perpetrated
against. For example, some studies show lower rates of homophobic comments among black youth (Bochenek and Brown 2001) (Fisher and Komosa-Hawkins, 2013); however, for some black boys, “white” takes the role of “gay” as a negative synonym for femininity. Black boys also construct and defend their masculinity by attacking each other for perceived femininity, but with a different vernacular. (Pascoe, 2011)

Similarly, adolescent girls who break with stereotypical gender roles face varying degrees of discriminations depending on the degree to which their subversion challenges male dominance. Girls who claim certain masculine traits such as athleticism or boisterousness are often popular and well liked, even some who identify as lesbian. However, girls who “politicize” their gender by adopting male styles of dress along with masculine behavioral traits tended to draw homophobic remarks. When girls used gender subversion to challenge boys’ dominance in social situations, taunts often became violent threats. (Pascoe, 2011)

A better grasp of this understanding of homophobia would help educators better serve their LGBT students. As I’ll discuss in my findings, the teachers I interviewed shared that their colleagues considered homophobia to be not much of a problem, or simply a form of immaturity. An understanding of the important role homophobia plays in adolescents’ construction of masculinity, the prevalence of homophobia, and the damage it causes could help teachers take this problem more seriously and help them adapt their practice to be more responsive to it. Groups like GLSEN, Teaching Tolerance, and PBS learning media are well poised to bridge this gap, and I’ll later propose several methods by which they could do so. Such knowledge would empower teachers to help combat the corrosive effects of homophobia and the harm it causes LGBT students.
The deeply embedded cultural problem of homophobia is extremely harmful to LGBT students and causes them to experience unique social, emotional, and developmental difficulties. Many of the emotional issues faced by LGBT youth are directly attributable to discrimination by peers. This has a demonstrably negative impact on psychological outcomes for LGBT youth, as demonstrated by a meta study showing that they experience depression and suicidal ideation at much higher rates than their heterosexual peers. (Almeida et. al., 2009)

The harm inflicted on LGBT students’ mental health affects their identity development, a process which begins very early in life. Identity development begins with “self-concept” which refers to a person’s thoughts and attitudes about themself. Children begin forming their self-concept as toddlers. In this initial stage they do so “in terms of discrete, observable characteristics” like eye and hair color and aspirational abilities, like knowing their ABCs. In elementary school, children begin to participate in “social comparison,” in which they compare themselves to the characteristics, behaviors, and possessions of their peers. Rather than considering themselves good at what they want to be good at, as the toddler does, children by the end of elementary school consider themselves good at that at which they perform better than their peers. (Siegler et. al, 2003)

When children enter adolescence, the ways in which they form self concept changes due to their ability to think abstractly. This allows adolescents to “conceive of themselves in terms of abstract characteristics that encompass a wide variety of concrete traits and behaviors.” These could be extraversion, intelligence, or an LGBT identity. Often, adolescents conceive of themselves in terms of “multiple selves,” such as the self they are with their family and with their friends. Feelings of uncertainty and internal conflict may arise at their inability to reconcile these
selves with each other. Adolescents’ mode of thinking about themselves can be characterized by the “personal fable” in which adolescents exaggerate the uniqueness of certain traits. This often results in adolescents developing a preoccupation with what others think of them. This can be especially difficult for LGBT students due to prejudice against that particular identity. (Bilodeau, 2005) As adolescents progress in development they begin to fixate on contradictions in the traits and behaviors by which they define themselves. As they enter late adolescence, individuals begin to integrate their seemingly discordant traits and worry less about others’ perceptions of them. Their focus shifts from what people think they did, to who they are going to become. (Siegler et. al, 2003)

While self-concept refers to a person’s thoughts and attitudes about themselves, self-esteem refers to their “subjective evaluation” of themselves, whereas a person with “high self-esteem” feels good about themselves and someone with “low self-esteem” thinks poorly of themselves. Approval and support from others plays an important role in children’s self-esteem. Early on in childhood, self-esteem is derived mostly from parental approval, but as children grow older, its source shifts to peers. “Adolescent self-esteem is also affected by the standards and values of important people and cultural groups in their lives.” Because middle schools and high schools function as cultural institutions, and ones with homophobia as a prominent feature, LGBT adolescents often experience low self-esteem. (Siegler et. al, 2003) (Kosciw et al, 2013)

Identity refers to how individuals define themselves. At adolescence, children begin to cultivate multiple, distinctive identities. As identity develops, adolescents can be in one of four identity statuses: “Identity achievement” in which “the individual has achieved a coherent and consolidated identity based on personal decisions.” “Identity foreclosure” in which “the
individual has not engaged in any identity formation.” “Moratorium” in which “the individual is exploring occupational and ideological choices”. And finally, “Identity diffusion” in which the individual does not have firm commitments regarding identity and is not making progress toward developing them.” Family and culture exert a powerful force on children’s conception of their own identity. For example, children of parents with a warm parenting style are less likely to experience an identity crisis, and until recent social changes took hold, girls tended to define their identity in terms of marriage and children instead of careers. (Siegler et. al, 2003) (Waterman, 1999)

Sexual minority youth tend to experience their sexual orientation as a distinctive identity category. (Bilodeau, 2005) As early as childhood, sexual-minority youth report feeling “different” and in some cases challenge gender stereotypes that are applied to them. The initial step of the development of a sexual minority identity is “first-recognition,” when an adolescent first identifies their attraction to members of the same sex. This is followed by “test and exploration” in which an individual engages in same-sex sexual activity and then begins to feel alienated from the identity category of heterosexuality. Eventually this leads to “identity acceptance” and then “disclosure.” When individuals do disclose their sexual identity and “come out,” they are sometimes met with hostility by peers and family. (Siegler et. al, 2003) This contributes to a number of psychological challenges, such as the increased rates of depression and suicidal ideation identified in the Almeida paper. (Almeida et. al., 2009)

Knowledge of the psychological concepts and processes that underpin the challenges LGBT students face could help teachers serve those students more effectively. As I’ll discuss in my findings sections, the teachers I interviewed did not express familiarity with the
psychological dimensions of the challenges LGBT students face. Improvements to the resources on LGBT-inclusive teaching could help teachers incorporate this knowledge into their practice and better serve their LGBT students.

The role of curriculum and literature

LGBT-inclusive books and curriculum is one method teachers could use to effectively address the root psychological issues affecting LGBT students. Books featuring LGBT characters can have a powerful, positive effect on queer students’ identity development, especially if these books are thoughtfully integrated into classrooms using anti-bias curriculum and anti-oppressive pedagogy. (Blackburn and Buckley, 2005) Research also suggests that exposure to positive, authentic representations of an identity can help people who share that identity feel more positively about themselves. (Ward, 2004) (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011) The psychological concept of narrative identity even suggests that hearing and telling stories is a key process in identity formation. (Hammack, 2008) There is also a positive impact on students who aren't a part of the identity group represented. Exposure to diverse identities, including LGBT ones, through books and other media has been shown to help people build empathy toward out-groups. (Blackburn and Schultz, 2008)

Novels are an excellent way to facilitate this type of representation. Some studies have specifically examined the impact of books on individual attitudes and found that reading a fictional account of a member of a different identity group can help people reduce prejudice and build empathy toward a group. (Mirra, 2018) Similarly, reading about characters with whom they empathize can help people feel more affirmed and supported in their own identity. (Ward, 2004)
(Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011) Finally, there is a practical piece, ELA classrooms still primarily use books as their medium of instruction, so a guide on LGBT anti-bias pedagogy will be most effective when it is directed at the type of materials teachers are already using.

In the past decade a groundswell of high-quality young adult literature featuring queer characters has been published. (Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan, 2016) Books like Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe, The Miseducation of Cameron Post, For Sizakele, Will Grayson Will Grayson, and Under the Udala Trees could all play an important role in supporting queer students and changing the attitudes of straight ones. While the teachers I interviewed for this project aren’t yet using books like these within an anti-bias framework, there is extensive scholarly literature that could help them in such an endeavor. What’s needed are improved resources to bridge this knowledge gap.

Anti-bias education

Anti-bias education and anti-oppressive pedagogy is an expansive if somewhat disconnected field; however, many scholars endorse a five dimensional framework, first proposed by James A Banks. (Banks, 1995) (Gay, 2010) (Mertens, 2014) (Ladson-Billings, 1998) (Howard, 2016) (Ovando and Combs, 2018) (Cochran-Smith, 2014) In this framework, each dimension involves distinct but complementary methods of anti-bias education: Content integration, the inclusion of content featuring diverse identities; knowledge construction, instruction on how bias impacts thinking; equity pedagogy, classroom practices to affirm diverse identities; prejudice reduction, instruction that deconstructs students’ biases; and empowering school culture, school policies that support the practices of the previous four dimensions.
Several scholars have suggested strategies for applying these dimensions to LGBT inclusive education. (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013) To effectively apply content integration, teacher need to use examples of diverse people and families across subjects. In the context of LGBT education, teachers could include in math word problems that deal with a family budget, parents of the same gender. Greytak and Kosciw also suggest teaching the persecution of gays and lesbians during holocaust units, discussing Frieda Kahlo’s bisexuality when cover her work in art classes as methods for applying the dimension of content integration into LGBT education. (Banks, 1995) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013)

Knowledge construction, meanwhile, refers to instruction that helps students “identify and understand the cultural biases that shape the way knowledge is constructed.” (Banks, 1995) There are several ways this could function in the context of LGBT inclusive education. Teachers could “challenge the concept that everybody is one of two genders,” in biology class, for example. (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013) The next dimension, equity pedagogy, refers to the teaching methods that teachers employ in their classrooms and how they can marginalize or affirm students. To effectively employ this dimension in the context of LGBT-inclusive education, teachers should avoid grouping students by gender because it can marginalize students who don’t identify with a binary gender. (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013) (Banks, 1995)

The next dimension, prejudice reduction, is similar to knowledge construction, but rather than aiming to simply help students identify the way prejudice impacts their beliefs, prejudice education aims to deconstruct student biases. This type of education can take place either reactively: in response to student prejudice, or proactively: preempting student prejudice. (Banks, 1995) Greytak and Kosciw suggest that teachers educate students about homophobia when
reprimanding them for a homophobic comment as a form of reactive education, and include movies that feature characters who struggle with homophobia as a form of proactive education. Banks final dimension is empowering school culture, which builds on the dimension of equity pedagogy. An empowering school culture for LGBT students would mean that all school policies and practices are LGBT-inclusive. This could include ongoing assessments of school climate, professional development for staff on LGBT issues, and student lead initiatives like Gay-Straight alliances. (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013) (Banks, 1995)

While these “five dimensions of multiculturalism” form the foundation of anti-bias scholarship, they don’t alone prescribe the best methods by which educators should teach an anti-bias curriculum. Kevin K. Kumashiro proposes a “Theory of Anti-bias Pedagogy” that explains in greater depth the specific practices teachers should engage in to combat bias and oppression through their practice. (Kumashiro, 2000) Taken together, Kumashiro’s theory and the five dimensions of multicultural education point to a coherent set of best practices that educators can employ. Teachers should establish a classroom culture that empowers queer students, target instruction to the dual challenges of homophobia and disrupted psychological development, integrate intersectional LGBT perspectives throughout a yearlong curriculum, show students how prejudiced norms are constructed and how they impact students’ worldview, develop students’ capacity to analyze social systems for prejudice, and facilitate student action against prejudiced systems, while leaving students the freedom to construct their own knowledge.

Four approaches to anti-bias education emerge from the work of Kumashiro: education for the other, education about the other, education that is critical of privileging and othering, and education that changes students and society. The final one, education that changes students and
“Education for the other” closely mirrors Banks’ equity pedagogy. (Banks, 1995) It involves conceptualizing schools as harmful spaces for othered students and working against this harm. The two methods by which teachers can do this in the education for the other frame is by creating safe spaces and by teaching with inclusive pedagogies. Specifically, teachers should “incorporate students home cultures into their pedagogies.” For LGBT students, this could include avoiding “masculinist pedagogies” that utilize classroom activities like debates or adapting lessons to students class backgrounds. (Kumashiro, 2000)

While it is an important component of anti-bias education, “education for the other” is not on it’s own a complete strategy. If education for the other were the only approach used it would center “the other” in discussions of oppression, which could suggest that if otherized identities did not exist, then neither would oppression. Further, it would require rigid and artificial constructs of identity. For examples, if a teacher creates a club meant to be a safe space for queer students, it could exclude closeted or questioning students, along with those who identify as straight and cisgendered but eschew gender-conforming behavior. Finally, it would require teachers to diagnose the needs of their students, and in many cases, such as those featured by the Human Rights Watch, discrimination can be invisible. (Bochenek and Brown, 2001) (Kumashiro, 2000)

The strategy of “education about the other” strengthens “education for the other,” when they are employed together. It also aligns closely to Banks’ dimension of multicultural education “content integration” but goes further. “Education about the other” includes two concurrent
strategies for educators. First, educators should provide students with opportunities for thorough and authentic engagement with marginalized identities. Second, educators should spread lessons and units on marginalized identities throughout the year so as to avoid temporally otherizing them. When teaching these lessons, teachers should not aim to teach students a single narrative about an out group, but rather frame the lesson as “disruptive knowledge.” Disruptive knowledge can help demonstrate to students that their prejudiced view of the world is incorrect. The goal here is for students to use the knowledge presented as a catalyst for seeking for additional knowledge, rather than for them to simply accept it as a static and immediate correction to prejudice. (Kumashiro, 2000)

This process of continuing to seek out disruptive knowledge is known as “education that is critical of privileging and othering.” In its ideal form, this approach to anti-bias education should function as a “critique and transformation of hegemonic structures.” The central pillar of this type of education is teaching that the “normal” is both constructed and contested, and involves helping students identify and unlearn constructed, harmful norms. As students continue to seek out and learn disruptive knowledge, they will begin to understand the ways in which norms are socially constructed, deeply flawed, and oppressive. (Kumashiro, 2000)

In order to internalize this understanding, though, students need to take action. Simply teaching students about how oppression functions is not enough. In order to truly facilitate in students a deconstruction of prejudice, teachers should help students become actively involved in laboring against oppressive systems. Teachers require their students to put into action their knowledge of oppressive systems and work to combat them. (Kumashiro, 2000)
Multiple scholars have endorsed Kumashiro’s theory of anti-oppressive education and made several important additions. (Irvine, 2003) (Jean-Marie, et. al., 2009) (Asher, 2007) There is the risk in anti-oppressive education as modeled by Kumashiro for pedagogy to oppress students with the methods by which it aims to combat oppression. (Butin, 2002) Teachers risk imposing their own versions of anti-racism on their students, which could constitute a form of oppression because it limits students’ ability to construct their own knowledge. A constructivist approach the the strategies of anti-oppressive pedagogy, one in which teachers continuously expose their students to material that highlights prejudice and oppression and the harm it causes, could help mitigate this risk. Teachers should help their students engage with this content in such a way that students construct their own understanding of oppression and decide on their own to take action against it. This can be thought of as an “anti-oppressive implementation” of anti-oppressive pedagogy. (Butin, 2002)

Methodology

Through an analysis of scholarly research on anti-bias and LGBT-inclusive education, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and an examination of resources and guidance for educators who teach an LGBT-inclusive curriculum, I investigated the following questions: How can LGBT-inclusive curricula be taught in an anti-bias framework? To what degree do teachers of LGBT-inclusive curricula integrate anti-bias education research into their practice? And, what are the gaps in the resources that aim to help them do so? I conclude by proposing strategies that groups producing such resources could use to improve them.
I interviewed teachers at schools around the U.S. over the phone and in person. These methods of contact allowed me to conveniently contact a geographically diverse sample of interview subjects. I accessed teachers through snowball sampling, beginning with several high school teachers of my Yale classmates and teachers who responded to my posting in the Facebook group “Yale Alumni Educators.” I conducted six interviews in total; however, one concluded quickly after it became clear that the teacher did not have experiences relevant to my research questions, and the recording of another interview was rendered inaccessible due to a corrupted file.

Of the five teachers with whom I conducted full interviews, three were women and two were men. Only one identified as LGBT. I describe my conversations with these interview subjects using pseudonyms in order to give my subjects as much freedom as possible to express their true feelings without fear of repercussion. “Daniel” teaches in a public middle school in an urban city on the east coast and does not identify as LGBT. “Levi” teaches in a public high school in an affluent suburban community on the east coast and does not identify as LGBT. “Alison” teaches in a private, therapeutic high school serving special education students. Her school is located in an urban city in the Midwest, and she identifies as LGBT using the term queer. Mary is colleague of Alison’s and teaches in the same therapeutic high school. She does not identify as LGBT. “Sarah” teaches at a private high school in Manhattan, and does not identify as LGBT.1

I conducted five interviews over the phone and one in person. Interviews lasted about 30 minutes and were semi-structured. A list of interview questions is included in the appendix. I

1 The recording of Sarah’s interview was rendered inaccessible by a corrupted file, so I do not make extensive reference to it in my findings section.
recorded interviews with the iPhone Voice Memos app and with Quicktime. I transcribed interviews using Trint and coded by hand. I coded the data using an inductive approach. I reviewed all of my data and noted patterns and themes that were common across multiple interviews. After establishing categories based these patterns and themes, I coded my transcripts accordingly. I sorted interview subjects comments into the following categories: The impact of school culture, The difficulty of bringing LGBT content into the classroom, Forms of opposition, A focus on LGBT student experience, Limited engagement with psychological concepts, Safe Spaces, and uncategorized. After coding responses in this way, I compared the best practices I identified from the literature to the ways in which teachers described their experiences.

My role in the field was limited by the fact that the majority of my interviews were conducted over the phone. This meant that for most of my interview subjects, our conversation likely felt distant from their lived experience. My identity also shaped my observations, because I experienced high school as an LGBT student and have a very close personal connection with this topic, I was viewing the interview subjects responses through the lens of my own experience.

There were a number of limitations present in my methodology. Some are related to my identity. While I did not tell my interview subjects that I am gay, they may have inferred as much based on my interest in the topic of LGBT-inclusive education. Even without knowledge of my sexual orientation, interview subjects still knew that I cared a great deal about this topic. Therefore, they may have been inclined to over-represent their interest in LGBT-inclusive curricula and the degree to which they engage with it in their classrooms due to a form of social desirability bias. Additionally, conducting interviews over the phone kept me from being able to
see interviewee’s expressions, which limited my ability to observe how they felt about what they were saying. In spite of this limitation, I chose to interview subjects by phone instead of video conference, because all expressed preference this method of contact.

Using a mixed methodology allowed me to compare best practices from the literature to teacher experiences in the classroom, and resources available to teachers. This comparison pointed to a clear path forward for improving LGBT-inclusive anti-bias education.

Findings

*Best Practices for teaching LGBT-inclusive curricula with an anti-bias framework*

Effective anti-bias education must not simply provide students with information, but develop in them a way of engaging with information that they incorporate into their daily lives. (Butin, 2002) (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013) (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014) (Pollock, 2008) There are several reasons for this. Foremost is that individual experience is multi-dimensional (one’s experience isn’t simply “the gay experience” but informed by their many identities). Therefore, it would not be possible for teachers to give their students information about all identity groups. Further, knowledge-based anti-bias instruction relies on the false assumption that knowledge about a group equates to a reduction in bias toward them. (Kumashiro, 2000) Usually, knowledge alone is not enough to engender a change in attitude toward a particular group. For example, students who reported the most prejudiced attitudes toward black people were the fastest to forget the positive information about black people that they were shown. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014) Similarly, even less prejudiced students sometimes categorize stereotype-challenging depictions of out-groups
separately from the out-group, meaning that instead of deconstructing a stereotype of one group, it simply creates an entirely new category. (Kumashiro, 2000)

This is not to diminish the importance of providing information about “the other” or out-groups. Rather to say that the most effective way for educators to teach such information is in the service developing new attitudes of the concept of “the other” and an understanding of how privilege is constructed. Kumashiro puts this well, saying “educators should teach not just about the Other, but also about the processes by which some are Othered while others are normalized.”

Education of this type can be particularly powerful, because it gives ownership to students. For example, instead of attempting to instill the idea that “gay people are just like us,” teachers should instead teach students about the structures in US society that marginalized queer people, such as the enduring dominance of Christianity. Students could then take the analytical tools they learned and apply it to say, the marginalization of black Americans, and analyze on their own how the legacies of slavery continue to impact black experiences in the United States. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013)

While the analytical skills and new ways of thinking that students gain from exposure to the perspectives of others are the goal of anti-bias pedagogy, the perspectives presented matter too. This is because of the types of misinformation that people can possess about “the other.” The first consists of strict definitions of what is “normal,” “typical,” and “accepted.” These norms come to be seen as normative goods, and often people believe that the strict definition they hold is “right.” For example, a student may only be aware of heterosexual sexualities and therefore conceive of them as “normal.” If students were to be confronted with a queer person who challenges this norm, these students would perceive such a person to be “wrong.” The second is
stereotypical information about the “other,” in which people are aware of deviation from the norm, but they ascribe negative stereotypes to these deviations. In the example of an LGBT “other,” this would mean that a person is aware that LGBT people exist, but thinks that all gay men are overly effeminate. When presenting information to correct this misinformation, anti-bias education aims to fill both gaps. The challenge is doing so without creating a blanket experience, for example, allowing students to come away thinking they understand “the gay experience.” Correcting misinformation without falsely universalizing the perspective of out-groups while also developing in students the analytical skills for deconstructing new forms of prejudice they encounter is the central goal of anti-bias education (Kumashiro, 2000).

There are several strategies educators can use to achieve this goal when they are teaching about experiences of people who are otherized. When presenting material about the experiences of a group, teachers should keep two goals in mind. The first goal should be to provide students with the opportunity for deep and authentic engagement with other’s perspective. This could look like reading excerpts from a memoir, watching an interview, and viewing photographs, rather than simply learning biographical facts. Teachers should also take care not to otherize with the timing and frequency with which they present diverse experiences. Rather than have the “black unit” or “the gay unit” it is more effective for teachers to intersperse these perspectives throughout the year, so that students understand them as integral rather than periphery. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014) (Butin, 2002)

In order to best support LGBT students, teachers must think carefully about their audience and should resist conceiving of their students as a monolith of straight people and also should resist teaching only to gay students. By positioning an audience as potential allies and
possible queer people, teacher’s can help their students break down the idea of a single narrative through introspection. (Caroline and Blackburn, 2009) The types of LGBT experiences a teacher chooses to incorporate are important too. First, teachers should select books with intersectional characters and be sure to highlight the ways experiences vary across lines of race, gender, class, and other dimensions. In one study, queer youth of color reported that many books with LGBT characters lacked any meaningful impact on their lives, because they couldn’t connect with the characters. (Crisp and Knezek, 2010) For teachers, it is important not to reduce students to one, singular piece of their identity. Educators should also take care not to reinforce stereotypes about queer people. One way to do this is to portray LGBT people within the context of a larger queer community, which can help students deconstruct the conception of queer people existing as others in a straight world. (Caroline and Blackburn, 2009)

Research on anti-bias education and LGBT-inclusive curricula points to set of seven key strategies that educators should use to teach LGBT-inclusive books with an anti-bias framework. This framework will help support LGBT students’ identity development and combat prejudice among their straight peers.

1. **Establish** a classroom culture that empowers LGBT students and respects their experiences

2. **Utilize** knowledge of adolescent identity development and homophobia to target instruction toward the unique emotional challenges faced by queer students

3. **Integrate** diverse, intersectional, and positive LGBT perspectives into curriculum throughout the school year and across subjects
4. **Show** how norms and prejudices are constructed and shape the way we interact with the world by demonstrating their effect on LGBT experiences.

5. **Foster** in students the analytical skills to observe such processes in other contexts throughout their lives.

6. **Facilitate** student action against prejudiced systems to help them internalize an understanding of the degree to which such systems are embedded in society.

7. **Allow** students the freedom to genuinely construct their own knowledge.


There is a clear vision for how instruction of LGBT books could employ these tenants. However, teachers need guidance and resources on how to put this vision into practice. As I’ll discuss in the following sections, there are clear gaps between the vision I outline here and the classroom practices of the teachers I interviewed, and these gaps align with gaps in the guidance that is produced for teachers by educational organizations like GLSEN.

An empowering classroom culture begins with a baseline of respectful interactions between students. Teachers should set classroom norms like open-mindedness and respect at the beginning of the year and frame such norms as fundamental values rather than conditional rules that only apply in certain discussions. This type of classroom culture also demands a set of ground rules for appropriate discussion. This should include an explanation of the terminology LGBT people use to refer to themselves and particular attention should be paid to the complexities of the word “queer” which can be used both as a positive description of an LGBT
identity or as a pejorative depending on context. (Banks, 1995) (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014)

Application of psychological concepts related to adolescent identity development is more ambiguous and will look different based on each teacher’s classroom. However, teachers should be aware of the processes by which LGBT adolescents’ identity development can be disrupted. For example, adolescents construct their self-esteem based on comparing their identity to the values of the culture they inhabit. This knowledge should inform educators’ selection of content, and they should be sure to include positive representations of LGBT experiences, such as the one depicted in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Further, educators should familiarize themselves with the concept of narrative identity and include assignments that allow LGBT students to develop a “personal fable” or a story that explains their identity. (Siegler et al, 2003) (Hammack, 2008).

When selecting content and integrating it into their curriculum, educators should be mindful and choose a wide variety of perspectives that intersect with many different identities along lines of race, class, and geography. For example, *Under the Udala Tree* is the story of a romantic relationship between two Nigerian girls, and could help expand LGBT perspectives beyond the white, male, upper middle class, American story of queerness that is most commonly represented. Teachers should also take care to spread their representation of LGBT perspectives across the year and throughout units. For example, rather than having an LGBT unit, teachers should include an LGBT perspective in each unit they teach. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000)

Showing how norms and prejudices are constructed and fostering in students the ability to discern the way these processes impact their worldview requires thoughtfully designed
classroom activities and discussions. One way to do this effectively could be through writing and discussion prompts that encourage students to reflect on prejudice and consider norms from a new perspective. However, teachers should take care not to make questions too leading in order to allow students the freedom to construct their own knowledge. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000)

To help students internalize this knowledge and develop new patterns of thought, they should connect them to opportunities for social action. This could include students planning a day of silence for their school or even becoming involved in a local pride committee. However, such activity should be student driven rather than teacher prescribed. This ensures that classroom practices do not inadvertently oppress students by keeping them from constructing their own knowledge. (Kumashiro, 2000)

My interviews with teachers showed that their classroom practices differ greatly from this vision. Interviews highlighted the barriers that even the most dedicated teachers face in teaching LGBT-inclusive books in accordance with the vision I outlines and allowed me to identify specific gaps between the reality and the ideal. However, interviews also pointed to gaps in the guidance provided to teachers which showed a way forward for improving the way LGBT-inclusive literature is taught.

*How five educators teach an LGBT inclusive curricula*

While all of the teachers I interviewed expressed a strong interest in teaching an LGBT inclusive curriculum, none employed a classroom practice consistent with the best practices from scholarly literature. Teachers tended to do well at creating a safe and empowering classroom
culture and at integrating LGBT perspectives into the content they taught. However, only some teachers included deliberately intersectional perspectives and spread LGBT-inclusive content throughout the year. Just one teacher discussed trying to help her students notice oppressive social structures and develop the skills to analyze these systems on their own, and she did not mention specific strategies that she used for doing so. None of the teachers I interviewed mentioned the psychological development of their LGBT students, none mentioned connecting their students to opportunities for social action, and none discussed considering how to leave students the freedom to construct their own knowledge.

Finding 1: The experiences these teachers had teaching LGBT inclusive content were shaped powerfully by the culture and policies of their schools, suggesting that school leaders play a key role in the teaching of LGBT inclusive curricula. Daniel was constrained by his building principal from teaching LGBT content in his classroom, and doesn’t feel like it would be safe for any teacher in his building to do so. Levi’s curriculum is set by his school (located in a highly-regarded, affluent suburb), and the only LGBT inclusive content comes in the book *The Color Purple*. However, he tries to give students opportunities to engage with the book’s LGBT themes and works proactively to keep class discussions sensitive to various identities. Alison teaches at therapeutic school with high number of LGBT students and staff. Her self-designed curriculum is “fully inclusive,” and seeks to engage with marginalized perspectives. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Allison Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Levi Interview”)
Finding 2: The possibility of an LGBT-inclusive curriculum is anything but certain for even the most dedicated teachers. Each of the teachers I spoke to was highly motivated to teach an inclusive curriculum that included LGBT perspectives. However, constraints from administrators and curriculum posed powerful barriers. Daniel described engaging in “months of advocacy” and “building a base of support within our school” in order to advocate for an LGBT competency training for teachers. In spite of this work, the principal at Daniel’s school opposed such a training and it never came to pass. In response to the question, “Have you ever taught curriculum that engaged with LGBT themes, Daniel replied, “No. I've been made to feel like it's a dangerous choice to make in this building and that I would like you know be potentially be in trouble for it.” Even teachers like Daniel who are extremely dedicated to the cause of LGBT inclusive education can be hindered by opposition form their administrators. But barriers take other forms too. While Levi said he’s never received pushback from parents or administrators regarding LGBT themes, his curriculum is set by the district and only one book on the syllabus includes LGBT representation.(Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Levi Interview”)

Finding 3: Opposition takes many forms including hostile administrators, inflexible curriculum, and student misbehavior: The three teachers I interviewed described a wide variety of different types of opposition. Daniel’s principal, who refused to allow a GLSEN training to occur in his school, publically framed his opposition in terms of lack of need, saying “this isn’t a problem,” in reference to homophobia and the challenges of LGBT students. However, he privately framed his opposition in terms of his “Christian identity.” (Adam Michalowski,
Meanwhile, Levi faced little opposition to his engagement with LGBT themes in his classroom. Once, a devout Muslim student was uncomfortable “reading depictions of sex and masturbation,” included in the book *The Color Purple* but together they found a work around for her, and the inclusion of such themes in the curriculum was left unchallenged. They only other case that Levi could remember of someone expressing opposition to his engagement with the LGBT themes in “The Color Purple” was when a supervisor told him that it “wasn’t a queer book,” a comment about which he said only, “I don’t know what book she read.” His sarcastic tone suggested that this opposition, if it can even be called that, was easy to ignore. What primarily limited Levi’s ability to engage with LGBT inclusive texts in his classroom was the rigid curriculum he’s required to teach. “There’s a set of books and we’re not allowed to add major texts,” he said. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Levi Interview”)

Allison’s experience differed sharply. She said, “I basically got to write the class however I wanted it… …my co teacher and I made a very deliberate and intentional curriculum that was representative of race of gender sexuality of all those different things.” Rather than being constrained by her curriculum, the policies of Allison’s school empowered her to design a curriculum that directly engaged with LGBT identities. Allison noted that the executive director of her school is queer, and therefore personally supportive of her efforts to diversify curriculum. This is a striking contrast to Daniel’s experience with his principal. The only opposition Allison faced was occasional immaturity from students. She couldn’t think of a particular instance of students joking about the issues of diversity and identity in her curriculum, but she say that in
such instances students “usually did not find traction,” among their classmates. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, Allison Interview)

Finding 3: Teachers conceived of the positive benefits of LGBT inclusive curricula primarily in terms of how it could support LGBT students rather than in terms of how it could change the attitudes of straight students. For example, Daniel said this,

I heard from a couple of alumni students who used to be at this school. These were ninth graders who came to talk to me because they had seen my [GLSEN] poster outside my room. They had had a ton of unaffirming, unwelcoming experiences. They were now a couple, two young women, and like had had a lot of affirming but also a bunch of unaffirming experiences while they were here. And so that inspired me to start talking to staff on whether they felt like we had enough training they knew what to do and it seemed like there wasn't and I didn't feel like you know like wonderfully trained or like up to speed on all of the ways in which I was affirming or not affirming people's gender expression and identity and sexuality and such. So I proposed that we start I proposed that we like consider having a GLSEN and training for staff. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”)

When faced with evidence of LGBT students “unaffirming” experiences, Daniel sought to discover ways that teachers could change their behavior and instruction in order to “affirm people’s gender expression and identity and sexuality.” Notably, he did not discuss looking for ways to change the behaviors and attitudes of other students that might have contributed to an unaffirming experience for LGBT students. (Adam, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”)
Similarly, Allison framed her reasons for teaching LGBT inclusive curricula based on her own experiences as a queer student. She said that she found the lack of LGBT representation to be damaging to her own identity development, and said the interacting with the perspectives of queer folks was “powerful.” This lead her to explicitly add LGBT representation and perspective to her own curriculum. Mary, meanwhile, said that teaching LGBT-inclusive content was important because of the high number of LGBT students in her school. She said, “I think that it's important in our school we have a significant LGBTQ population that we have many students who figuring out how to exist within the world and you know with gender identity sexual identity.” (Adam, personal communication, “Allison Interview”) (Adam, personal communication, “Mary Interview”)

Finding 4: Teachers do not engage directly with psychological concepts in service of the goal of supporting LGBT students, in spite of their explicit focus on LGBT identity development. None of the teachers interviewed referenced psychological theories of development nor did they reference any strategies based in psychology research. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Allison Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Mary Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Levi Interview”)

Finding 5: Teachers seem to follow best practices of creating safe spaces for discussion in their classroom. All of the teachers I interviewed described robust procedures for creating safe spaces, framing respectful discussions, and responding to negative student attitudes. Allison articulated such procedures in particular detail.
We start almost like you would start like a support kind of situation with ground rules. Step up step back in terms of identifying that mostly it's people who are in positions of privilege and power that do most of the talking and are really comfortable talking and trying to make space for folks that maybe don't feel comfortable or haven't been told for their whole life that their voice is important and necessary. And so again really starting in general terms we go over terminology that is and is not appropriate just so that it doesn't have to be a corrective experience where like a kid has it wrong and then we have to correct them. It's like when we're talking about queer people here's the language that we're going to use, here's the words that we're using specifically and here's the words that we're not going to use and we don't even we don't say the words but we say 'you know what those words are.' A lot of that is modeling a question is framed in a way you like. If a student asks a question that's framed in a way that isn't the best way to say it, we'll reframe it in the answer and will like rephrase it. We're using the correct language so that it's not a gotcha but it's more about how we're going to talk about this in here and make sure that corrections. When kids are you know maybe intentionally try to like stir something up that are dealt with really quickly and the student is asked to leave the classroom immediately to check in with an adult so that those types of things just become not acceptable at the classroom culture. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Allison Interview”)

Mary Daniel, and Levi discussed similar procedures, though in less detail. Levi noted how he made sure never to single out LGBT students or “put them on the spot when discussing texts where their identity was represented. Daniel, due to his more hostile administration, was focused
mostly on school policy change that would allow for things like gender neutral bathrooms and non-discrimination training for teachers. Mary talked explicitly about the need for creating a “safe space” and she said that she keeps top of mind the questions of: “How do we create an environment where everyone feels supported in sharing their responses or their reactions to the literature.” (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Allison Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Mary Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Levi Interview”)

The teachers I interviewed were invariably enthusiastic about teaching LGBT inclusive curricula and supporting LGBT students. However, their ability to do so was limited by a number of factors. In cases where a lack of knowledge on strategies based in adolescent psychology and anti-oppressive pedagogy was a limiting factor, greater engagement with scholarly literature could help overcome it.

The experiences of the teachers I interviewed point to five key gaps between their classroom practice and the knowledge contained in scholarly literature.

1. Teachers are unaware of the psychological concepts which underpin the challenges LGBT adolescents face related to the development of their identities and self-esteem.
2. Teachers did not express familiarity with the ways in which homophobia fits into constructions of adolescent masculinity and high school social systems.
3. Only some teachers consider the types of LGBT identities they are representing and the placement of those identities within curriculum. While some of the teachers discussed
their inclusion of intersectional LGBT perspectives and their spacing of LGBT representation across units, others did not.

4. Few of the teachers I interviewed used LGBT perspectives to help students learn how to analyze prejudiced systems. Only one teacher mentioned trying to teach her students about the ways that oppressive systems function.

5. No teachers that I interviewed discussed facilitating student engagement in social action.


My interviews also revealed a number of barriers that stood in the way of these teachers’ ability to teach LGBT-inclusive content in an anti-bias framework. The first barrier was school governance. Some teachers were inhibited from teaching LGBT-inclusive curricula with an anti-bias framework due to inflexibility in the curriculum they were prescribed by their schools or due to hostile administrators. However, even some teachers who did not encounter school governance as a barrier still did not teach LGBT-inclusive curricula with an anti-bias framework. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Levi Interview”)

For these teachers, the primary barrier was a knowledge gap. Teachers were not aware of key findings from research related to anti-bias education, LGBT adolescent identity and self-esteem development, and homophobia. This is not do to any fault of educators; their job is not to comb scholarly literature for the latest findings on these issues. There are several organizations
which have adopted this task and produce resources aimed at given teachers the tools to effectively teach LGBT inclusive curricula. As I’ll discuss in my analysis of these resources, they contain significant gaps which is likely a contributing factor to the knowledge gap among educators. (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Allison Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Mary Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Daniel Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Levi Interview”) (Adam Michalowski, personal communication, “Sarah Interview”)

**Gaps in the resources for teachers**

While the teachers I spoke to were incredibly talented and dedicated educators and mentors, the work they did in their classrooms engaged with few of the theories of present in anti-bias education scholarship, psychological literature, or research on homophobia. This is likely because the practical resources available to educators do not incorporate much of this scholarship. The resources available for teachers mirror their experiences in the classroom -- the majority of resources for teachers could be be described as “safe space kits,” or sets of instructions on how to avoid marginalizing students identities with curriculum and classroom procedures. The strong relationship between what teachers do in the classroom and what resources are available to them is on one hand heartening because it demonstrates the power that support for teachers has at improving the classroom. On the other hand it is disheartening because is demonstrates the negative impact that a lack of supporting resources has on the classroom experience. (GLSEN) (The Safe Zone Project)
All the teachers interviewed mentioned GLSEN as an important resource that they use when bringing LGBT topics into their classroom. Two specifically noted GLSEN’s “safe space kit.” The safe space kit is the cornerstone of GLSEN’s resources and it outlines in great detail ways in which teachers can personally be supportive to LGBT students, create safe classroom climates, and advocate for policy change in their schools and districts. These are precisely the types of things that the teachers I interviewed do well. This demonstrates both the power and effectiveness of these resources, and the impact of their gaps. (GLSEN)

Resources related to curriculum and pedagogy are rarer and less comprehensive. Usually, they take the form of introductions or one-off lesson plans, rather than large scale guides for integrating LGBT content into a yearlong curriculum. For example, GLSEN has published a short, two and a half page “Developing LGBT-Inclusive Classroom Resources” guide that mainly encourages educators to consider the degree to which their curriculum is inclusive and introduces the “windows and mirrors theory.” They’ve also produced a few lesson plans on books like, “Heather has Two Mommies,” and historical figures like Alan Turing. (GLSEN)

PBS Learning Media also produces resources for teachers who hope to support LGBT students and engage with LGBT themes in their classrooms. They produce an “understanding LGBT identities” guide which provides teachers with a list of LGBT identities and the definitions and proper terminologies associated with each. They have also compiled a library of videos related to the LGBT rights movement, some of which are accompanied with a short write-up on how the video could be included in a lesson. (PBS Learning Media)

Finally, Teaching Tolerance, a division of the Southern Poverty Law center has produced a “Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education” guide. The 36-page document is an extensive
guide to the practice of anti-bias education. Many of its strategies are applicable to LGBT inclusive curriculum, but it usually takes the lens of racial equity. Further, it does not engage with the theory that supports its prescriptions, limiting its usefulness past a beginner level. (Teaching Tolerance)

The practical resources that aim to help educators teach LGBT-inclusive curricula or teach with an anti-bias framework are effective but limited. The teachers I interviewed do an excellent job of putting their guidance into practice. Many resources provide a set of best practices for creating a safe and empowering classroom culture, and the teachers I interviewed follow these practices. Further, resources provide content for teachers for to include in their curricula and justify the need for such content. The teachers I interviewed include content of this type in their curricula and were able to justify its importance. Occasionally, information about the need to present intersectional identities and spread representation across units appears in resources. A limited number of teachers I interviewed employed these practices.

However, there is a significant amount of important information that is left out of these resources. This absence is reflected in the practice of the teachers whom I interviewed. Resources related to LGBT-inclusive education do not address the complex system of which homophobia is an important piece. They leave out the way homophobia is part of the construction of adolescent masculinity and they do not include information about the roots of the psychological challenges faced by LGBT students. Sources on anti-bias education do not include information on concepts beyond an empowering classroom culture and content integration. They do not provide details on strategies for helping students use the diverse perspectives they encounter to observe prejudiced systems, developing in students the analytical skills for noticing
how prejudice shapes them in other contexts, or connecting students to opportunities for social action. In the next section, I’ll propose several strategies by which organizations that produce resources intended to help educators teach LGBT-inclusive content and teach with an anti-bias framework could improve and fill these gaps. (PBS Learning Media) (GLSEN) (Teaching Tolerance) (The Safe Zone Project)

Analysis and Proposals

In order to teach LGBT-inclusive literature with an anti-bias framework, teachers need to take the following steps: Establish a classroom culture that empowers queer students, target instruction to the dual challenges of homophobia and disrupted psychological development, integrate intersectional LGBT perspectives throughout a yearlong curriculum, show students how prejudiced norms are constructed and how they impact students’ worldview, develop students’ capacity to analyze social systems for prejudice, and facilitate student action against prejudiced systems, while leaving students the freedom to construct their own knowledge. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013)

As I have shown, teachers only partially employ these strategies, and this gap is likely related to the current limitations of resources which aim to help educators teach an LGBT-inclusive or anti-bias curriculum. There are several strategies that organizations producing these resources could employ in order to improve resources and help close the knowledge gap between educators and academics.

Resources for anti-bias education and LGBT inclusive education should be merged. Currently, practical guidance for educators on anti-bias education only engages with LGBT
issues to a limited degree, and vice versa. Anti-bias education resources should directly address methods for teaching LGBT issues, and resources for teaching LGBT-inclusive content should be presented along with anti-bias education strategies. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013)

When framing the problems that LGBT-inclusive anti-bias education aims to correct, these resources should describe in detail the ways in which homophobia fits into the social systems present in high school. Further, they should discuss, in a way that is easily accessible to teachers, the specific psychological challenges that LGBT adolescents face. They should tailor the curriculum and classroom activities that they offer educators to directly respond to these challenges. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013)

Resources for LGBT-inclusive anti-bias education should be sure to make clear the importance of intersectional representation and the importance of representing such perspectives throughout the year. Along with emphasizing this importance, resources should offer multiple LGBT-inclusive lessons that could fit in variety of units. They should also direct teachers to materials that offer diverse, intersectional perspectives. Books like Borderlands/La Frontera and The Cherokee Rose would be a good place to start. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013)

Finally, these resources should make clear that LGBT-inclusive anti-bias education is more than just showing students that diverse LGBT perspectives exist, it also involves using those perspectives to teach students about oppressive systems and develop in them the ability to observe how such systems affect them in other contexts. While this is a high goal, and crafting a comprehensive curriculum for achieving it is beyond the scope of this capstone, organizations
that produce LGBT-inclusive anti-bias resources should begin the task of creating one. In particular, they should center the role of student social action. (Banks, 1995) (Kumashiro, 2000) (Greytak and Kosciw, 2013)

Limitations

This capstone faced several limitations. The first was the a small sample of relevant data to analyze. Far fewer teachers than I expected had experiences teaching LGBT-inclusive literature and were willing to be interviewed and there were not many resources on teaching LGBT content available for me to analyze. However, this demonstrates the importance of improving resources. Further, my identity as a gay person powerfully shapes how I interact with the data I analyze. My identity also likely shaped my interview subjects responses causing them to overrepresent their involvement in LGBT-inclusive education. In spite of these limitations, my key findings, that there are significant gaps in teacher knowledge on LGBT-inclusive anti-bias education that correspond to gaps in the relevant literature were not significantly affected by these limitations.

Conclusion

There are significant gaps in educator knowledge on LGBT-inclusive anti-bias education and these gaps correspond with gaps in the resources available to support such education. However, there are several reasons to rejoice. Because educator knowledge tracks so closely to available resources, it seems that third-party resources are an effective way to bring scholarly literature to educators. These resources simply need to be improved. In order for educators to
teach LGBT inclusive literature by the following best practices: establish a classroom culture that empowers queer students, target instruction to the dual challenges of homophobia and disrupted psychological development, integrate intersectional LGBT perspectives throughout a yearlong curriculum, show students how prejudiced norms are constructed and how they impact students’ worldview, develop students’ capacity to analyze social systems for prejudice, and facilitate student action against prejudiced systems, while leaving students the freedom to construct their own knowledge, resources need to bring this knowledge to teachers. Organizations like GLSEN and Teaching Tolerance have proven that they are effective at mediating scholarly findings to educators, there is simply more work to be done. If anti-bias and LGBT-inclusive education resource are expanded and put into the hands of more teachers, more students will be able to experience the full transformative power of LGBT-inclusive books. At Hope in a Box, were pursuing this goal: more books transforming more kids. It’s humbling to be confronted with how much it takes to achieve this goal, but it’s inspiring to see that we’re not going at it alone.
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*Queer Youth and Media Cultures By Christopher Pullen*


The Safe Zone Project “Two Hour Curriculum” https://thesafezoneproject.com/


**Appendix I - Interview Script**

1. Tell me about the work that you do related to LGBT issues in your school/district

Do you teach curriculum/lessons that includes LGBT topics?

2. Tell me about a recent unit that you taught that talked about LGBTQ topics (or books),

Walk me through the opening language you used to introduce the topic/book

What strategies did you use…

What was effective, what was ineffective?

3. Process: What was the process you developed to add this to your curriculum?
When/How many years have you been doing this curriculum?

What type of guidance, if any, did you receive when incorporating this material into your classroom?

Any support, collaboration with colleagues?

4. Tell me how you became interested in teaching this topic.

If you self-identify, did you reveal that to your students?

How did that factor in your teaching?

4. Pushback -- Did you encounter negative attitudes inside or outside the classroom?

Pushback from parents, administrators, or community members

How do you address negative attitudes that come from outside of the classroom (parents, school district)?

Did you encounter problems inside the classroom related to teaching this material (student immaturity, homophobia, religious beliefs etc)?

Did any LGBT students uncomfortable with classroom focus on their identity?

How do you deal with problems inside the classroom?

5. Advice -- What advice would you give to teachers who are new to this topic?

6. Are there any resources you have found particularly helpful?

7. Anything I haven’t asked you that you think are useful?
8. Demographic details

Identification of school district (Urban, suburban, rural) (region of country)

Gender

Do you identify as LGBT

Appendix II - Interview Transcripts

Mary Interview.aifc

[00:00:00] Yeah I'm going to put you on speaker phone just so that I can record.

[00:00:02] All right but yeah so my first question is just can you tell me a little bit about the work that you've done related to LGBT issues. In your capacity as a teacher and education but specifically related to curriculum and teaching in the classroom. Anything that's been part of your experience.
OK. Yeah. I teach high school literature all levels. So the way that I have been able to bring LGBTQ content into the classroom is through book choice and themes that I follow. Though I specifically teach two different very different classes. So kind of tell you a little bit about each point. The first the first one of my survey of English class which is our students work at our school is that special treatment.

Also we have some sheet of paper and some of our oh I'm really sorry you're cutting up for a second.

Are you so there airfares for our kids business. We're more spoiled because of high elevations and they just have gaps and they have more significant need.

And in that class they get complete choice about what they read. I give them book lists and they can go to the extensive book list and pick the things that they're interested in reading and two of the booklists come one come from the rainbow reading list which has recommended books for LGBTQ and the other one comes from the Stonewall award the American Library Association Stonewall award that also has several years of books that have won this award and are honored for that.

In addition to that I have other other sections like graphic novels that might have or other before words that make them so next year out of that are books that are told from an LGBTQ perspective or that included LGBTQ in some way. So that for that the other class that I
have been able to really work some contact in my American literature class and the way I do that I should say I have four units on different themes. So the first one we do is identity. Then we just finished up our society unit and now we're in our oppression and resistance unit. And then the last unit is going to be immigration. So the immigration line I don't really have a ton that overlapped because as you can imagine there aren't a multitude of books written about immigration yet. I think it's going to increase but. And so then to find books that are both about immigration and have an LGBTQ perspective is really difficult. I will keep my eye out. But at this point I don't have that yet.

[00:03:09] So I didn't hang out and check it. Oh yes a did. Chuck I'm going to have to find another place to go in just a minute. But the one room I was going to go to had a student and a subject I didn't know. So in that in that we're being able to include obviously when you're talking about identity or you're talking about society or you're talking about oppression and resistance those are kind of natural themes in which you know LGBTQ issues and in books to be included. So I'm to pull in books to each of those units and then within those units what happens is the students get to choose what they read for an independent book and then they rank for a book club book with on the part of the group at the book club but they have to have enough kids interested in the same book for it to make but then kids can take whatever book they want for their independent reader. So that's kind of the way that I've done it. I also use resources from I don't know if you've heard of Facing History.
Yes I have. I'm actually the director of education studies program that I'm in right now. We're still facing history now.

So I've heard a lot of OK right. So I called up from them and well they they don't. There are some things that are specific to LGBTQ but there are just of things that are specific to kind of the way the different groups of people have treated each other. Then I can bring into the classroom and give kids kind of a perspective from which to talk about what they're reading. So especially like the society unit that they have a lot of great resources that kind of give them near to start talking about what you are reading about. And I will also show you I think that it's important in our school we have a significant LGBTQ population that we have many students who who are here working on not working on but like figuring out how to exist within the world and you know with gender identity sexual identity. So our student body I think probably is I would say probably is more open than the average. Yes body in terms of the discussion around these issues or are looking at characters and kind of expecting these characters. But I think there characters there's not a lot of contact. I compare them to see that though it actually opens the door up and really makes sense for me to be able to talk to them about it. and have discussions where they're really delving into it.

Yeah. Yeah.

So do you explicitly try to engage with the queer LGBT themes in these books. And if so can you tell me a little bit about how you do that. Do you mean do I like reach out to them
and say hey you might want to read or when you're discussing a book in a classroom setting or on working on assignments things like that. Do you bring that up as something to talk about in terms of the text or not too much.

[00:06:22] Yeah know we do.

[00:06:24] You know I kind of like let the kids guide a lot of discussion in terms of what they're bringing from the book. But I will kind of join in that discussion sometimes so for example there is a book you probably are familiar with Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe. Yes. Right. So that's the one that I offer and that gets read pretty pretty frequently. One of the things is that for me I was kind of hoping reading the book Oh hey you know a straight male can be friends with a gay male and that's cool you know. Okay. And then they went the romance route which I also totally get because they're aren't that many happy romance stories out there for people who are LGBTQ.

[00:07:29] But there was that part of me that was like Oh there’s this big hang up that guys are like I can't be friends with someone who is gay. What does that mean about me. But I usually let the kids drive the discussion and it comes up pretty frequently. Another one where they had some really pretty frank and interesting conversations is “more happy than not”

[00:07:56] Mm hmm. Which that's another one that like you don't have. Have you read that. I haven't read that one.
I actually just recently read Aristotle but that's not OK.

So More happy than not. You don’t really know what’s happening in the story until you get partway in and then you’re like “oh, that’s what's happening, this is about LGBTQ issues”

And so that is kind of cool because it kind of shifts your perspective in the novel. Once you find this out. And then the kids usually have really sharp conversations on that. But I don't have to push quite as much but in general I let them have that discussion and they always do draw really strong connections to their own lives and to things they experience things they see. So I haven't had to push that much.

Yeah that's great.

So another thing that I'm wondering about is just how did you get interested in doing this work.

How did you decide to bringing stuff like this into your curriculum.

So a couple of different things. A couple of students came to me asking to recommend books to them that were told from an LGBTQ perspective or by an author who
identified with them that one of those one of the population. And I really had this kind of thinking and doing some research because it hasn't necessarily been such that I had plenty of students will identify. It hadn't really been fully in my radar and I think OK. Let's think about this. And then the other thing that happened I'm actually currently working on a doctorate in reading and language literacy. And and when I was working on the master's level that I had to take a children's literature class and then to another one about diverse lecture. And that was where I was introduced to other book awards and kind of the resources behind that provided narrow window access in different ways. And so it kind of opened the door for me that the teacher. Unfortunately most teachers rely on what they read in terms of what they're bringing into the classroom. And I just didn't know all these resources existed. In fact I'm old enough that there wasn't such a thing as young adult literature. When I was an undergrad you know there was a whole new world I need kind revamp how I am doing here and try to include as many different perspectives in each unit. Aside from immigration although in immigration I try to have as many different stories from immigrating from different places. But in the other unit I really try hard to have each unit have a choice that reflects a different kind of different diverse perspectives so that when they're picking they have that option to pick like a book like Aristotle and Dante they could be LGBTQ but it could also be a student who's Latin that might be interested in it. I really try to use the resources I got there to make sure that I'm offering both current literature and literature that comes from a multitude of perspectives.
Yeah yeah sure. Can you tell me a little bit more about any resources that have been helpful for you in kind of teaching diverse literature on especially related to LGBT stuff but more broadly.

Right. So the rainbow reading list is a big one it gives you two things it gives you both books and a summary because you know as somebody who did not identify LGBTQ I could put something up in there and be like I don't know if this is again a good representation. Are there things. Yeah I there are some there some obvious stuff that I know but I often note that there are like with any population there are things that are less obvious and more subtle that can be problematic with a book. So the thing I like about the Rainbow reading list is that I feel like I can trust it. It’s kind of like a blog in some ways because they give you not just the book but what it's going to be like. Oh yeah. Not only this is the book but this is why we think this is a good book. And so then that gives me some context to go on when I'm doing my book talks to kids because I do try to read everything I don't. Sometimes I'll start reading a book and I read it with them but I trust like the reviewer from that rainbow reading list, like this is what you need to know about this book. And so that gives me that confidence that not only am I reading something but I'm making sure that I'm including something that is going to be reflective of the way that population would say something or do something or want to be talked about. Yeah. And then I think the Stonewall award in the same way. Get me some of that confidence. They don't give quite as much information about why you know you just get a list of honor book. But at least I know that it’s been vetted by kind of a team of people who have sat around and talked about it for some insiders to the population Yeah. So that those I think have been the big ones.
that rainbow being left up that gives you kind of mind. I am pretty fortunate here as well because we are at therapeutic school and one of our directors has done a lot of work himself with LGBTQ. So there have been a couple times on that, and thinking of using what do you think about that. Or you know do you have any recommendations. So I have some resources within the building as well. The teachers.

[00:14:38] Yeah yeah that makes a lot of sense.

[00:14:42] Have you ever encountered any sort of pushback or negativity toward this type of work whether from passenger administrators who are maybe uncomfortable with it being in the classroom or just kind of immaturity or insensitivity on the part of students who are engaging with it in the classroom

Usually the students who I’m receiving that immaturity from I would get the same immaturity if it was something talking about the sexuality of a straight couple.

[00:15:15] Usually it’s just the idea of sexuality.

[00:15:19] I have not had any pushback from parents or administration.

[00:15:30] And generally speaking if there is a question which are around LGBTQ literature there hasn't been except for a recent book I'm teaching. OK so it's a nonfiction book and it's
actually about an incident that occurred in Oakland California in 2013 where an agender teen was on the bus wearing a skirt and another group of kids from another party and one of them light a lighter and the skirt went up in flames and the teen had like 22 percent of the body of having third degree burns.

[00:16:19] And it kind of talks about that whole story and how it blew up in the media. And like everything was like and the media kind of took little pieces of the story and it blew up in a way that didn't happen. That one I did

[00:16:42] So almost half of my students wanted to read this book. And I just wanted to make sure that parents were aware that there was an act of violence towards an agender teen as several of my students, like I said, are transgender or identify as gay. And so I wanted to make parents aware of that and a couple of parents just said thanks for letting us know. And a couple just wanted me to double check with the student and make sure that they were comfortable. All the kids knew what it was about when they picked it but you know I try to be conscious of that kind of thing but that was more about the violence not the fact that inclusion of LGBT LGBTQ issues.

[00:17:33] I'm just really fortunate that I think because so many of our students do fall in that population and parents have become more comfortable with that because those students are here some of them live here. Some of them live in a dorm with the student who is transgender.
And I think that our population just happens to be more accepting of the topic in general. I do also teach adjunct classes and I will say that I teach the children's literature class. Now the one that I took I now teach and I have many many teachers and tell me that when we do the unit that includes specifically I look at LGBTQ literature many teachers especially elementary school teachers will tell me there's no way my principal would let me bring this book into the school.

So I do think it is a continuing problem in a lot of especially public schools. I'm just fortunate that it doesn't really impact me.

Yeah that's understandable.

Yeah yeah sure. So another question that I have as we're kind of getting to the end is just. Would you have any advice for another teacher say who does not have experience teaching LGBT but or your own kind of best practices resources that could be helpful or anything.

Yeah.

a few things that I would say for sure, I would say make sure utilizing resources make sure that you're bringing a book that is authentic to the population.
Make sure that you have read it and really understand it especially if it's an unfamiliar topic to make sure you read it understand it kind of look at it from a perspective and be prepared for some certain questions if prepared like before you bring it in the first time. It's something new be prepared to answer questions from the administration or from parents. And to not be afraid of that but be prepared and armed with this is why this book is important you know.

And if you generally speaking my experiences when I have been questioned about literature that I'm using if I have a strong basis for why I'm bringing that into my classroom quite often that does questions about a way I think the other piece is to make sure that you are clear on some other terminology. Making sure that you understand some of the way to describe different situations or that you create an open space for students to be able to say and to be able to say that.

Hang on a second. Oh yeah. I think for you to be able to say say what they're what they want to say about the literature that they're that they're being conscious. And yes you need to do that work ahead of time.

Work on how do we have a safe space and how do we have to face conversation. How do we create an environment where everyone feels supported and sharing their responses or their reactions to the literature.
Because if that's not already in place in the classroom and then you insert something that makes students more uncomfortable then that could create problems that aren't really about the book but then you're going to be more hesitant to use the book that I think also it's going to get worse.

So then again and then the last thing that I think I would really recommend is that they also you know use online resources their blogs and I'm going to blink on any of them or you can go on and just kind of read information that lets you know what are the topics happening within the LGBTQ world. Right now what's in the news right now so that you're prepared for what kids might bring up to you. Yeah I think it's that preparation creating a safe space and making sure you've prepared yourself to respond to things that may come up and as well as you can also really do strongly recommends connecting with something like facing history that gives you resources that help you know how to have difficult conversations. And it's not necessarily even always difficult conversations but it could be a conversation that one student doesn't know quite how to say something. And how do you support that when you might have another student who's a part of the LGBTQ population. And they might be getting upset because a student doesn't know how to say it. How do you navigate all of those things and support learning and I think a lot of the things that they're facing history that talk about how you are becoming a member of the community and being a member of a community and I think all that's important when you're bringing in literature that people could have a reaction to whether it's about LGBTQ or about racism or anything you want to make sure you have that safe space.
Yeah totally. Well that's wonderful.

I guess just the last thing that I have for you is if there's anything that didn't come up kind of in this topic that you feel like is important to share I'm happy to share any final thoughts.

OK. I think I just I think I one.

I think I want to say and obviously you're already aware of this but I think it's so important for professional development for teachers to be given the kinds of resources that I discovered in the past and to really be thinking about what we bring to kids to read in terms of whether or not it's a mirror or a window and knowing that we need to have both mirrors and Windows available to them.

You know it's really really important because research shows it shows that teachers will bring into the classroom what they're familiar with and they did as students unless they know how to find other materials. And so I think to me that's a really important piece of it is making people aware and giving them the skills and opportunities to find this literature. Unfortunately teachers may have the best of intentions but we get so busy that sometimes it's like OK I want to find a new book but I'm swamped right now so I'm just going to teach the same old book that I've taught multiple times and I think that kind of support should bring in new resources and new information about how to write them. Really important.
Yeah absolutely. Well thank you so much. This was super helpful and I really enjoyed hearing about all your experience and perspectives. Thank you.

Oh no problem. Good luck with your project.

Yeah. Thank you. Have a good rest of your father and enjoy the weekend.

You too Adam thank you. Bye. All right.

Daniel Interview

So your question was like What have I done here on the LGBT front. So the full story I'll give like a summary of the story. So I put up those posters in the corner and for those who are listening to a recording. Those are glisten Safe Space posters in English and Spanish. The first year I was here I think. And that didn't seem like a big deal to me. But my principal mentioned at one time that families were asking I was like Yeah OK good to know that families are asking. Yeah. And then.
Fast forward a few months later, I heard from a couple of alumni students who used to be at this school. These were ninth graders who came to talk to me because they had seen my poster outside my room. That. They had had a ton of unaffirming, unwelcoming experiences. They were now a couple two young women and like had had a lot of affirming but also a bunch of unaffirming experiences while they were here. And so that inspired me to start talking to staff on whether they felt like we had enough training they knew what to do and it seemed like there wasn't and I didn't feel like you know like wonderfully trained or like up to speed on all of the ways in which I was affirming or not affirming people's gender expression and identity and sexuality and such. So I proposed that we start I proposed that we like consider having a GLSEN and training for staff and my principal veto of that agenda item from the school planning and management team.

Through a series of months of sort of like advocacy burning my bridge with my principal handing out posters to lots of teachers building up a base of teachers who are interested in like having morning meetings and trying to think through like how can we make this happen. Ultimately it didn’t, no training came to pass even though it had all of the approvals from all the teachers and we had built our base within the school. Ultimately my principals personal perspectives and I'd say like lack of will to be able to communicate with families effectively about the topics alongside no pressure or encouragement from the district meant that no training like that ever happened.
OK so that was two years ago. That's really interesting and kind of disheartening.

So I guess I would love to hear a little bit more about how your principal framed their opposition.

Opposition was framed to me in ways that were different than other places. So it was framed to me as like this isn't a problem. This isn't something that we have to like. This hasn't come up. I've spoken to all of our like counselors psychologists like no one says this is a problem was a lot of the phrasing. There was also phrasing around like if you know if posters are up and like parents don't like the words gay and transgender and lesbian are on the walls like I'm not going to defend you like you know you're you're making this choice yourself. Like if downtown comes like it's on you yeah.

And then in other in other circles you know he had framed it as like his Christian identity was a really important piece of how he was making these decisions. But that was never communicated directly to me.

Wow. That's interesting. So other than him did you encounter opposition or just more general negative sentiments from anywhere else whether you like parents students like within the classroom like people students making comments about the posters or anywhere.
During that experience. No. There is a situation that came up this past fall. Where some of that was happening so I can tell that story when you're ready.

[00:05:16] Yeah but no during this first push. No I think the teachers certainly have like a variety of perspectives around like we should be talking about this with kindergarten kids versus seventh grade kids. Yeah. You know. I think people definitely there was a conversation two days ago about a teacher saying like well I wouldn't read that book with my kids or I would definitely send a note home to parents getting their approval and I was like it's just about romance. And we do that stuff with youth all the time. So yeah I mean there's over a hundred people in the building so there's a lot of different ideas. One reason why you like do training is to like Norm and to figure out what do what does everybody feel think and or want.

[00:05:57] Yeah that makes a lot of a lot of sense. So. And then your work with the task force. I'd love to hear a little bit more about that or if we're skipping ahead of anything's kind of like.

[00:06:08] Yeah I mean it's it's related it's a natural outgrowth. I mean like my personal decision was I can't do advocacy inside of this building in the way that I want to. And it doesn't feel effective. So and as I mentioned like he was never told he had to do this. Yeah right. So like he might be an individual problem but I'm interested in the system that's problematic. Yeah. And so I started asking questions about well what is the city doing. Who is hired by the city of New Haven to do LGBTQ advocacy. Yeah. Nobody.
You know what. Who at the district is like kind of responsible for doing this work. Well someone's in charge of surveys and someone's in charge of Title 9. And but but no one no one was really holding this as their own. And so. Jason Bartlett is the director of Youth Services for the city.

He and I forget exactly how we met but we met we'd met up a few times. We're talking shop and he came up with the idea that like I'm ready to do this thing let's start a task force for the city that's focused on LGBTQ youth. It's part of his youth purview. He also is an openly gay man. So it was important personally to him and he's like, Do you know anyone. I was like yes I do. Because that is sort of one of my great strengths is like being able to build membership you have and reach out to lots of the people who should be at the table. And that was sort of my initial role I'd say that's sort of one of the two key pieces of the role that I've played. So that was last January I was our first meet

Yeah I'm really great. I'm so I guess what are the types of things that you guys are working on in that house for us either goals that you have in general.

Sure there are a couple of departments. Yeah. And I'd say like a huge emphasis is like in school in district work. Right. So we're currently trying to make sure that every school has a GSA and that all the GSAs know each other and then that all the GSA's are sending kids to true colors and that we're sending for the first time over two hundred students to true colors and getting financial support from the like queer Center at Southern like and kicking in money from
the city and coordinating with the pride center. So like that's an initiative that's like happened and like previously we said a couple of dozen kids from random schools like. So there's sort of a collecting of power that's happening on a different platform but very important. We're doing a lot of analysis of policy of New Haven in public schools.

[00:08:50] Where where are we on discrimination anti-discrimination and support and locker rooms and bathrooms and Gender Affirming curriculum sex sexual education and trying to really still like hold the district accountable to saying this is important please follow the state law and please our national trends. And we're going to keep doing. Yeah. And you know we're right now we're recommending questions to the district to put in there like climate surveys for students and teachers and staff. Wait sorry students staff and families because we don't ask about like how safe do you feel like you know. Do you feel like your gender is allowed to hang out in school.

[00:09:34] Yeah. So those things are happening we've been pushing in our way like on the prep Bill to be passed so that way.

[00:09:44] Do you know about this.

[00:09:45] I'm not really know.

[00:09:47] Right now PrEP is a cool drug that you can take prophylactically to not get HIV. Right now you in Connecticut can't get it without parental consent. LGBTQ youth as you may
know like don't always tell their parents that they're having sex. So if this bill gets passed then teens can get it without parental permission in school based health centers let alone in health centers anywhere. So we've been pushing on that. I mean the task force and you could definitely come to our next meeting to all any meeting and what is teachers parents doctors advocates. People who work for nonprofits youth. We're trying to make sure that all the expertise is in the room. Yeah it's not. But we're trying. Yeah. Yeah. After our last article came out in the New Haven Independent someone reached out from the police department and like a couple of like guidance counselors at schools. So you know it's it's always interesting to see who's in the room.

[00:10:45] That's really great. And then how about in terms of curriculum. Have you taught anything in your classes or do you know of anyone who is working to incorporate say like books with LGBT characters or curriculum that addresses like LGBT themes in their classes so poor like No.

[00:11:04] No. I've been made to feel like it's a dangerous choice to make in this building and that I would like you know be potentially be in trouble for it. And so I've. I've done like some mentioning of like doing certain historical topics and someone's related and important not like mentioned that they are I guess over time when I've done some of our like puberty and sexual education I've certainly like done the work run like norming that like lots of people do lots of things and have lots of bodies and like lots of other bodies.

[00:11:42] Yeah. And you know we're sort of like.
On a daily basis we like chant. You know like we celebrate diversity and it's like part of our classroom value. But I don't have texts like with diverse families. I have not like talked about like gay liberation is like part of American history.

Yeah it's it's sorely lacking. Are there people who do it.

There's like one seventh grade teacher right now who is like maybe including a book and this is what I mentioned before that like maybe including a book that has like some hate crime vibe really like yeah gay without violence but probably not gonna happen because we just don't have a culture here we're like encouraged or allowed accepted it's like the world in which we have to send home you know letters to parents is obviously they're right. Parents at the opportune to opt out of anything they'd like to.

Yeah but but we haven't been encouraged to explore. Yeah. What do you think it would take for that exploration to happen top down direction.

Yeah I think that's and that was sort of the conclusion that I came to two years ago was like I'm interested in the ground up approach. But the ground approach ground up approach doesn't seem to have worked here. And I can rely on the top down approach because I'm in a blue state with good state law like in a in a fairly progressive town. This should be possible like this shouldn't be so unreasonable. Yeah there are places where I'd be much more difficult to do top
down work. But I think this is a place where top down work can happen because we're talking about stuff that everyone kind of already gets. Yeah. So. Yeah it's nice to be there's like the task force's work is all sort of like acceptable to everybody. We're not fighting so much so yeah we're just fighting people you know to call them when people don't move there's no work there's a word for this that's inertia we're fighting inertia. That's it. Yeah we're not fighting against people who relate we're not yet anyway.


[00:13:53] So in some of the smaller steps that you've taken. Like hanging out pick listen posters when you're talking about. Like if it's how topics like that. Have you had any sort of resources guidance mentors anything that has helped you along the way in terms of thinking about how to do that effectively or how to do that in a way that doesn't draw negative attention. Yeah.

[00:14:15] I mean listen Safe Space kid is a great set of tools. Going to true colors brightens my life every year. And I learned so much from the things that I learned in the workshops that I go to. I mean I feel like every task force meeting what I'm hearing some horrible story from a high school student. It's like Huffington forms from my responsibility to take this work forward Mm hmm. Yeah I I wouldn't say that I've like. Found one curriculum guide that like anchor is what I'm doing because I don't have the teaching curriculum.

OK so the and you mentioned earlier I think you said the issue last fall that you could talk more about I'd love to hear more about that.

Yeah. So this was all related. I had a student from Yale who was volunteering to my classroom as a tutor a random student not here to like make anyone gay but identified as friends and revealed this to me after a few weeks of coming presenting as male and saying like I typically present as female would it be OK if I did so and I was like.

Please be you in the way and present the way that you want to know that there'll probably be some like natural consequences and I'm ready to support you through that. Yeah right because like if you came presenting as male and now you're going to present differently these are children and they're going to respond like we'll figure it out because that sounded like the legal and kind and thoughtful response.

Yeah. So that happened. They came to as female the following week.

And some families like kids told some families that it just like it happened they weren't complaining but families maybe had some complaints about it. Families went to principal and principal was like OK this this club like. I can't believe that this teacher didn't come talk to me about this. Like this club is no good like you know they can't come anymore. Those
are sort of two separate thoughts. So this I can't believe that this teacher didn't tell me about this but also I heard from some other place that this club is no good.

[00:16:26] Like they just can't hold your interest so the blame is put on like this is like not a good club. We shouldn't be working with them at all. And that's how that's student sub volunteering in my classroom.

[00:16:42] So I think that families like had legitimate concerns. And if I was a principal I would have manage those concerns very differently. Yeah.

[00:16:52] And I felt horrible for the student who was in the situation. But it seems like this is where the climate is.

[00:17:04] Yeah. That's really tough.

[00:17:07] Yeah. So have you ever talked to your eye is like really addressed this like with your principal I guess. I can't imagine what that relationship is like giving kind of all the things that you've told me.

[00:17:19] Yeah. Yeah. I mean our our relationship is pretty soiled. I think we pretend a lot of the time. Like have some Acholi group. We've had a lot of difficult conversations over the past three years. And you know sometimes he'll pretend that he isn't. Remember what we fought about two
years ago. Yeah he he's I've lost a lot of a lot of trust and it's OK because I don't get to control
how he thinks and feels. Yeah. I am. I am planning to leave at the end of this year and I am
because I want to be a principal and I want to be a principal and I want to mentor. Like under an
outstanding principal. And so he would never sign off on the principal's training documents for
me. He would never support me in any. He's been vindictive on a couple of other fronts with like
saying no to other opportunities that I want to apply for. So yeah. But I believe that at some point
his boss is going to tell him that he's got to provide training for staff or that like of course like
that poster should be up or that he should really do a better job of making sure that like. You
know like. Bathroom accessibility like exists and that like when there's like gender based like.

[00:18:43] You know based bullying happening like there's a different way to address it than we
do. Yeah. So yeah I think I believe that the winds are blowing in the right direction and he's
going to figure out what to do.

[00:18:55] Yeah and it's not my responsibility to get him there it's my responsibility to make sure
that I'm plugging it in some other important way to advocate. Yeah.

[00:19:02] Absolutely. And then do you feel like kind of your colleagues like other teachers here
are aware of kind of the dynamic from the principal related to LGBT issues related to you
personally. And then kind of same question always happening was pretty public. Oh yeah. Yeah.
How about like parents families students. No idea.

[00:19:26] Have where other staff members supportive of what you were doing or did they.

[00:19:31] Many staff members were supportive. I can think of two staff members who were to identify as Christian religious who are no longer here.

[00:19:40] Okay. Yeah. And then did you feel like they were like you. Can you tell me more about that support wise I just like it more emotional support like hey we are here for you.

[00:19:53] By then like maybe they were skeptical of why you were doing this or the value of it or was it kind of all in support like he's being totally unreasonable you should push forward with this.

[00:20:03] It's pretty all in support. Yeah I think that like at that time I was just advocating for a training for staff. I wasn't announcing that we hadn't. We should do an assembly for kids. I wasn't like recommending that we like change the second grade. Like health curriculum and so it was pretty baseline of interest to everybody. Like on staff I think our elders are like LGBTQ staff. Like we're sort of in a weird position because they.

[00:20:31] They like were supporting me but also didn't want to feel targeted. I'm straight cis gender and.
Yeah. But there were 30 staff members who were like on my like Incognito. You know like email chain and people would show up to like meetings in the morning to like figure out our next steps and try and move it forward. Yeah there were people who were like not participating or ignoring it but yeah I didn't have pushback from other staff. OK.

That's really interesting. That's kind of cool the thing about it. I can't give anything that'll change in strategy meetings. Yeah it was cool to think about. Yeah yeah.

Yeah. And then.

Okay. So and just what sparked your interest in this. Like how did you decide that this was something you wanted to advocate for.

This like the silliest question to me in some sense. I'm supposed to have like a gay brother when I answered the question right. But I don't I like Help start our GSA in 9th grade because it just seemed like the right thing to do. Yeah. A. Ally. Ally ship. Just like feels very natural to me. This feels like. This feels like work that we should all be thinking about.

Eh. Yeah.
I mean I can tell you all about like why I think people should be able to like express themselves honestly and like love what they want and like be as much themselves as like they choose to be.

I guess I feel like in some sense this is like the civil rights like movement that we're all supposed to be like jumping up for.

And yeah.

And I'd say in some sense I said and I mentioned this before like it feels winnable. Yeah it's like this town twenty thousand kids like it just feels like LGBTQ youth advocacy is like a very winnable thing. Yeah. And that I think excites me and motivates me.

Yeah absolutely.

Okay sorry. I'm just going over time to see what things you have to have. I'm the I. The Rainbow library that came up in our email sharing. Can you tell me a little bit more about that.

It's not my project. My friend Michael who I can certainly connect you with. Yeah.
Works for achievement first which is the charter network. Getting. He sort of like birth this concept with ink glisten. He's a former teacher taught third grade and there were never books for like you know with all of the ways in which people should be diverse in books. And so yeah he's like building up this program that's gonna allow teachers to like apply for like a set of books and then they get them.

He knows that at the last meeting that we had. And.

You know and that it's just a question of like for a guy like who wants to pay for stuff and then how do we get the word out. And it seems like a baseline response to like.

You know where's the curriculum coming from and how do we make it super easy for teachers to like make it to to normalize like rainbows and classrooms and everything that comes from books.

Yeah definitely. Yeah I actually would be interested in chatting with him if you're able to. And then just kind of like as a final thing. Is there anything else that we didn't touch on that you feel like is important or kind of meaningful to this conversation.

Let me give you my thought.
[00:24:09] Yeah I mean I like I work in a little too next neighborhood and some people would say that Latin X people are like the most affirming enough to be able to say that the most like discriminating. And I think neither of those things are true. Yeah and it's been interesting to be the white guy. Yeah. And. I think like my white male cis gender straight identity like certainly is an important piece of how I like factor in here. Yeah but I'm also willing to sort of say like I know this is right. To hell with it. Like let me figure out how to like. Continue with caution and paying attention to the space that I take up. But also you know to build membership and like perform the role of secretary it's role that I can play without any meaning that like all the work is mine.

[00:25:08] Yeah. So I'm working to continuously distribute leadership. Yeah I'm the best I can. That's great. Yeah that's what I have for formal questions. I'm. I really appreciate you me. Yeah well.

Levi Interview

[00:00:50] Hi. This is Adam. I'm I'm Jacob's friend from Yale.

[00:00:54] It's not such a good time to talk they got about it. I was about to get to know it like a telemarketer. But you're not. I answered No.
And thank you for that. Are you sure. I'm happy to give you a call back in another time.

It's not as convenient anymore. I would rather than greed. I can. I can edit stuff. Yes.

All right. Oh that's wonderful. So I don't know how much background Jacob gave you on my project but essentially my for making senior capstone an education studies. I'm doing an analysis of the resources that are available for teachers who teach LGBT inclusive curricula or engage with LGBT issues in their classrooms. And that's awesome. Yeah. So in conducting these interviews I'm trying to better understand the the classroom experience of teachers who are doing this work so that I'm kind of capable of looking at the alignment of resources with the experiences of teachers.

So yeah sure. Does this sound like something that you're able to talk about and willing to I'm definitely willing to go.

Yeah. Yeah. All right. Great.

And then just kind of some logistical stuff. I will be using a recording this interview and transcribing it using it for my project. Your name won't be affiliated with any of your
answers but I will be discussing on kind of the information about your school districts or it would be like suburban school district on the East Coast.

[00:02:27] Does that all sound. That's totally fine. Yeah. All right. Great. So to jump right in. I would love if you could. There's a ton of fun for you. Yeah. Now if it had so many iterations of going over how to say it exactly right. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:02:46] So to get started I would love for you to just tell me a little bit about the work that you've done related to LGBT issues in your school and your classroom and kind of anything related to your position as a teacher.

[00:02:57] Absolutely. So my first student teaching I mean my thought in our first year of teaching I was asked by a student to be an advisor for the GSA. And agreed. And so I've been doing that. That much I was much more involved at the start. Forty years ago things were a lot worse than that at and I've taken a much less active role on the pass probably 10 years. Here's your sound. But that's an extra killer.

[00:03:31] And then the classroom.

[00:03:33] I've been we're restricted in terms of what our curriculum is and I think what we can teach. Yes. And we took the courses I teach that really has an LGBT theme would be the color by Alice Walker.
It's Celie's Sexuality that is a really core part of the book is a core part of her transformation and her realization and what another actually Yalie has explained to me is a phenomenon called post-traumatic stress which is exploring more directly. But you know we you sort of talk indirectly about that and how unlike many of the parts of American literature you find the strength to and kinds of support to grow and develop out of how much she’s experienced instead of be destroyed by it and her decision to just give in to her own sexuality is a key part of that.

So just in terms of the constraints that you face in with your curriculum just being prescribed in the school district can you tell me a little bit more about that. Is it just like that somebody else is designing the curriculum or is it specifically related to the types of content you're allowed to teach.

No it's really the constraints in terms of the books that were allowed to cover. So I teach Morris where there's a set of books and we’re not allowed to add major texts. You know, you can add Supplemental stuff. Yeah. There. But you know it's Macbeth, Jane Eyre, it's that sort of thing. And then Junior year is when we do American literature and so it’s a wider array of stuff
from there probably are a ballpark of 15 things on the curriculum. We can pick and choose what we want to do. You know flyy to Scarlett and Gatsby. I think that's it. And we can choose stuff like control from crucible or death of salesman. Yeah. Catcher in the Rye. The sun also rises, for whom the bell tolls.

[00:06:18] Yeah. Okay. I think I have a sense of that. Yeah.

[00:06:23] So when you do teach the color purple I would love for you to tell me a little bit more about that specifically whether or not like or to what degree you directly engage with the queer LGBT themes in the book.

[00:06:39] I think it's a book that's impossible to read without engaging with those themes, right?

[00:06:51] If you do it properly. Except well, I had a supervisor who thought it wasn’t an LGBT book and I don’t know what book she read. But so so that you know the [inaudible] is I think real component of what happens with Celie's development and so as as someone who is straight and cisgender I don’t have as much experience in that field so I don’t dive as deeply [inaudible]. But it is in valuable that we [inaudible] some of this stuff before we discuss it, so we do devote time to discuss how [inaudible] oppression of women [inaudible] where men are no longer necessary.
Is in her and she can do herself in terms of well herself in many different ways she’s able to take care of herself financially she’s able to take care of herself [inaudible] she’s able to live on her own and uh this kind of theory [inaudible] that sort of links them all together but wants them all for their differences.

You can’t get them out of the book if you don’t get that. You know that and so we definitely talk about it, but I don't I don't teach it as a queer text as like the focus of what we're doing.

My central focus is on Celie's liberation which queerness is a part of.

Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

And then have you ever face pushback either from students or parents in I guess a more organized sense of like we don't want you to teach this because there are LGBT themes or just general discomfort among students when you start talking about those things yeah.

So I've been lucky in that way. I met some other teachers who've done it.

But no, the closest I came to that was that I had a student who was devoutly Muslim and she didn’t want to read depictions of sex or masturbation.
[00:09:47] But it wasn't you know Cieli kissing Shrug, so I don't think that was a pushback on the key themes of sexuality either.

[00:10:13] Let's see, I taught one year early in my career and two sections and didn't get any pushback but that's back when I was like the young twenties teacher so I was fine. Then five six years ago I was teaching Juniors again and by then the community that I lived in was a college town. And it's just really more liberal, more accepting, more all that good stuff.

[00:11:06] So yeah, I really haven't had much pushback at all.

[00:11:19] You know the supervisor who suggested not to cover the queer themes in it because it's “not a queer book.” I just like closed the door and taught.

[00:11:34] So when you're teaching this book do you ever think about it or frame it in the context of what it means for your LGBT students. Or is that not something that's as present on your mind.

[00:11:48] We have some work in the curriculum, more so in sophomore year and so I think it plays over into junior year when we read the color purple, we work with the notion of how you know a book can be like a mirror or a window.
[00:12:04] It can reflect ourselves or allow us to see something else. So I think some of what we teach then probably comes through but I don’t [inaudible] students about it [inaudible] direct relationship with their identity, because I don’t want to put anyone on the spot. You know the other discussions we have with that is whether you handle the N-word in the book.

[00:12:32] Yeah. Walker uses it in many passages and I feel like if I turn to a kid who I know from GSA or who has come up to me and or even was out publicly and was like that does that connect to your identity during class, then that’s shitty. But I do encourage them to think about characters with whom they identify, characters who are like them and who are unlike them. Broadly addressing it like that. At the end of the year I also have students do and end of term research projects for junior english AP after the AP exam you're doing a research project that involves collecting secondary sources of a particular book to choose anyone from the book they want to cover.

[00:13:25] And I actually had a lot of students choose the color purple. Had more than one student come out to their [inaudible] about how important and transformative the book was for them.

[00:13:39] So yeah, indirectly it's happening but it's a like a hidden curriculum rather than a paper curriculum.

[00:13:52] Yeah okay definitely. And then.
[00:13:57] Sorry I had a question that just popped into my head but I seem to have slipped out of my mind momentarily. Oh that's sort of why. So when you mentioned like not calling out a student you might know to be LGBT and say Oh like how does this book relate to you or things like that. Is that something that you've ever gotten guidance on either formally or informally from colleagues or from resources or is that more so just something that comes intuitively. Like how to treat these texts in a way that's like respectful to students.

[00:14:29] Probably not direct instruction, you know we certainly had conversations in like PD programs or with other teachers starting out. Like the less you call kids out the better and the usual with discipline issues and so I probably I just extended that to you know other stuff and experience with like dealing with [inaudible].

[00:15:09] And the sophomore curriculum has books that are dealing with issues of race. So and one of them includes the N word for a moment in the text. So you know just common sense of like not turning to, my district it is not really diverse in terms of race, so not turning to the one black kid in class and saying, “So.” And that's just sort of you know came over into the way I handle LGBT issues.

[00:15:52] Yeah. Yeah. OK. And then with the trans students I knew not to, unless the student acknowledges it, you know, bring up their trans-ness.
Mm hmm. Yeah absolutely. Okay great. And then just like if you were to give advice to say a teacher who is in a district that is not as liberal and supportive as yours who has never taught like The Color Purple or any book with LGBT themes is there any piece of advice you would give someone who is kind of just starting out into like teaching these topics.

I think it really depends on the district and the level of support from the supervisor going off curriculum is that you’ve yourself written up can get you in trouble and potentially fired. The only thing I think you can do in terms of building stuff onto the curriculum is thinking about pitching it as substance. Right. The Color Purple as covering race from multiple perspectives. because it's the sort of dual themes of Celie and Netty. Yeah and so and if they ask. Say yeah we won't really get into any of that and then get back and cover the shit out of the gay thing. When your door is closed. Or even if you're not doing that. Like having students just see a representation of themselves in literature who is not a tragedy who is not dead by the end of the text but really quite the opposite. I think it is so so critical, so that even if you say look like the district told me that I’m not allowed to talk about this stuff, is a relationship that shows gay people, do with that what you will, We can't talk about it. I think it's still good for the students who are queer or they have their own identity to see that it doesn't have to be [inaudible] and it doesn't have to end badly.

So yeah yeah absolutely. I think that's a good piece of advice. And then just kind of as a final thing is there anything else that we didn't cover that you think is relevant to talk about in
terms of especially like teaching books with LGBT content or anything that you've done related to engaging LGBT issues in school.

[00:18:53] I don't know. I don't think about it in you know my role more as ally so yeah, I’ll leave that to people who are more knowledgable that I am.

[00:19:11] Yeah. Okay great. And then just as kind of a final thing I'm doing snowball sampling for there. So if there is any of your colleagues who you know who also have experience in this kind of stuff or you think might have something meaningful to say and would be willing to talk to me I would love it if you're able to connect me with anyone else OK let me guess specifically the buzzer. Yes specifically I think like the curriculum piece is a little bit more in alignment with what my project is covering. So like anyone who has taught or addressed LGBT issues LGBT books characters in their classroom would be the most ideal. But if there's no one off top of your head no pressure obviously.

[00:19:54] I have a colleague and he's off in juniors. So similar if you're interested if you would be willing.

[00:20:06] Yeah. That would be great. Maybe I could. If you're able to use like throw us on an email chain together. If he is willing to chat but again if not that's totally fine.

[00:20:16] Some of the text right now and ask.
[00:20:18] Yeah right. Great. Well thank you so much. This was really helpful. I appreciated talking with you. Yeah absolutely.

[00:20:24] I'd love to see it when you're older.

[00:20:26] Yeah definitely. That sounds great.

[00:00:02] OK great. Yeah. So to get started I would love to hear just a little bit about any work that you've done related to LGBT issues in your school or in your work related to teaching at all. Starting with whichever you feel has been the most important for you

Sure sure. So I started teaching about 10 years ago with Chicago Public Schools and I was a science teacher for them but I also taught, I’m A special ed teacher, so I taught a number of subjects and I mainly taught in schools on the South and West Side of Chicago. And none of the schools that I taught in had a GSA and I actually started GSA’s in oh geez three or four schools that I worked in and did did work with getting a GSA started and off the ground. I'm also one of the co-founders of The Chicago LGBT prom that we do every year and that's going to be in it. I think it's seventh or eighth year this year. And the school I'm at now is a private therapeutic school. And I have a GSA here too. That did not exist when I got here. And I've been here about five years. And so I've done a lot of work here with GSA and I also taught history here. So I'm trying to integrate LGBT curriculum with I would say a lot more relevant than it was. You know when I teach math or science.

[00:01:48] Yeah definitely. Well that's really great. Really inspiring to hear especially as someone who identifies as LGBT hoping to get an education but that's more of an aside. So I guess one thing that I'm interested in is how did you get interested in these type of issues and what was the motivation for bringing this into your work in education.
[00:02:11] Well I'm queer myself and I didn't come out, and It's not that, I didn’t really know anything about that until college. Mainly because there was no representation. I mean there were no there were no gay people on TV there were no gay people, there were no gay people, no trans people or anything that wasn’t kind of the butt of a joke or part of a gag or you know. So when I got to college, and there was a GSA at my high school and I you know went to a pretty liberal progressive school. Yeah. But it just wasn't a thing that you really could openly be at that time. And so when I got to college I joined the essentially the gay student union group myself and really jumped in with both feet and I mean I went to a pretty social justice heavy school and I got involved in doing just kind of activism work in general. And that was really powerful for me and it was really the first time that I like a group of queer people sat in the same room, And like we talked about that and that was you know I was 20 20 19 or 20 when that happened and it was just, It was transformative. I ended up taking a class in like sort of queer issues in college. And so I think I've known since then you know and certainly when I decided to become a teacher that that was going to be central to my work. I was working with queer students and especially as I moved closer they got my master's and I realized I was going to be working in the South Side and West Side schools that really don't have a lot of access to the resources that some of the whiter Northside schools have like. But you know there's the Boys Town neighborhood in Chicago. There's lots of you know organizations but they're really focused on the north side. And to me that was really really really important. And so I've always been kind of a troublemaker. And so and even in my first school where there was just no there was really no trace of LGBT anything it was an all black all black school. I was like I'm I'm going to find GSA. And so I made some flyers. Is this a new question. am I still answering the same question.
Yeah you're right. No you're totally fine. It's meant to be it's like semi structured interview. So this is all so far.

OK yeah. So you know. There was another teacher who helped me to do it and I made a bunch of flyers and I put them up. All over the school like really loud and really you know I put them in all the bathrooms. And I really just wanted to be super like public about it. I think sometimes GSAs are like there's like a corner of the school where the GSA meets and that was not what I was about. I was like No like I want to have a GSA. You're never gonna walk in the door. You know that that exists. And that that's the thing that is here and that is safe. That I can put flyers up on the wall you know and I think people have different ways of getting to GSA but for me that was really important and first meeting we got 35 kids and they were into it like really into it and they were they had a lot of questions. I mean when the kids show up to a meeting and they were like, I've never met a gay person before. And it was like No you definitely have. You definitely are talking to one right now. Yes. And and so there was I mean I was working there which just yet. All these kids still had you know family members that had same sex partners and trans folks and people who were on that gender or different gender expression but they just didn't they didn't know the language they didn't know what to call it and it was a secret. Yes. So our first my first GSAs they were really just getting in a room and being like what does that even mean, like what does it even mean to you to be queer and have you ever heard about being queer in school and a lot of them hadn’t they never. up to and including the school that I'm in now had never learned about LGBT issues in school. And there was always something that they read
about on their own on the Internet and. And a lot of that is really aggressively hidden in curriculum especially in the history curriculum where there's a lot of folks that we talk about and in history that were queer and were trans. But that's just not part of their story. That's not part of the story that gets told. And so I think that for me I really identified that feeling of isolation as something manufactured right. That was something. It's not that those people didn't exist or don't exist it's that they are getting consciously erased. And so my sort of movement was in the other direction I wore like a rainbow lanyard and I have the like lesbian haircut and the bright green hair and I do not try to make myself inconspicuous at all because I figured if I'm the gayest thing around I can be the lightning rod and then I can make it safe for them to show up and be how they want to be because I'm safe to do that right. And I’m in the position of safety to do that and so for me a lot of starting GSA’s was about essentially creating this umbrella where they could ask questions and where they could show up and be and exist. And that kind of morphed into you work around curriculum and I started teaching history.

[00:08:01] OK great. So one thing I was going to ask and you kind of already answered this was whether or not you self identify to your students and kind of let them know about your sexual orientation.

[00:08:12] I do. But I keep it in general I identify as queer because I feel like that gives them an understanding of who I am and where I'm coming from. But yes but it doesn't place the focus on me or my sexuality or me personally. So I have made the choice to be out to my my colleagues my students. But I know a lot of people that aren’t. And part of that is safety. You know is that
safe is that a job threat for you. But I have I've always really felt like it's important to have an adult that's a functional working professional adult who is queer. But that's not the center of their existence. So. So for me that's always been I have I think maybe not in my first couple of years but certainly as I've become established as a teacher I have come out to my students really and so often indirectly where I'll talk about my partner where it's appropriate and trying to really bring it up in ways that are really non-threatening but also let them know that they're talking to someone who's queer.

[00:09:20] Yeah. OK great. So I would love to hear about a unit that you've talked that address LGBT topics or a lesson that specifically addressed an LGBT person in history. Anything that comes to mind. Well I think the first really the first stuff that we do in history.

[00:09:39] At my school that I'm at now and we have really small classes for therapeutic school. And so we have a lot of opportunity for discussion. But we talk a lot about whose stories are getting told and which stories are not getting told and which stories are actually getting fabricated like which stories are lies. Yeah. And so we talk a lot about race. We talk about women you know women are make up 18 percent of the content in history books but they make up 52 percent of population and so we've looked at it really from a broad lens. There is actually a very small narrow scope about what actually is included in most history classes and the effort that same thing gets over and over and over again. And so it feels like that's all there is often for students to the point where when they see these works by. But when you point out to them for example that half of Shakespeare’s sonnets were written to a man. They’re astonished. They're
like Well why don't I know about this. And so we really start it in the context of representation and inclusion because our history classes look so different from the history classes that they've taking in the past and so right from the jump I would say on the first day of class. We use the term LGBTQ to to just really be like these are folks that you haven't read about but they've always existed. And then we really look at it like where those people were you know like what. Because we did we did that with the same language 200 years ago that there was now but there were romantic friendships among women in Victorian age and there were different things in Greece. We also look at you know just because we don't we didn't have the modern language that we use today. Those books were integrated into society. And so I think I think that's where we start is looking around and saying hey look at different diversity that we have in our population today. That was the same then. But those people didn't have the resources to get books published they didn't have the resources to write plays or give speeches and get them in the public square in the same way that white guys got to do. So I would say we really try to do it right from jump.

[00:12:10] Yeah it sounds like your school has a pretty strong and somewhat deliberate social classes bend to it. Is that an accurate assessment.

[00:12:24] Yeah, especially compared to most places. Our population is students with emotional disabilities or autism and LGBT students are very overrepresented in in that community. And so we're starting with a population of folks who are non-binary, who are trans, who are queer. And
so I think that part of it is shaped by our student body. But I will say that when I took over the history department from the person before me there was no LGBT inclusion in the history curriculum. When I took it over five years ago and it wasn't like it was excluded but it just wasn't included. You know I think you know and so my coteacher and I made a very deliberate and intentional curriculum that was representative of race of gender sexuality of all those different things. But it wasn't automatic we decided to make that happen.

[00:13:21] But we did have a very supportive administration because we are a special ed school and because we we are therapeutic. We had a lot of latitude to teach things in a nontraditional way. But I don't know they necessarily have that at a public school where you have a more like this is what we teach, we have 10 history teachers we teach that every year and so I basically got to write the class however I wanted it. And so I think that's a freedom that I have that most people just don't have.

[00:13:52] Yeah yeah. Are there specific strategies that you use when you're dealing with issues of identity to help kind of foster a sensitivity and positivity toward those particularly LGBT identities. But really any time when you're talking about marginalized people in your classroom.

[00:14:11] Yeah. No that we definitely do we start almost like you would start like a like a support kind of situation with ground rules Step up step back in terms of like identifying that. Mostly it's people who are in positions of privilege and power that do most of the talking and are really comfortable talking and trying to make space for folks that maybe don't feel comfortable
or haven't been told for their whole life that their voice is important and necessary. And so again really starting in general terms we go over terminology that is and is not appropriate just so that they so that it doesn't have to be a corrective experience where like a kid has it wrong and then we have to correct them. It's like when we're talking about you know queer people here's the language that we're going to use, here's the words that we're using specifically and here's the words that we're not going to use and we don't even we don't say the words but we say you know what those words are. A lot of that is modeling when a question is framed in a way you like you know if a student asks a question that's framed in a way that isn't the best way to say it. We'll reframe it in the answer and will like rephrase it. We're using the correct language so that it's not a gotcha but it's more about how we're going to talk about this in here and make sure that corrections. When kids are you know maybe intentionally try to like stir something up that are dealt with really quickly and the student is asked to leave the classroom immediately to check in with an adult so that those types of things just become not acceptable at the classroom culture. And again I'd say we have a critical mass of kids who are pretty in the know many of them are part of the LGBT community themselves. And so usually that's one kid and that kid usually doesn't find a lot of traction. And so that often kind of corrects itself once that culture is set but it's because right away we interrupt that and we interrupt sort of well-meaning statements with kind of gentle reframing. But once they're more malicious we really are like no you can't be in this room with your speak that way. Yeah.

[00:16:43] Yeah that sounds really good. So. And then one other thing I was wondering about is did you receive any guidance from colleagues on you all the things that you just talked to me
about or were there any resources from outside sources that were helpful for you in planning lessons on LGBT topics or helping frame the classroom culture in a positive way. I would say that I get a lot of my stuff from you know from GLSEN.

[00:17:17] We have like Howard ground health center in Chicago which is really focused on trans health and queer health and so I get a lot of my stuff from. You know I think that the sources that most people do. I think I kind of became that influence when I came to the school because I was so like in your face about it. Yeah. But we also. Our executive director is part of the queer community. And we have a lot of trans and non binary students and so there was sort of a I guess like an orientation for like let's talk about pronouns and like here's how we do this as part of our orientation. But that was that's unique to this school. I had to really plead with one of my public school principals to allow a group to come in and do like essentially make an LGBT competency training for the staff. We got a lot of pushback from that. And so I again I sort of feel like I'm in a cosy little world here at the school but but typically when I have reached out to the public school system when I reached out like Hey what about this. What about this. They're like hey we don't have time for that or you know we have too much other academic stuff. You really have to be pretty assertive to get that stuff in at the public school level.

In the resources that you've used like some question and other resources.

[00:18:49] Have you noticed any gaps in those or places where you wish you had more material or more guidance or anything like that.
I think that even as well intentioned as the organizations are. They're still very white and they're still very. They really are geared toward upper middle class white people. And even from the point of like it when I was on the South side and the West side there's totally different language that used even for like [inaudible]. And so I would suggest that just like really looking at who are the leaders who are the queer leaders of color who can also be experts in that field so that it's not so much focus on because I think that that's where also you have parental support more liberal white suburb kind of places. And so that's where it happens. So I would say that there's definitely a lack of resources available for people of color.

Yeah yeah well those are all the kind of discrete questions I have for you.

But if there's anything that you feel like is important on this topic that you haven't talked about yet I'm happy to hear of any leftover things that you wanted to share

I think that when I think about growing up without any LGBT like understanding that that was like a whole world. What was really powerful to me was I spent a lot of time on the library and one of the things that's been really critical in my own work with queer kids is I have a classroom library that has all the LGBT picture books that I can find it like a guidebook for LGBT teens and I think that's a really great way for kids to more anonymously look at stuff and get some of their questions answered and also just really normalized. Yeah in this classroom this is a place where we talk about this stuff. I think that that has to do with the visuals that you put on your
wall. I think it has to do with the books that you have in your library that the posters you know all the things that sort of cue a kid like hey this is an adult that if I have a question I could talk to them and a lot of things that students can interact with themselves tend to be helpful because a lot of kids are not even close to ready to talk about it with an adult they just they just need a book and some have that book is like Heather Has Two Mommies like it's a picture book. Look at how like look at how non-threatening this is look. You know that I love and Tango Makes Three. If a teacher was just starting out and they wanted to really start somewhere I would start with their own classroom library.

[00:21:45] Yeah yeah. Well that's really great. No none. Yeah. Thank you so much. I really appreciate hearing all of this just like on a personal note. It has been super inspiring and also we'll be super useful for my project. So thank you.

[00:22:01] Good. Good. I'm so glad you're doing it. They're just really needs to be so much more work around this stage so I'm glad I'm glad to hear you're doing it. And I can catch it a lot. I can have karaoke now around college as well.

[00:22:11] Yeah. If there's anyone else who you think would be willing to talk to me about this. I would love to hear from more folks. Thank you so much.
Yeah actually I think this teacher is much more I would say traditional conservative but actually do a lot of books that have LGBT content and she you a really good person to talk to. I to try to see if I can make that happen.