Recalibrating Our Moral Compass: How America's Narrowing Value System is Erasing LGBTQ+ People in Schools

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RECALIBRATING OUR MORAL COMPASS:
HOW AMERICA’S NARROWING VALUE SYSTEM IS ERASING LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS

A Thesis Presented

by

Andrew M. LeValley

to

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Abstract

This thesis bridges the effects of society—meaning politics, policies, norms, and values—and school on LGBTQ+ students. Paramount educational philosophers, namely Dewey, Freire, Berliner, and Illich, understood that schools are a reflection of the communities they serve. I apply this common philosophy to the LGBTQ+ community to uncover the systems of inequalities that have negative effects on LGBTQ+ youth in order to promote better systems that include both LGBTQ+ youth and the larger LGBTQ+ community. To illustrate the effects of society and school on the LGBTQ+ community and youth, I use traditional peer reviewed researched data, current events that showcase America’s debate over values, and anecdotes from my own life experience as a homosexual high school English teacher. I have chosen to insert myself into this research because I believe it is academically irresponsible to ignore both my bias and insider knowledge on the topic. To best insert myself into my research, I present my work through the Scholarly Personal Narrative writing style. The findings of my research show that there are systems of oppression within society that serve the LGBTQ+ community, which both mirror and effect the systems that LGBTQ+ students experience within public schools. My research also reveals a lack of data on LGBTQ+ students’ academic achievements to determine what supports are needed to aid this population. This thesis provides some suggestions to better support LGBTQ+ students, but it primarily focuses on uncovering systems of oppression, which negatively affect the LGBTQ+ community, that exist within our society and are transferred onto our education system.

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Introduction

Framing the Research

Much of my graduate school experience focused on various educational philosophies and strategies. While researching these philosophies/strategies, I would find myself looking forward to going into my classroom to see the application. One of my great frustrations of graduate school has been watching these philosophies fail. Sometimes they were beyond failure—they would fail miserably. I do not blame the scholar, and I do not always blame myself. Rather, I blame the system by which we learn. Theory is just a dream if there is no practical application. I teach at a Title I school where all of my classes are heterogeneously grouped. In order for me to buy the theory, I have to ensure the practical application is successful for everyone. The organization of my writing within this thesis examines a particular topic, the research around the topic, and then exposes the reality of the topic and/or research within the school. Think of it like a tornado: the theory and scholarly research being toward the top of the tornado, the wider, bigger section of the tornado, and the practical application or reality of the situation at the bottom of the tornado—the point that makes contact with the ground. It is this nexus where the heavens meet the earth that profound learning occurs: the act of making meaning.

The conventional research paper is crafted to put distance between the writer and their research to show other scholars within the writer’s discipline that they have taken steps to ensure that their research is objective, sound, and free of bias. The unbiased or objectivist
approach to research is crucial in many fields of academia attempting to prove an outside truth.

This research is not intended to prove that homophobia, transphobia, or heterosexism exist; I assume the reader acknowledges these types of oppression within our society. This research shows how homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism within our society show up in our public schools, and how systems of oppression affect students, faculty, and the overall education system. Because I am a gay teacher, bias is undeniably present. Rather than writing a thesis that separates my research from my bias, I have elected to lean into my bias by presenting my research in the form of a scholarly personal narrative. Not only is covering up bias through objectivist writing morally questionable, but my bias provides useful insight.

Robert Nash, my professor who coined the term scholarly personal narrative (SPN), defines the genre: “[SPN] puts the self of the scholar front and center […] The best analysis and prescription come out of the scholar’s efforts to make narrative sense of personal experience. All else is commentary—significant, to be sure, but commentary nonetheless […] The ultimate intellectual responsibility of the SPN scholar is to find a way to use the personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers.”¹ The scholarly personal narrative is more appropriate for my research than the traditional objectivist approach given how I identify, my work, and my experiences. I have something to say about this research, and scholarly personal narrative writing is a way for me to use my experience as analysis for my research.

For much of my life, I was voiceless. I lived in a conservative state, and I was raised by a conservative family who unknowingly and knowingly silence me because of their heterosexist view of the world. Scholarly Personal Narrative relies on the voice of the author. Nash says, “It’s the ‘you’ whom you are choosing to tell your story. It’s the recognition that you can never be fully outside your writing. As an author, you are always an insider; not omnisciently removed from what you write, but caught up personally in every word, sentence, and paragraph.”

It is cathartic to liberate my voice from the prevailing heterosexual world. To be able to express my academic research using my voice, experiences, and identity is a rare and unique privilege.

This thesis is born from the pedagogical knowledge I learned throughout the Interdisciplinary program at the University of Vermont. It is born out of many hours of research. It is born from applying my identity and academic research within my school and examining the outcome. As an instructor, I define successful learning as applying the knowledge we gain in class to our own lives. This thesis is evidence of my own successful learning—the point where the tornado makes contact with the earth.

2 Ibid, 24
Chapter 1

Finding Identity, Finding Purpose

“We are not written for one instrument alone; I am not, neither are you.”
— André Aciman, Call Me by Your Name

Like most undergraduate students obtaining an English degree, I wondered what I was going to for my life work. I gave serious consideration to being a high school teacher—in fact, I even changed my major to education for a semester. I took classes on pedagogy, the history of the education system in America, and human development classes. Panic didn’t set in until I went into the schools to observe teachers and students. I was twenty, and I was wrestling every minute of every day with my sexual identity. It was not until I walked into a high school as an adult that I realized working in a high school—a place that represented great oppression in my youth—was unbearable, even self-loathing. When I opened the front door of the high school, the smell of waxed linoleum, cafeteria food, and laminators triggered a panic attack; the students would know, my colleagues would know, administration would know, and just like before, I would be verbally attacked, physically attacked, or worse, ignored and erased. And what about the logistics of this pipe dream? At that point I had never heard of a gay teacher in the state of Kansas. Was it even allowed? Who did I think I was? The idea of becoming a teacher was a colossal mistake.
Trying to catch my breath in a bathroom stall surrounded by racial slurs and homophobic language etched into the walls was the moment I realized I was in the wrong place. I had to get out of the school of education, and more importantly, out of Kansas. Not dissimilar to a refugee seeking refuge, I fled the state of Kansas. The politics, policies, culture, and overall aggression toward homosexuals in the state continue to create conditions which, I believe, make it difficult to be a happy and whole homosexual.

When I arrived in San Francisco, I began to fully realize the oppressive nature of my upbringing, and its effects on my person; I had more than just boxes to unpack. I was liberated from the molds and cages I was forced into by my family, friends, and community. And rather than feeling exhilarated by the freedom, I felt unmoored by the realization that I didn’t know how to be myself because I didn’t know myself. I spent so many years wearing a costume to hide my homosexuality that shedding the costume left me naked and vulnerable.

I spent five years immersed in the gay community, getting to know a part of myself I hid, ignored, and hated. Eventually, I found the courage to lean in to the newfound freedoms California offered: I surrounded myself with gay friends, gay community, and gay culture. I did everything I could to make up for lost time I spent imprisoned in the closet. San Francisco allowed me to focus on my sexuality, and embrace a part of myself I did not know or understand. After years of focusing on my sexuality, identifying first as a homosexual and secondly has a human being, I felt further from my identity, values, and belief systems than ever before. I thought San Francisco was going to help me reconcile my identities so I could be a holistic human being who no longer grappled with identity.

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focusing on a single part of myself, the pendulum of my identity was pushed in the other
direction. I knew I needed to leave San Francisco to find center, balance, and reconciliation.

I started dating a lawyer who lived and worked for an eccentric, wealthy policy wonk
and psychologist. Dan—the lawyer—recognized my internal dilemma and brought me to
meet his boss. After answering Dan’s boss’s rapid firing of questions about my past in order
to ascertain my socio-economic background, religious/spiritual beliefs, value systems, and
aspirations, this man looked me squarely in the eye and said, “What the hell are you doing in
San Francisco?” I told him that I was wandering around the Bay Area completely lost. He
laughed and said, “Of course you are—San Francisco mirrors none of your values.” It was
clear that this was a man who understood my internal struggle. At the end of dinner, he
pulled me aside, “Would you like to move to Vermont? I have a property on 25 acres. I
need someone to take care of it, and you need the space to figure out your life.” I accepted a
whimsical dinner invitation, and my ticket out of San Francisco presented itself in the same
whimsical spirit.

Robert Nash, my esteemed professor at UVM writes, “We think of meaning-making
as a process and purpose-finding as a product.”² Dan’s boss understood that I was still in
the process of meaning-making. But before I could find purpose, I had more work to do.
As soon as I arrived at the 25-acre compound, I knew I made the right decision. The
isolation of Vermont gave me time and space to process and synthesize my experiences in
order to reconcile my identities; I was on a journey to become a human being with a
balanced amount of internal conflict. The summers with Dan’s boss were used to assess my

² Jennifer J.J Jang and Nash, Robert, “Making Meaning: The Common Theme in Crossover Content.” In Search
of Self: Exploring the Undergraduate Identity Development, edited by C Hanson, Chapter 3 (San Francisco: Jossey-
Bass, 2014).
progress and set goals for myself. After two years on the farm, I felt whole—I found meaning in my experiences, and now I was ready to find purpose.

For months, I researched master’s programs, vocational schools, and jobs. I considered welding, running for office, academia, starting my own landscaping company, becoming a librarian, or even becoming a farmer. One evening in late summer, I was looking at jobs for the state of Vermont, when I stumbled across a program called Peer Review. The program is an alternative route for obtaining a teaching license; it targets folks who are looking to change careers, but already have a degree in a discipline: math, science, English, history, foreign languages, art, theater, or music. As I began to contemplate teaching as a career, I was immediately twenty years old and panicking in that bathroom stall in Manhattan, Kansas. And yet the idea remained in my head. As I considered it for several weeks, I made a connection: my anxiety didn’t come from being in a school, interacting with students, or observing teachers. I understood that I was remembering a person who was wildly insecure, conflicted, and unhappy because I was unseen. I realized that my 20 year-old self didn’t stand a chance in the classroom because he was a fragment of a larger identity. The other pieces to that sliver of an identity had since been found and pieced together. I had the perspective of a whole human being, and not someone who was splintered. In searching for those pieces, I gained life-experience and found a voice to share my experiences.

That was a difficult and arduous journey, and so much work could have been avoided if my childhood would have allowed for a safe and healthy exploration of myself. Suddenly, in that moment of clarity, becoming a teacher was inevitable. As a homosexual, I have unique life experiences that can be used to protect misunderstood, scared, and erased LGBTQ+ youth, and instill tolerance in heterosexual students by simply being present. I
realized that schools—LGBTQ+ students—needed me. And just like that, a purpose appeared.
Chapter 2

The Danger of a Narrow Lens

“The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame.”
—Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!
—Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”

America is a nation of immigrants, which is what makes this country strong. Valuing differences in each other is a cornerstone of the American identity, which is evidenced by Emma Lazarus’s poem bronzed on the Statue of Liberty. Because America has been a welcoming beacon of light for people around the world, many of our communities are made up of different races, religions, cultures, values, morals, and norms. These diverse communities are the pillars for innovation in this country; people merge their unique backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge together to create a wider perspective, a greater knowledge. It is crucial to our country that we foster these heterogeneous learning environments by ensuring our schools mirror the communities they serve. All students must see themselves in both the curriculum and the faculty.
Research repeatedly shows that more diversity in staff helps to close the opportunity gap. Students make connections when they can relate to their instructor. Research aside, common sense says when students are able to identify with faculty, they feel safer, which means that students are more likely to attend class, which leads to students retaining more information, yielding better test results, but most importantly, learning. If all students feel safe to engage, students are able to merge their knowledge to create innovation within the classroom. Students then leave institutions with a wider lens of the world, diverse knowledge, and more empathy and tolerance. And that is my definition of human progress.

Unfortunately, this is not what is occurring. Diversity of students, in regard to race, within public schools is increasing much more quickly than teachers of color are entering the profession, thus the opportunity gap is widening. There are several disconnected reasons for this, but the most notable is a system of oppression: because the opportunity gap is not closing, partially as a result of students of color not seeing themselves in faculty, students of color are less likely to graduate from high school. Fewer students of color graduating from high school means fewer students of color attending college, and even fewer going into a profession that does not pay particularly well. This is one of many systems that keep diversity out of the classroom.


Idib., 3
There are also incentives to retain educators in the profession for a lifetime. Education is notorious for low salaries. However, the profession has historically offered a middle-class income over time, and a comfortable retirement. As a result, older generations of teachers remained in education long term, which doesn’t allow for schools to onboard diversity as quickly as the demographics of student bodies change. This is particularly frustrating to witness in my work environment. I have several colleagues that have been in the profession for years, and are close to retirement. These particular colleagues make it clear to students and faculty alike that they are biding their time. These are older, white educators who make no attempt to refresh their lessons, create new curriculum, make connections with students, or foster community. I suspect that burned-out educators negatively and disproportionately affect marginalized students because for an older, white educator to relate to a student of color requires effort. This only exacerbates the system of oppression in place. Please note that I am not creating an archetype for older teachers approaching retirement—many veteran teachers within my building are some of the finest educators, colleagues, and mentors. I give this anecdote to exemplify another system that oppresses marginalized students, and keeps diversity out of the classroom.

Teachers play an important role in the capitalist system of oppression. Anyon briefly touches on the idea of self-commodification of the teacher. Teachers that are paid well feel honored which speaks to her idea of “relations between people and their work,” as well as physical capital, meaning more money. All of this is to say that people—good teachers can be bought. And who has the capital to purchase quality teachers and give them the

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6 Idib., 3
7 There is no research on this suspicion, just my own observations.
resources they need to be effective? Communities with physical capital. Siegel-Hawley exposed the correlation between school and housing by making the case that a lack of capital perpetuates a lack of capital: “Disparities across municipal and school-district boundary lines exist largely because, without an overarching political body managing regional concerns, small local units compete with one another for advantages—economic or otherwise.”

She goes on to make the case that capital perpetuates capital by citing a study: “One UCLA researcher conducted fieldwork on White families moving ‘for the schools’ in a Southern California school district. She found that informal conversations passed through friends about the degree to which educational settings were serving Whiter and wealthier students largely formed the basis for decisions about whether or not a zone or district should be sought out.”

The evidence is clear that capital has perpetuated advantages in our schools. And on the other side of the coin, there is clear evidence that systems of oppression exist as byproduct to obtaining capital.

Educators, at least within my building, are always wanting to “nail down our curriculum” or “align our curriculum.” While the idea of aligning our curriculum so students can naturally build on prior knowledge appeals to me, I am cautious of overly curating the curriculum. Michael Apple, a renowned educational philosopher says, “The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always a part of selective tradition, someone’s selection, some groups’ vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of cultural, political, and

economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize people [...] The
decision to define some groups’ knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge,
while other groups knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely
important about who has power in society.”

This limited view reflected in public schools perpetuates the same limited view, thus it hinders progress within both society and
education. A narrow education creates a static society, it creates prejudice, and it
discriminates against those who are not included in that narrow cycle.

Another great education philosopher, Ivan Illich, warned about curating curriculum
to the point of institutionalizing knowledge: “The institutionalization of values leads
inevitably to physical pollution, social polarization, and psychological impotence: three
dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery [...] this process of
degradation is accelerated when nonmaterial needs are transformed into demands for
commodities; when health, education, personal mobility, welfare, or psychological healing
are defined as the result of services or ‘treatments.’” People are individuals who function
differently from one another. If we institutionalize everything, we begin to create
predictable patterns of thinking, which crushes innovation. And more dangerously, it
becomes exclusive thereby perpetuating oppression of marginalized students.

If we are naming democracy as the core value of our country, then we must ensure
that every student and staff member is reflected somewhere in the curriculum—this gives
voice and recognition to those who are consistently marginalized within our society. In his
essay “Education and Social Change,” John Dewey recognizes that schools are slow to align

College Record* 95, no. 2. (Columbia University: 1993): 223

12 Illich, “Why We Must Deestablish School,” 1-2.
to social changes within society. Dewey posits that schools are seemingly disorganized and disconnected when it comes to their curriculum because social changes within a society are disconnected and disorganized. Dewey argues against schools upholding and curating certain knowledge because new knowledge inevitably seeps into institutions through the people that occupy the schools, i.e. students and staff, and local and world events that take place outside of the school.13

When I read the news, I cannot help but think that we are unmoored when it comes to our values. There are so many wars currently being waged over our identity as a country, it is difficult to decide which cause to fight for: technology, income inequality, women’s rights, racism, immigration, etc. Our society cannot agree on much, even issues regarding basic human rights. Regardless of the conflict, all wars are fought over the same thing: an abuse of power. Because schools are a reflection of the larger community, those who have power have the most sway on education policy; and typically, those with the most power are wealthy, heteronormative, white, educated males. That is a specific and narrow perspective that does not always align with students sitting in my classroom, or the teachers running the room. We should not decide what gets taught in the classroom based on power, but rather based on the who is in the classroom. Dewey saw promise in an education system that is centered on our country’s democratic values.

Our western ideologies emphasize the importance of the individual because democracy gives each person an equal voice. The transcendentalists progressed this idea by romanticizing the idea of democracy and the individual. But when capitalism seized hold of the individual, it polluted our idea of democracy. Every individual does have a voice, but the

volume of a voice depends on how much money one is willing to pay for someone to turn up the knob on their volume. Jean Anyon’s research focused on capital oppressing marginalized populations: “What potential relationships to the system of ownership of symbolic and physical capital, to the authority and control, and to their own productive activity are being developed in children in each school […] These differences may not only contribute to the development in the children in each social class of certain types of economically significant relationships and not others, but would thereby help reproduce this system of relations in society”14. As soon as we enroll children into our public schools, we immediately start grooming them for their “appropriate” roles in society, thus perpetuating who has power and who works for power. The idea of unknowingly training children to have specific relationships with power is not the only way schools perpetuate a system of oppression.

As our values shift further toward prioritizing money and comfort, we shift away from democracy which is reflected in the classroom through access to power. Who has access to publishers, standardized test developers, college admission boards, and educational policy wonks? People with money. Apple goes on to articulate how capital, regardless of the type of capital, supports itself—his main evidence being the ask by those in power for a nationalized curriculum. By curating knowledge, the wealthy and powerful become gatekeepers for power itself: “Cultural form and content function as markers of class. The granting of sole legitimacy to such a system of culture through its incorporation within the official centralized curriculum, then, creates a situation in which the markers of taste become the markers of people. The school becomes a class school”15. Students prior knowledge

14 Anyon, “Hidden Curriculum of Work.”
matters, even indirectly. If students don’t have access to the same cultural, economic, and political capital that created the curriculum, they are at a disadvantage before they even walk in the school. This is evidence that the school system, itself, can function as the system of oppression.

I am not convinced that people built systems of oppressions within schools knowingly. Perhaps I am naïve, but I think the more likely explanation is democracy gave way to capitalism, and people play by the rules of the system capitalism has created. We, as a society, must be vigilant in protecting our core value as a nation: democracy. Education is a pillar of democracy because democracy relies on an exchange of ideas—a healthy, knowledgeable dialogue. Paulo Freire wrote, “How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided? How can I dialogue if I am closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others? How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness? Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue. Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world.” Education must be centered on the premise that everyone has an equal voice, otherwise, we exclude much of our identity. If we continue to center education policy on data like test scores, attendance rates, suspension rates, prison rates, we will continue to gaze into the opportunity gap and wonder why it is not budging. Spending our money based exclusively on statistics and numbers is not necessarily being inclusive of all populations, but rather, it can backfire and harm students. If we look up from the data, take an introspective look ourselves and our society, ask ourselves who we are versus who we want to be, and recalibrated, we would be a society that lives by its morals and values—a truly democratic society.
The research I offer in this chapter is intended to make a point: note that the LGBTQ+ student was never mentioned in this chapter. This is because leading educational scholars have codified our approach to diversity within schools through race and socio-economics. Throughout my graduate program, my research on diversity in schools consistently brought me back to Anyon, Apple, Berliner, Dewey, Freire, Illich, and Ladson-Billings. These are scholars who have done, or are currently doing, crucial work to create equity within schools. However, their work is limited to socioeconomics and/or race. In regard to Dewey, Freire, and Illich, democracy was not intended to protect the LGBTQ+ community evidenced by never mentioning the LGBTQ+ community in their work. The Puritans who landed in New England would have burned me at the stake. But we have progressed as a country and as a species. Yet our research and approach toward diversity within schools remain indoctrinated in socio-economics and race. Let me be clear in saying that I am not criticizing the incredible work and accomplishments of these great academics. They are pillars of educational scholarship. Rather, I am calling for educational scholars, specifically academics researching diversity, to consider and name the LGBTQ+ community when discussing equity in the classroom.

Imagine being a gay graduate student who set out to examine how LGBTQ+ students relate to the opportunity gap, only to discover that in a data-driven world, there is no data on LGBTQ+ students and the opportunity gap. Imagine being a gay graduate student taking classes on diversity in public schools—reading research similar to what I presented in this chapter—and discovering that the bulk of diversity research focuses on race and socio-economics. Or imagine an LGBTQ+ high school student reading that section of my thesis and not seeing themselves anywhere in research that informs their education.
Chapter 3

An Illustration of Data-Driven Oppression

“The popular view that scientists proceed inexorably from well-established fact to well-established fact, never being influenced by any unproved conjecture, is quite mistaken. Provided it is made clear which are proved facts and which are conjectures, no harm can result. Conjectures are of great importance since they suggest useful lines of research.”
— Alan Turing

In chapter two, I show how systems of oppression are often affirmed and sustained by making decisions centered in data rather than values. Much of the evidence I used to uncover these systems, is based on quantifiable research of scholars who study the opportunity gap in an attempt to close the gap. In all of the research I have found, the classes I have taken, and the professional development hours I have accrued, closing the opportunity gap focuses on achieving parity between white students and students of color as well as students with varying socioeconomic statuses. I posit that the opportunity gap is laser focused on these populations because our society currently values the dollar above all else. Data informs our local, state, and federal governments on where and how to spend money most efficiently; the logic being that we want to avoid wasting money and resources, so data, particularly quantifiable data, must inform spending—that is the overarching system of oppression.
When I decided to write a thesis halfway into my graduate program, I ruminated on why I became a teacher, which, as I explained in chapter one, was to protect LGBTQ+ students from being erased. I was taking a class that was centered on closing the opportunity gap. Because this topic is constantly broached in my professional career as an educator, I understood that the course would likely approach the opportunity gap through the definition of diversity as being students living in poverty and/or students of color. Because this was a graduate course, and not professional development, I hoped we would look at diversity through an LGBTQ+ lens, but that view never presented itself. I could not understand—the teacher was compassionate, thoughtful, and clearly knew what she was talking about. Why were we not looking at more holistic data that included LGBTQ+ populations? I was still waiting for the data that would fall in line with my focus, my identity, my need to protect LGBTQ+ students. Slowly, it dawned on me that perhaps there was no data available. It was a slow realization, because it seemed impossible. We are such a data-centric society, that data on LGBTQ+ students’ academic performance must exist. After doing hours of research—searching “opportunity gap and LGBTQ,” “achievement gap and LGBTQ,” “opportunity gap and homosexual,” achievement gap and gay,” “academic performance and LGBTQ,” and so many other variations—my jaw dropped. There is no quantifiable research that addresses LGBTQ+ students in regard to academic performance. Again, none of the research I provided in the previous chapter mentions LGBTQ+ students and the opportunity gap because there is no data. It is difficult to quantify LGBTQ+ students—difficult, but not impossible. Because data is more complicated to compile in regard to LGBTQ+ students, researchers approach the opportunity gap without considering the populations with less quantifiable data.
When data-driven decisions are the center of educational policy, all public schools must make every effort to follow that policy to maximize their funding. Without considering those outside of the data, LGBTQ+ populations are inevitably forgotten about on the local level. I teach high school in a city with a refugee resettlement program—a community living by American values. As a result, the community has seen many changes within the last 50 years in regard to its demographics. Today, this quaint, liberal New England city is home to people from Vietnam, Somalia, Syria, Nepal, Burma, Armenia, Bosnia, and Serbia to name a few. The demographics in the city’s public schools reflect the changing demographics of the community. In keeping up with the change, my school district rebranded itself with the slogan, “All Are Welcome.”

I work for a school district that prioritizes closing the opportunity gap for students of color and refugees because that is inclusive to our changing community, but it also behooves the school’s budget because our national education policy is incentivizing a focus on low-income students and students of color. Let me be clear: this is a small community where people live by their morals and values, meaning the district focuses on inclusive environments for refugees because it is the democratic approach to education. I am not criticizing my district for focusing on closing the opportunity gap for lower socioeconomic backgrounds and students of color. I am simply pointing out that the opportunity gap limits its focus to minorities that are quantifiable.

So much time and money are spent to close this gap through professional development, staff meetings, and department meetings to ensure our curriculum and pedagogies are culturally responsive. And because federal education policy applauds these efforts, district leaders feel that they are doing their job in living up to our brand of, “All Are Welcome.” The problem is that we are laser focused on supporting a quantifiable
marginalized population, thus other marginalized populations are lost in the peripheral. Policy wonks, administrators, school boards, and teachers are not thinking critically about this exclusive definition of diversity because race and socio-economics is the accepted definition—a definition codified through data.

In the spring of 2019, faculty within my district were asked to sign up for professional development strands for the 2019-2020 school year. The strands are a themed class offered by the district which meets throughout the school year to focus on the chosen topic. While there is a class called Teaching for Social Justice, the LGBTQ+ population is not named anywhere on the program of studies.16 There is, however, a class that is offered called Culturally Responsive Classroom Management, which is based on Culturally Relevant/Sustainable pedagogy, a pedagogy that focuses on racial equity.17 Our school district is required by state and federal funding to close the opportunity gap, thus the professional development logically coincides with this vision, and in fact, the school receives money which is earmarked for these classes. Again, the vision does not consider the LGBTQ+ population because it is not a quantifiable minority. It is not incentivized because it is difficult to quantify, thus no data is available to policy wonks to create education legislation that supports LGBTQ+ students. And yet, we all know LGBTQ+ exist within our schools—a clear example of making decisions based on capital rather than values.

This limited definition of a minority is consistently used to make decisions. On January 3, 2020, all of our departments—meaning English, science, social studies, math, fine arts, etc.—were asked to look at the classes we offer, and the demographics within those

16 Appendix A
classes, to ensure that our curriculum is meeting the needs of our students. The data we were given about students in our classes does not offer any information about LGBTQ+ students. The data included, race, free and reduced lunch status (socio-economic status), and binary gender, meaning male or female. Because this quantifiable data was provided, the topic of the conversation was centered around including these populations. We are not using our resources with equity. This is not out of malice: the district focuses its resources and efforts on quantifiable data and calls this successful equity work because they are able to show progress in numbers, and our society values checking off boxes evidenced by numbers. LGBTQ+ students must self-identify before they are able to check a box. Meaning, a teacher cannot look at a student and know they identify as LGBTQ+. This complicates equity work because our society refuses to allocate resources toward something that cannot be measured with data. But this does not mean these students don’t exist, and this does not mean that school districts should continue to ignore the LGBTQ+ community, thereby erasing this identity.

Because 46%—a measureable number—of my school district’s student population identify as non-white, my district does a tremendous job of implementing culturally competent curriculum where students of color can see themselves and their experiences in the content teachers deliver. For example, in that same meeting, our English department identified Elie Wiesel’s *Night* as our 9th grade core text. The core text for 10th grade is the *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*. These books are incredibly important works of literature that shed light on large, oppressed populations. They should continue to be core texts. The English department moves to semester long elective courses for eleventh and
twelfth graders. We offer courses like Harlem Renaissance, Spotlighting Justice, and Introduction to African American Literature. These are courses I am proud to offer and teach because it shows an inclusion of populations, and it shows that our curriculum is progressive and relevant. However, it does not include any LGBTQ+ classes—or even units within our elective courses—to support the LGBTQ+ community.

For several years, the English department has been looking to bring queer texts into our curriculum. The head of the department asked me to identify a queer text we could roll out. I suggested the coming of age novel Call Me by Your Name by Andre Aciman. It is about a 17-year-old boy who is discovering his sexuality. On August 18, 2018, the head of the English department at Burlington High School texted me after reading the book, saying, “I am fascinated that you want to teach a book with pussy fucking, ass fucking, finger fucking, peach fucking, fucking in alleys, fucking on beaches, fucking under your parents’ roof, fucking two different people in one day. Fascinated. Prepare your argument for why this riveting novel belongs in a high school classroom. I am hugely skeptical and willing to listen.” I was crestfallen. My esteemed colleague and good friend—someone I consider an ally—erased my coming-of-age experience in a quick, brutal text message. But she also deemed the book inappropriate based on heteronormative values. Because I have no data how many students in my classroom need that book and why, engaging in a debate on why our department needs Call Me by Your Name was difficult.

The English department has had a difficult time introducing LGBTQ+ books and curriculum because these books are centered on sex. The point the head of my department was making is that much of our country is still steeped in Puritan beliefs and values. She wants me to remain an employee, and her text message was intended for me to consider the reaction this book would receive. Parents would be lining up outside my door if I taught
Call Me by Your Name. Yet I still cannot shake that parents applaud me for showing Schindler’s List to 9th graders, a movie that suggests rape, alludes to children being murdered, and the genocide of six million Jews.

A queer teenager’s journey begins with being sexually liberated. The liberation comes from accepting and embracing same-sex attraction. Every queer text is hinged on this journey. Until I can say that sex is okay, our school will continue to be devoid of a queer text. And our queer and questioning students will continue to feel unmoored because they do not see themselves in our curriculum. My reply to the head of the department: “It kills me that as a society we are more ready to talk about rape (Handmaid’s Tale) and realities of drug use, and the irresponsible sexual choices drugs lay way for (Sing Unburied Sing). However, we can’t talk about a boy figuring out who he loves and what healthy love feels and looks like? But Elio’s journey [the protagonist] in Call Me By Your Name is the same journey all humans are on: the quest for love and acceptance. I’m fascinated that we can’t show a positive sexual experience, but can unpack a rape scene or genocide.”

Our conversation at this department meeting was conflating data with our morals and values. We were looking at the data of students in our class to decide on what books we should teach. Good educators already know the students in their classes, and do not need data to point them in the direction. If we were actually having a conversation about inclusivity we would be ensuring that all identities are seen in the classroom—ensuring democracy is present our classrooms. Personal beliefs and data need to be set aside; ensuring our classrooms reflect our democratic society should take precedence. We cannot have an unrepresented population.

The data-driven allocation of resources is being felt by low-income students and students of color, which is wonderful. However, the LGBTQ+ population continues to
suffer. For example, two years ago the high school where I teach was the second school in
the country to raise the Black Lives Matter flag. For the Black Lives Matter flag to be raised,
it had to be a student led initiative, meaning the students had to convince the school board
to raise the Black Lives Matter flag on the high school flag pole. The school board
unanimously approved the proposal. I was beaming with pride as I watched the flag being
raised. But as the flag was being hoisted up the pole, it dawned on me that a queer
questioning student was unlikely to understand how this was a win for them. The Social
Justice Union is the group of students who wrote the proposal and pitched it to the school
board. The Social Justice Union is a robust and active union comprised of ten black
students and one white student. Because the district nourishes our black students, they were
empowered to ask the school board for another symbol of support. A local paper
interviewed members of the SJU, quoting one of the leaders exemplifying the nourishment
she feels, “You know your experience best. So, whatever you feel is not adequate for you
and your community and the school that you go to, then I think you need to step up.”19 I
am the teacher advisor for the Gender Sexuality Alliance. On a good day, we have three
students who show up for our meetings, all of whom identify at LGBTQ+—so no straight
allies. On a normal day, we have one student who consistently attends. The numbers and
dynamics of the GSA and SJU directly correlate with the messaging of the school district.
Would a proposal have the same impact for one student to go before the school board and
ask for the LGBTQ+ flag to be raised versus a group of 12 students, including one ally,
asking for the Black Lives Matter flag to be raised? The flags send the same message, but

19 Nicole Higgins DeSmet, “Black Lives Matter flag flies over Burlington High School,” Burlington Free Press,
matter-flag-fly-over-burlington-high-school/345934002/
represent two different demographics—one is supported by the district, and the other is ignored. How could I ask the member(s) of the GSA to put together a proposal and publically go before the school board to ask for a symbol of support when they have historically been ignored by the school district? If the board were to deny this request, it would crush the LGBTQ+ population, and send many students further into the closet. And so they continue to live malnourished and hidden away.

The school district I work for is onboarding a new discipline system that pulls students into the community rather than pushes students out. It is well researched that school suspensions and prisons are directly correlated—quantifiable data. My district’s new discipline system is an effort to mitigate the school to prison pipeline, which disproportionally effects black and Latino males. Again, because the district can quantify our school suspension rate, as well as the demographic of students who are suspended, they are pouring money into onboarding a new disciplinary practice. Consultants have been hired, grants have been given, and in-service days have been allotted to train the faculty and students on Restorative Practice. The crux of Restorative Practice is asking teachers, students, and administration to be vulnerable with one another in order to humanize one another, creating empathy and preventing conflict. Restorative Practice is not a new process. This system has been used by indigenous tribes for centuries. Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis are women helping to lead the charge in getting this work into schools, especially schools with a diverse population. They do a beautiful job capturing and articulating the goal of a circle:

The Circle is a simple structured process of communication that helps participants reconnect with a joyous appreciation of themselves and others. It is designed to create a safe space for all voices and to encourage each participant to step in the direction of their best self. Circles are relevant for all age groups. While the language may vary to be developmentally appropriate, holding certain conversations in Circle is equally beneficial for all members of the school community, from the youngest to the eldest. We believe that the practice of Circles is helpful for building and maintaining a healthy community in which all members feel connected and respected.21

If a student disrupts the class and damages the ethos of the community, teachers, students, administration, and sometimes parents or guardians sit down to show that student how they damaged their community. The process involves all parties of the circle being vulnerable based on their own experiences and identities. The theory behind this practice sounds ideal, but the reality is more complicated, especially for LGBTQ+ students and teachers.

I was part of a Restorative Circle at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year. Two of my students were disruptive and disrespectful throughout an all-school assembly centered on victims of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—so a profound and grave assembly. Finally, I asked them to get up and follow me out of the gymnasium because they were no longer capable of being a part of the community. One of the students called me a faggot in Maay Maay in front of hundreds of students. Because of the egregious insult, a circle was requested by administration. The student who disrupted the community was allowed to bring a student voice, and I was also allowed to bring a student voice. Having to pick a

student to bring was extremely difficult for me as an adult and teacher. My initial thought was to bring a student who identified as being a part of the LGBTQ+ community. This was problematic. I was being asked to be vulnerable with my emotions, experiences, and identity, and I was anxious. I am a 34-year-old man, and I have embraced my sexual orientation for well over a decade. Yet, I was nervous to face this student and the trauma this student inflicted. Any student I asked to join me would be expected to be as vulnerable in letting their peer know how they impacted their own identity. How could I, in good conscience, ask a student to undergo the same anxiety I was experiencing? After all, I had years of experience to explore and reconcile my sexuality and identity. The student I would be asking to join the circle is not even acknowledged in the school’s curriculum. I felt selfish and defeated. While Restorative Practice benefits one marginalized population, it can push another population further into the fringes.

The school district has relied on Restorative Practice for several years as its primary system for managing student behavior and discipline. Unfortunately, this system has emotionally and mentally hurt our LGBTQ+ population. At one of the elementary schools within my school district, there has been sustained bullying of students over gender-identity. After three years, the Department of Justice was brought in to the school to investigate. They found that the district did not take sufficient action to protect these students, meaning, the district was in direct violation of The Civil Rights Act of 1964: “Under this Agreement, the District will receive technical assistance from the Mid-Atlantic Equity Center ("Equity Center") to support a review of its sex-based harassment policies,

practices, and procedures to make them consistent with one another and with Federal law.”  

The United States government investigated a progressive New England city that prides itself on its inclusion, and found that we were not sufficiently supporting our LGBTQ+ students. I posit that this sustained harassment resulted from Restorative Practice being the primary behavioral system. Again, Restorative Practice was born out of data-driven research meant to mitigate another specific data driven research. In the district’s narrow goal to check off the box, an LGBTQ+ student was harmed.

When the superintendent acknowledged the settlement with the Department of Justice, he gave the district an opportunity by saying, “I believe that the workaround equity and bullying and harassment, in particular, around some of the inclusionary areas, is problematic but also good for all of our schools to build capacity. So our plan is going to be inclusive of not just one school but all our staff and all our schools.” When I heard this comment, I rejoiced—finally some relevant professional development was going to be implemented. On December 18, 2019, we had a faculty meeting that started with the principal of my school passing around a copy of the Department of Justice Settlement. I was thrilled; my school district was finally going to acknowledge its narrow, data-driven definition of diversity, and broaden its focus to become more inclusive. The next handout we received was the difference between harassment and bullying. As a faculty, we discussed the difference between the two words. The final handout we received was an assessment to ensure that we had an understanding of the two terms. And then we were

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23 Settlement Agreement Between the United States of America and The Burlington School District. Department of Justice (Washington, D.C.), 2019, 1; Appendix C.
24 Idib
25 Appendix D
26 Appendix E
dismissed. There was no acknowledgment of the incident that lead to the settlement. There was no information or discussion of how we can be a more inclusive district for LGBTQ+ students. We did not share what we were doing in our classrooms that acknowledges and supports LGBTQ+ students. In fact, LGBTQ+ was never mentioned in that faculty meeting. There were four teachers sitting in that cafeteria who identify as LGBTQ+, and in that hour and fifteen minutes, our principal erased all of us, our LGBTQ+ students, and the victim that lead to the DOJ settlement.

To be clear, I am not postulating that in order for LGBTQ+ students to be included, we must stop our efforts on creating parity between race, socio-economic status, and other cultures. For one marginalized group to thrive, another does not have to be ignored. All of our marginalized students can and should be seen at the same time. I understand that the district gets rated and funded based on quantifiable data, and so focusing on the largest marginalized group is logical. The above anecdotes are intended to show that when a school district places all of its time and resources on data, the unintended consequence damages other students by further marginalizing, silencing, and pushing them out of the community. The district’s message then feels like, “Most are welcome, but not all.”

The district’s curriculum should continue to focus on historically marginalized populations like Jews, African-Americans, and refugees. But there is also room in our curriculum for more identities. The Black Lives Matter flag should be raised. It represents speaking truth to power, and protecting those who are voiceless and oppressed. But there is also room and time for the LGBTQ+ flag to be raised, which reinforces the same message—the intended message of school district: indeed, all are welcome. However, the district must nourish its LGBTQ+ students in order for those students to have the courage to speak.
My school district has a black superintendent and a black principal leading the high school, which sends a sovereign message to students of color—these are the people leading their education. And so, it is my job as one of the few gay teachers in the district, to be a voice for LGBTQ+ people—the very reason I chose to become an educator. I will take every opportunity to remind our leaders that the LGBTQ+ community exists, and desperately needs to be recognized, encouraged, and embraced. Currently, I do not hear that message. Instead I hear the word faggot used by our students in the hallways, and gay is still used as a synonym for dumb, stupid, or lesser than. It is difficult to know how many LGBTQ+ students we have, and impossible to know how many questioning students we have roaming the halls. Though we may not all be quantifiable, we exist, we matter, and we are listening. There are four LGBTQ+ teachers in my school that I know of, and if we are not hearing the message that all are welcome, then it is certain that our students are not hearing that message.
Chapter 4

An Illustration of Institutionalized Oppression

“Somebody,” said Jacques, “your father or mine, should have told us that not many people have ever died of love. But multitudes have perished, and are perishing every hour - and in the oddest places! - for the lack of it.”
— James Baldwin, Giovanni’s Room

Data-driven oppression creates the structure in which institutionalized oppression can occur. The dollar is the overlord in our hyper individualized and capitalistic society. And data is used to direct the dollar. Institutionalized oppression is different from data-driven oppression, in that it doesn’t necessarily use data to oppress, but rather it uses the norms and values of our contemporary society to oppress. I posit that institutionalized oppression is a more accessible starting point to disrupt oppression than data-driven oppression because data and the dollar are too enmeshed in our society to disrupt, and our hyper capitalistic society cannot accept the risk of devaluing of the dollar. So pushing back on the individual’s value system—a central component to institutionalized oppression—is likely where the LGBTQ+ community will find more success.

Many argue that with the invention of the internet, a new era was ushered in, overturning the post-WWII era. The narrative of the media seems to rule all, even reason. By interacting with media for much of our day, data has become invaluable. It is mined, and then used to mine more, making data omnipresent. One could argue that the LGBTQ+
community could not have leaped frogged its activism without the internet: Facebook suddenly put people’s lives on display. Homosexuals became humanized to many friends and family members who were alienated from their day to day lives. Thus, denying marriage between two people obviously in love became monstrous to many people. However, marriage was not the end-all of oppression for homosexuals or the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, I think the LGBTQ+ community prioritized the fight incorrectly. Marriage isn’t the pillar of equality—an accessible and affective education is the gold standard of equality. Or what about a safe work environment where everyone is included, open, and secure about who they are in where they work? Or what about a push to legally expand our definition of the minority so that we can include financial, educational, and social services for the LGBTQ+ community?

Institutionalized oppression is a reality because changing policy and ideologies of academic institutions is like asking an aircraft carrier to do a hair pin turn—it takes time. But there are ways to begin to change course and include the LGBTQ+ voice within these institutions. Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote a groundbreaking essay where she coined the term “culturally relevant pedagogy.”27 Ladson-Billings’s work changed the way we think about education in our contemporary school system. Equity work within my school district, and I suspect many other schools, is based on her work. While scholars and educators continue to implement and build upon her work,28 culturally relevant pedagogy remains centered on the definition of a minority being specific to race and socio-economic status. When schools base their equity work off of this definition, other minorities are ignored. The

LGBTQ+ community must be included as a minority when talking about culturally relevant pedagogy, or a lack of LGBTQ+ equity research, namely in regard to the opportunity gap, will continue to be the status quo.

What constitutes a minority, and why are these parameters important? In a democratic society, the answer to the importance of having a clear definition is obvious: if a minority is a group that constitutes less than fifty percent of the whole, history tells us this group will have the smallest voice thereby slowly, or sometimes instantly, becoming oppressed and silenced; and if anyone is silenced in a democratic society, then democracy is failing. Further, our schools suffer because not all perspectives are being accounted for, thus a limited view of the world is being taught. To answer the second part of that question, John Ogbu, a notable 20th century anthropologist, centers his definition of the minority around power structures saying, “A population is a minority if it occupies some form of subordinate power position in relation to another population within the same country or society.” If this definition holds true, the LGBTQ+ community must be included as a minority. Ogbu classifies types of minorities, identifying a voluntary minority as, “[...] those who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities than they had in their homelands or places of origins.” When one applies this definition of a voluntary minority to the LGBTQ+ coming out experience, parallels cannot be denied: people come out to family and loved ones hoping they will find happiness and freedom from oppression and shame—more opportunity. This is an experience not that dissimilar from an immigrant or refugee.

30 Idib, 164
In bringing this definition of a voluntary minority into schools, is there evidence that shows that LGBTQ+ students occupy a position of subordinate power in relation to students who do not identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community? The answer is overwhelmingly yes. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey anonymously asks students about their behaviors, mental health, and perceptions of their school community. The 2017 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported that only 31% of students who identify as LGBTQ+ believe they matter in their community versus the 67% of students who identify as heterosexual. Sixty percent of students who identify as LGBTQ+ are significantly more likely to have serious thoughts of suicide. The group that trails homosexuals are students of color at 24%. Sixty-four percent of all students say they feel like they matter in their community, while 55% of students of color believe they matter, and only 39% of LGBTQ+ students feel like they matter within their community. LGBTQ+ students are much more at risk for alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and EVPs (vaping).31 This data shows that students who identify as LGBTQ+ do not feel welcome within their community more so than any other marginalized population. And as a result of feeling unwelcome, they are much more likely to have thoughts of suicide, and much more likely to use illicit drugs. This data is not unique to Vermont. The National Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that the data showing LGBTQ+ students are much more at risk of suicide, drug use, and engaging in sex—this is consistent throughout the United States.32 Clearly these are students who feel powerless, voiceless, and even full of despair. Is this group a minority? Without a doubt, yes.

Gloria Ladson-Billings’ work on creating pedagogy where all minorities see themselves in the content is foundational work when thinking about equity in public schools. This is evidenced by scholars who continue to build upon her ideologies. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim call for the next generation of culturally relevant pedagogy, which they term “culturally sustaining pedagogy.” Here, Paris and Alim articulate how culturally sustaining pedagogy is the next progression of Ladson-Billings’ work:

The concept and practice of culturally sustaining pedagogy […] has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change. CSP, then, links a focus on sustaining pluralism through education to challenges of social justice and change in ways that previous iterations of asset pedagogies did not. We believe the term, stance, and practice of CSP is increasingly necessary given the explicit assimilationist and antidemocratic monolingual/monocultural educational policies emerging across the nation.

This next generation of culturally relevant pedagogy is now acknowledging that society shifts, and identities and the culture of groups change. If educators do not take note of how communities are shifting within minority groups, then culturally relevant pedagogy becomes irrelevant. And yet, this progression and acknowledgement in pedagogical research still does not name the LGBTQ+ community within its work. How can we discuss changing attitudes of youth culture and not name the LGBTQ+ identity? Perhaps a starting point in including

33 Django Paris and H. S. Alim, “What Are We Seeking to Sustain”
34 Idib, 88
the LGBTQ+ community in culturally sustainable pedagogy is through the lens of LGBTQ+ students of color. After all, the LBGTQ+ black boy exists, the LBGTQ+ refugee exists, and LGBTQ+ students are living in poverty.

If the LBGTQ+ community was named by scholars studying and researching diversity and equity and their effects on the opportunity gap, perhaps scholars could begin to unearth ways of mining data to measure LGBTQ+ students. However, this will never occur if the LBGTQ+ community continues to be ignored when studying the opportunity gap. Culturally relevant/sustainable pedagogy is a natural place to begin considering the LGBTQ+ community, because it is research that focuses on minorities being able to see themselves within schools.

Inclusivity of marginalized populations is the basic ideology of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings’ work was transformative in thinking about inclusive pedagogy in schools. Her work functions as the umbrella, or mecca for closing the opportunity gap. In other words, culturally relevant pedagogy is the starting point or frame for equity in public schools, and the opportunity gap is how schools receive equity funding to support vulnerable students. But in order to approach this starting line, we have to shift our thinking and begin to see the LGBTQ+ population as a minority, not part of a chosen identity.

A shift in our thinking is necessary because we must step back from data and assume that LGBTQ+ students are part of our learning communities. We must assume they cross race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomics, which should make supporting LGBTQ+ students urgent. By naming the LGBTQ+ community when talking about culturally relevant pedagogy, I presume that a domino effect of inclusivity would occur: a reshaping of educational policy, hiring policy and employee protections, bullying policies, and the ethos of schools toward LGBTQ+ students and staff.
If LGBTQ+ people were regarded as minorities, hiring practices would shift. There is a push toward diversifying the workplace, and this push is based on data showing a correlation between diverse companies, meaning gender and race, and profit. The McKinsey report states, “Our latest research finds that companies in the top quartile for gender or racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians.” Again, this shows policy based on quantifiable research that influences the almighty dollar—the epicenter of our contemporary value system. However, the McKinsey report does go on to acknowledge diversity that cannot be easily quantified: “More diverse companies, we believe, are better able to win top talent and improve their customer orientation, employee satisfaction, and decision making, and all that leads to a virtuous cycle of increasing returns. This in turn suggests that other kinds of diversity—for example, in age, sexual orientation, and experience (such as a global mind-set and cultural fluency)—are also likely to bring some level of competitive advantage for companies that can attract and retain such diverse talent.” McKinsey is one of the most prestigious consulting firms in the world because they can aggregate data and turn it into profit. Despite the cold explanation for why diversity matters, they are still able to acknowledge that quantifiable data misses some marginalized populations, so their report suggests that employers assume LGBTQ+ employees have a unique perspective which contributes to their bottom line.

My employer—again, I reside in a liberal city in New England—continues to hire with a limited definition of diversity. On January 13, 2020 I sat in on an interview for a new

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36 Idib, 2.
English teacher. I was given a list of district approved questions, which included a series of questions surrounding diversity. The school district’s definition of diversity was made crystal clear:

- What experience do you have working with:
  a. Students who are English Language Learners
  b. Students who are from low-income families
  c. Students who are refugees
- How would you approach a situation in a school in which you find children of color are being disproportionately disciplined relative to white children?
- [Name of school] along with the school district is committed to hiring teachers who have experiences in working with populations from different cultures and backgrounds. Two of the questions you were asked to write about were: “Discuss with us how you have become more aware of issues of cultural, ethnic, or racial difference as well as social inequity in order to prepare yourself to work effectively in a diverse, multi-cultural environment. How you handle “A white student delivers what appears to be a racist comment in class.” Please your responses to these questions.

None of these questions name anyone within the LGBTQ+ community. There are no phrases, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, etc., that include the LGBTQ+ community. None of the example situations include the LGBTQ+ community such as

\[\text{Appendix F}\]
bullying, harassment, or hearing phrases like, “no homo.” The district I work for isn’t considering the LGBTQ+ community as diversity, so why would that transfer into hiring someone that is LGBTQ+? Further, if a candidate is LGBTQ+, none of the questions make for a natural segue for the candidate to divulge their sexuality. This means that if the candidate is not “butch,” “flamboyant,” or “not passing,” the hiring committee may not realize they have a unique candidate. This limited view is not unique to my district as I have never been asked a question in an interview for any school district about the LGBTQ+ population.

If an LGBTQ+ teacher is hired, the next hurdle is protecting LGBTQ+ employees. Too many people in our country lead with their Christian (or other religious) values rather than democratic values. Their moral compass is imbedded in their own personal beliefs rather than the democratic morals and values put forth by the United States Constitution. When these two value systems are conflated, the LGBTQ+ community is typically the first to suffer. Many people who lead with their religious morals and values believe the LGBTQ+ population have made a perverted, amoral, and sinful choice to be LGBTQ+. If society can begin to think of the LGBTQ+ population as a minority, systems can be built to support the community rather than to tear down the community, specifically policy that protects and names LGBTQ+ employees as a minority. Because much of the United States votes with their religious compass rather than their democratic compass, our country has made great strides to erase the LGBTQ+ identity within society starting with the work force. Many folks in this country are silencing a unique and vulnerable human experience and perspective, thus devaluing democracy and a democratic school system.

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans and Intersex is a federation that compiles empirical data to gauge the global ethos and attitudes towards the LGBTQ+
community. Their *State Sponsored Homophobia* report uses data which analyzes laws that protect and laws that oppress the LGBTQ+ community in order to understand general attitudes of individual countries toward the LGBTQ+ community. Their report shows that a trajectory of laws and attitudes in the United States are becoming more conservative as a result of people prioritizing their religious values: “Faith-based and conservative campaigns have sought to either codify directly discriminatory policies like “bathroom bills” or, more insidiously, attempt to flout existing discrimination protections by claiming exemptions on the pretense of religious freedom.”\(^38\) As a country, we are too far from our democratic values, and the liberty of our LGBTQ+ population is at risk. The LGBTQ+ population continues be politicized and questioned because religious values are seeping into democratic values.

The most basic rights of LGBTQ+ folks are presently being debated in The United States Supreme Court. It is 2020, and we are questioning if employers have the right to fire LGBTQ+ people from their jobs. Conservative lawmakers—often funded and elected by Christian constituents—are picking apart syntax within Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Does the word “sex” include the LGBTQ+ identity?\(^39\) Much of our identity in a capitalistic society is centered upon what we do for work. How one acquires capital is often the first question we ask when meeting a person for the first time: “What do you do for work?” By debating whether an LGBTQ+ worker can legally be fired, sends the message that we, as a capitalistic society, are unsure if LGBTQ+ people have the right to make a

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living. Do LGBTQ+ people have the right to engage in our most coveted value as a country—capital? The fact that this basic right is even in question is dehumanizing and demoralizing for everyone living in this country. Everyone has a right to earn a living, no matter their identity. However, for a society to recognize that truth, people must be able to separate their democratic value system from their religious value system. A separation of church and state by the individual is necessary. When people fail to compartmentalize their value systems, the LGBTQ+ community suffers first. When dehumanizing the LGBTQ+ population as a society, the dehumanization is mirrored within schools.

Even in the extremely liberal New England school district I work for, the LGBTQ+ population is dismissed thereby diminished. Given the current attitudes of the United States government and many of its citizens, being an LGBTQ+ teacher is difficult, at best. In many states, it is nearly impossible. State sanctioned homophobia was prevalent across the United States in 2019: In Indiana, a Catholic school fired a teacher for being an openly gay man who is legally married to his husband. This is despite the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, apologizing to the LGBTQ+ community, and calling on Christians to treat LGBTQ+ people with dignity and respect. He specifically said, “[homosexuals] should not be discriminated against.” When the teacher filed a lawsuit against the diocese, the Trump administration, representing a branch of the United States government, sanctioned the firing by issuing and unprecedented statement of interest:

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution shields the Archdiocese in at least two independent ways. Initially, the First Amendment

40 Appendix C
precludes this Court, a state actor, from cooperating in Plaintiff’s attempt to stifle the Archdiocese’s First Amendment right to expressive association. The First Amendment also precludes the Court from entangling itself in a quintessential ecclesiastical question: whether the Archdiocese properly interpreted and applied Catholic doctrine. The First Amendment commits that question exclusively to the ecclesiastical tribunals of the Church. The United States has no reason on this record to doubt that Plaintiff was an excellent teacher. Cathedral’s heartfelt letter, attached to Plaintiff’s complaint, suggests as much. But like this Court, the United States can cast no judgment on whether the Archdiocese’s decision is right and proper as a matter of Catholic doctrine or religious faith. This action, accordingly, must be dismissed.43

The Trump administration through the Department of Justice is sanctioning discrimination of LGBTQ+ workers, specifically teachers. This is an egregious assault on LGBTQ+ people, and sends a clear message that our government does not want LGBTQ+ teachers in schools. If the LGBTQ+ community was viewed by our society as a minority rather than part of an identity, our government would be actively supporting more LGBTQ+ teachers in the classroom. By submitting this statement to the judge, the United States government sends a message that freedom of religion takes precedence over freedom itself. A statement in support of the teacher would have been a more democratic message: two truths can exist at the same time. A man can be gay and Catholic. A school can be centered on a religion and employ an array of faculty. The state can acknowledge the church and the individual.

Many argue that this is an isolated conflict between church and state because this man was fired from a religious school, however, the firing of LGBTQ+ teachers is not nuanced to private schools.

While it is slightly more difficult for LGBTQ+ teachers to be fired in public schools, the United States has a rich history of “purging gay and lesbian teachers.” In the early 1960s, Florida underwent a McCarthy-like purging of homosexual teachers. Legislation was passed by the state that directed superintendents to terminate the employment of known homosexuals working for schools. Both the personal and professional lives of teachers were placed under a microscope. From 1961-1964, 123 professionals were accused of homosexual affiliations or practices. People were fired and publicly humiliated. This is state sanctioned discrimination that is based on Christian values, not democratic values. Florida’s state government did irreparable damage to the LGBTQ+ community which still reverberates within our society today.

The purging of LGBTQ+ teachers continues within public schools. In October of 2019, a North Texas teacher was fired because he texted his babysitter, who was a student, the location of his date—his same-sex date—in case of an emergency. The district terminated Dr. Josh Hamilton’s contract accusing him of, “developing inappropriate relationships with students, providing inappropriate information to the students concerning his personal life through text messages, treating students as family members or close friends and providing inappropriate personal information to the students and developing

inappropriate relationships or boundaries with the students.” While states and districts are not expressly firing teachers for being LGBTQ+, districts are using technicalities to terminate LGBTQ+ employees. Dr. Josh Hamilton’s account is not isolated or uncommon, in fact, there were three more cases of LGBTQ+ teachers being fired in 2019 alone.

Typically, people do not seek out places that are unsafe. For many LGBTQ+ people, schools are unsafe, and as a result, there are few LGBTQ+ teachers in our schools. The heterosexism of public education keeps LGBTQ+ teachers out of our classrooms, which is an effective form of silencing the LGBTQ+ community—institutionalized oppression. A respect for religious beliefs and values can exist simultaneously with respect and protections for LGBTQ+ teachers and employees. Under a democratic value system, morals do not need to compete—they can all exist.

Yet conservative, predominately Christian states within the United States, are passing legislation that is actively erasing history. States are passing legislation that denies LGBTQ+ people our history, our contributions, our voices, and our place within humanity. “No Promo Laws” are laws that are being passed and enforced in schools that prohibit the promotion of homosexuality. Eight states have passed “No Promo Homo” laws: Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. Several of these states do not allow any LGBTQ+ curriculum in public schools. Meaning, these states

46 Emerson Clarridge, “Citing texting policy, school district fires teacher; he says it’s because he’s gay,” Fort Worth Star Telegram, October 24, 2019, https://www.newsweek.com/texas-high-school-teacher-alleges-he-was-fired-telling-students-he-gay-via-text-message-1467902
are actively narrowing perspectives by refusing to acknowledge LGBTQ+ people. This is an aggressive form of erasing LGBTQ+ people from their schools, communities, and states.

“No Promo Homo” laws primarily exist within southern states, but they still resound throughout the country. When a state sanctions the eradication of the LGBTQ+ identity, people who fear the LGBTQ+ population are inspired. One state sends a message to the entire world that homosexuals, and all of our contributions to the world, do not matter, and this is a dangerous message for countries actively devaluing democracy. These laws are frightening, and are not dissimilar from laws that begin genocides or extreme forms of oppression and segregation: Nuremberg Laws, Jim Crow Laws, and apartheid. The Constitution was not intended to be weaponized in order to silence and oppress the most vulnerable Americans. It was created to combat these dangerous laws, and to protect all voices—to ensure that everyone is heard. The First Amendment should protect those that want to worship freely. The religious voice and ideology is important to our country’s identity. However, the First Amendment should not be used to elbow out other voices at the table. All identities can sit at the table side by side, break bread, and be heard. That is diversity; that is democracy; that is what makes our country exceptional. Sadly, that is not the current position of The United States Federal Government.

The United States Federal Government is actively harming students and teachers alike by allowing states to pass “No Promo Homo” laws. Even in my small, extremely progressive liberal district I’m nervous to teach any LGBTQ+ curriculum. Because higher education is not researching the needs of LGBTQ+ identities in the context of the opportunity gap, I am defenseless as a teacher because it does not meet my district’s goals of closing the opportunity gap. As a teacher, I feel vulnerable to parents who are concerned I am pushing an LGBTQ+ identity onto their child. This concern is only exacerbated by “No
Promo Homo” laws. Finally, I am left exposed to the laws of the United States, which do not adequately protect me from being fired as an open and proud LGBTQ+ teacher who is trying to educate students on an identity that is present and vulnerable within their very school. If the community were to point its fingers at me, the school district could fire me under the smallest of infractions. What does this mean? I am one of a few LGBTQ+ staff members at my school, and I am obtaining my master’s degree which is focused on how to better support LGBTQ+ students, yet I am nervous to implement LGBTQ+ curriculum. That is institutionalized oppression in action.

The 9th grade program in my district combines English and civics into one class which we call Humanities. The idea is for students to make the natural connections between literature and history. My co-teacher covers Amendments and the Bill of Rights, and her class also looks at how rights are created. She begins with movements to show students that rights can take hundreds of years to obtain. Her class builds a timeline that starts at the beginning of the movement up to present day. This allows students to visualize the entire scope and sequence of the movement.

While my colleague is teaching the scope and sequence of obtaining rights and progressing the movement, I am teaching poetry. Throughout the unit, I speak to the power of poetry, and its intent to move people emotionally—after all it well known that the tyrant fears the poet. This is where my co-teacher’s civics class meets my English class; movements cannot happen unless the people are moved to call for action. After students make the timeline, I have students write poems to move people to action. We hang the timeline throughout the school, and we hang students’ poems throughout the timeline. The timeline then becomes a visual representation of the oppressed calling for action, and power answering those they oppress.
Every year, my colleague and I create a different visual representation of a call to action. The first year we created a Civil Rights timeline, and in 2019 we created a Women’s Rights timeline. This year, my colleague suggested that we create an LGBTQ+ timeline. We always intended to create this timeline, but when she suggested it, my reaction was that of terror. I told her I would think about her suggestion, but that an immigration timeline would work better with my next unit, and perhaps that was more relevant given current events. I could feel myself getting hot and embarrassed. I attempted to circumvent the LGBTQ+ timeline. Why? In that moment, I realized that talking about and planning LGBTQ+ curriculum, and actually implementing the curriculum, are two different acts of courage.

I have spent three years pondering, planning, and researching LGBTQ+ curriculum. It never occurred to me that fear would be present when turning ideas into actionable lessons. How could I have been so short sighted? Fear of implementing LGBTQ+ curriculum is logical: a fear of parental backlash from the effects of “No Promo Homo” laws; the fear of losing my job over accusations of moral turpitude; the fear of the current conservative Federal Government waiting for the opportunity to use a teacher’s curriculum to show political bias in education. The fear I felt manifested an alternative poem for students to write. Rather than writing a poem for progressing the LGBTQ+ movement, I created an alternative assignment for students to write about oppression in general. This alternative assignment created much internal conflict: for the first time in years I felt shame. I was ashamed because I was walking away from the reason I became a teacher. I was backing away from the fight.

49 Appendix G
50 Appendix H
The morning of the lesson, I walked into the English office, and asked the first colleague I could find for advice. A history teacher graciously listened to my concerns. He affirmed what I already knew: I did not create the alternative assignment when my co-teacher and I rolled out the timelines for the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement. If we were planning to create a timeline on immigration or the Labor Movement, I wouldn’t create an alternative assignment. Why should the LGBTQ+ movement be any different? But ultimately, he encouraged me to implement an assignment that I was comfortable assigning. I was still terrified and unconvinced.

In the hour before giving the lesson, two remarkable moments occurred. I was planning on rolling out both assignments with shame and self-loathing. I went to the library to print off color copies of images for the timeline when our librarian asked if I had seen the letter that was anonymously mailed to the school board. An employee of the school district I work for—a colleague—wrote a letter attacking the LGBTQ+ community. The letter recounted a presentation a trans student gave at their elementary school. The teacher who facilitated the presentation was accused of “guiding a lesson to an expected conclusion while giving the appearance of impartiality [...] The children were actively discouraged from taking an opposing viewpoint. Under these circumstances, trans ideology is not an ideology at all, but rather an orthodoxy, placed beyond rational discussion.” The educator made a list of demands:

1. I propose that the district immediately halt any further presentations of the trans orthodoxy curriculum;

51 Appendix I (Letter to Curry)
2. I propose that the same staff members who presented it already, return to those classrooms and correct the disinformation previously taught;

3. I propose that the district host at least one open public forum devoted to the content and goals of this curriculum;

4. I propose the district host at least one panel discussion critiquing the implementation of trans orthodoxy in schools.52

One of my own colleagues in the district I work for proposed a form of “No Promo Homo” laws. One of my colleagues was publically politicizing the trans identity. This educator goes even further by asking to publically humiliate the teachers who presented the information by forcing them to admit spreading misinformation through their own bias. And finally, this educator is demanding the school board to listen to folks who are trying to silence the voices of the LGBTQ+ identity. This is not an educator who is able to separate their own bias from our united democratic ideals. This is not an educator who is practicing Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. This is not an educator who is attempting to expand perspectives. This is a colleague who is attempting to narrow perspectives. This letter is embarrassing for my union (if this person is in the union), the district, and our community. I live in one of the most liberal New England cities, yet this letter reminded me that the fight for the LGBTQ+ community to exist in public schools is raging. Rather than pushing me further into the fear of implementing an LGBTQ+ lesson, this letter made me angry, and my anger pulled me out of the fear. I was headed straight for the fight.

Before I could make it back to my classroom to change the lesson, that same history teacher approached me and asked if we could circle back to our previous conversation. In
that moment in the library, he directly encouraged me to implement the lesson without the alternative assignment. He reminded me that there are colleagues that see the LGBTQ+ struggle within our schools, and that people support this curriculum within our schools. He reminded me that I work among more LGBTQ+ allies rather than people who agree with author of the anonymous letter. That colleague helped me focus on what matters—on why I became an educator: to protect and give a voice to LGBTQ+ students.
Chapter 5

The Key to LGBTQ+ Curriculum: Professional Development, Teacher Training Programs, and School Policy

“Fairness is for happy people, for people who have been lucky enough to have lived a life defined more by certainties than by ambiguities. Right and wrong, however, are for—well, not unhappy people, maybe, but scarred people; scared people.”
— Hanya Yanagihara, A Little Life

For LGBTQ+ curriculum to be successfully planned and delivered, faculty needs to feel safe, knowledgeable, and confident. This means teachers and administrators need to have a baseline knowledge of what LGBTQ+ means. Teachers need more knowledge of the culture in order to embed the identity into their curriculum. And administrators must let the community know that teachers are implementing LGBTQ+ curriculum using best practices thus making it clear to teachers that they are protected and supported in their implementation of LGBTQ+ curriculum. I am a gay English teacher who has spent three years studying how to better support LGBTQ+ students in public schools, and I was still terrified of delivering curriculum I carefully planned based on expert knowledge. If I was fearful of the disparaging and risky classroom conversations, parental backlash, and job security, how can we expect other teachers, who have no knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community or curriculum, to feel comfortable teaching something so new and fragile? Professional development, teacher training programs, and school policy must be in place to support LGBTQ+ curriculum.
The current semester—Spring of 2020—was the first time my school offered professional development opportunities specific to the LGBTQ+ community. However, this opportunity was not prioritized, so none of our staff was able to attend the conference due to a school-wide event which requires teacher participation. External professional development opportunities—professional development that is optional for staff to attend outside of the school—are wonderful, but institutions must insist that all staff be trained on best practices that serve the LGBTQ+ population, a population that exists within every school. In the same way that Gloria Ladson-Billings’ work launched an internal examination of curriculum and professional development across America for people of color, we must do the same the for the LGBTQ+ community.

Elizabeth Payne is one of the leading scholars on LGBTQ+ professional development. She makes the argument that external professional development is not changing the culture or climate of the school in regard to LGBTQ+ students because the educators attending LGBTQ+ professional development are the educators who are already doing the work for the community. The educators who need LGBTQ+ professional development are people who do not understand, know, or interact with LGBTQ+ people. In fact, these educators who are ignorant about LGBTQ+ people and students often serve to actively harm these students. This means LGBTQ+ professional development cannot be optional—it must be prioritized and heard by all staff, especially those with limited experience with LGBTQ+ people, or those with narrow views toward education.

53 Appendix J
On January 28, 2020, a group called Gender Critical [name of state] organized a meeting in my community to discuss the idea that transsexuals’ rights are subverting women’s rights. This is a group that is fracturing the LGBTQ+ community by attacking the trans community using the women’s rights and lesbian rights platform. Due to counter protests from the trans community, the meeting was canceled. However, the most vulnerable identity in American high schools was under attack within my community.

When teachers caught wind of the event, one my colleagues sent out an email warning our staff about the event to ensure that everyone in our building would provide wrap-around support for our trans students. Several staff members responded with concern and empathy for these trans students. However, one response from a colleague was alarming: “What we have here with Trans Activist Organization and Gender Critical Organization is a Liberal circular firing squad, and I see zero need for [name of school] Staff Email to be used FOR or AGAINST either group. Just my two cents.” Had this colleague received some professional development around the LGBTQ+ community, they would have realized how dire the situation could be for our trans youth. But instead, this colleague politicized the trans identity. Had the Ku Klux Klan been holding a discussion in our community, our staff likely would have rallied around all of our students of color without politicizing their identity. Professional development helps to mitigate these issues by delivering necessary information to staff so everyone is able to professionally respond when our most vulnerable students are under attack.

It is crucial that professional development include administrators and superintendents. In the same disconcerting email chain, the principal of my school stepped

55 Appendix K
in to shut down the reactions to the uninformed colleague’s comments. However, his reply was curt and debatably more damaging than the original comment. “Please shut this thread down. It will absolutely not prove to be productive via email. Thank you.” This was a perfect opportunity for the leader of my school to address how we support our LGBTQ+ community—without hesitation or reproach. In not shutting down my uninformed colleague, my principal left his support for the LGBTQ+ community in question, which gives courage to those seeking to narrow and erase identities within our classrooms. The ethos of a school is set by its leaders, and in this scenario, the leader of my school set the wrong tone by not addressing the situation head-on. I do not assume this was out of malice toward our LGBTQ+ community, but rather out of ignorance and fear of supporting the LGBTQ+ community.

My principal, and many of my colleagues would consider themselves experts when it comes to cultural relevant/sustainable pedagogy, and teaching in a diverse classroom. However, all of our professional development uses the narrow definition of equity to mean socio-economics and race. This means few educators at my school have received professional development around the needs of LGBTQ+ students. On January 24, 2020, I went to a professional development conference that was hosted by my state’s Agency of Education. One of the speakers was a retired teacher, and the other was a retired superintendent. These two consultants have published several books together, and consulted with hundreds of school districts, meaning they are prominent experts in their field. For the entire day, I endured the same information I have heard time and time again: how to teach to students of color and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The
LGBTQ+ student was never mentioned. Finally, toward the end of the day, I raised my hand above my head which was adorned with a Keith Haring hat, and to a room full of educators, administrators, and superintendents I said, “I just want to point out that schools need to assume that LGBTQ+ students exist in our learning communities. I am curious to know what districts, administrators, and teachers are doing to support these students.”

During our afternoon break, both consultants bee-lined over to me, and began politicizing the LGBTQ+ identity by saying things like, “I completely agree with your stance on the LGBTQ+ community, but we do a lot of work in the south where that community isn’t supported.” I politely excused myself, because politicizing a student’s identity to make excuses for excluding them in presentations to people making school policy, allocating school resources, and creating curriculum is egregious. A few weeks later, I received a lengthy email from one of the consultants with a closing statement saying, “None of this is written to help you out in your dilemma which I will be making more central to our messages. If I knew what to do or how to do it I sure hope I’d be doing it.” At best, this is a person who makes their living by consulting school districts on how to provide a more equitable education, and yet in that line, he made it clear that he never considered the LGBTQ+ student to be part of his work until I raised my hand. At worst, this is a person who pointedly doesn’t include LGBTQ+ students in their work because they find it too political thereby narrowing their audience, which would limit their consulting work.

Regardless of the consultants’ inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community, their presentation was ineffective because it was irrelevant. How professional development is delivered is important. Professional development is not a phrase that typically excites

57 Appendix L
teachers and administrators. Often, professional development is theoretical with no practical application. It is frequently administered by consultants who have not been teachers for decades, which often makes their presentations irrelevant to educators’ current classrooms because proficiency-based grading and the Common Core has completely overhauled the job. Or they work for a district that in no way resembles the school to which they are delivering their message, again, making the professional development irrelevant and ineffective. If people are going to include the LGBTQ+ community in their schools, learning how to do that work needs to be effective and relevant. And sitting through hours of irrelevant information can be condescending, which is an important feeling to exclude when talking about LGBTQ+ professional development.

Payne urges schools to use a teacher-to-teacher professional education model to maximize LGBTQ+ professional development: “Teachers can resent mandatory professional development, particularly around issues they feel do not affect them. Many teachers resent outside “interference” and may feel that policy changes take away their professional decision making and force them to comply with mandates that often demonstrate a lack of understanding about schools, teaching, students, or learning. Thus, having another teacher connect personal in-schools experience with the workshop content could be useful in engaging resistant teachers to consider how the experiences of LGBTQ students are indeed relevant to every teacher’s teaching practice.”

Professional development is critical in supporting LGBTQ+ students because these are students who are too often politicized, so adults in the building can be hesitant, unsure, and neglectful of LGBTQ+ students. Or worse, some adults in the building can be, “resistors to change or

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58 Payne and Smith, “The Reduction of Stigma in Schools”
dialogue around LGBTQ issues.” Payne suggests that the teacher-to-teacher model helps the staff identify allies, as well as understand which colleagues are willing to do the work to provide LGBTQ+ students with the support they need. In short, the teacher-to-teacher model allows for the professional development to be framed as those that are willing to do their job and support all learners, and those who are unable to separate their personal beliefs from their job.

Teacher training programs within higher education have great potential to shift curriculum within secondary education. These programs are training the next generation of teachers. These are often students who are emerging from youth culture—people who are often closer in age to the students they teach than many of their colleagues. Imagine if these energetic, young teachers were trained in being allies for LGBTQ+ youth. Sadly, decades of research continue to show that university teacher training programs are failing to prepare aspiring teachers to support LGBTQ+ youth through cultural competency, curriculum, heteronormative bias, or recognition of sex-based bullying and harassment. Elizabeth Payne directly states, “Future school professionals have few opportunities in their training programs to reflect on the likelihood that at some point, they will be working with LGBTQ

59 Idib, 188
or gender nonconforming children or parents.”

Embracing the LGBTQ+ community in schools is still a fairly novel idea. Procedures and data are lacking in how to best support these students, but this does not excuse teacher training programs from addressing the issue. Throwing their graduates into a school with little to no knowledge on LGBTQ+ students is dangerous. University faculty must step up to the challenge by leading with their values, rather than leading with data and scholarly journals that do not yet exist.

Some teacher training programs do broach the subject, but often the subject of LGBTQ+ students in higher education is a unit, lesson, or mention within a larger diversity class. This semester I have a student intern who is in his last semester of college at a well-known university. I asked him about his program’s depth in preparing him for LGBTQ+ students: “We all had a class about Theory and Development where we were given readings each week about the classroom as a whole. One reading was about LGBTQ+ students in the classroom and how to support them. Other readings focused around students with disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, English Learners, and more. Although the reading was crucial to us as teachers, the in-class discussion and methods part only went over how the LGBTQ+ identity could simply be one that is found in the classroom. There was no mention of curriculum and teachings that should be structured around this.” This neglects both the future teacher and the LGBTQ+ student. One article cannot cover the experience of a transgender student taking hormones, finding a bathroom, changing in the locker room, and playing on a sports team; one article cannot cover the coming out process, the family trauma, toxic masculinity, and gender fluidity; one article cannot cover gay culture, lesbian

culture, drag culture, and trans culture; one article cannot cover the AIDS crisis, the Stonewall Riots, PrEP, and the accomplishments of LGBTQ+ people throughout history. That is a robust curriculum that requires an entire class. Why should an entire class be devoted to teaching future teachers about the LGBTQ+ history, culture, norms, and contemporary issues? Because few people in this country, if anyone, is receiving this curriculum in high school. The university should provide a crash course on the LGBTQ+ community to ensure future educators have a baseline knowledge of the most vulnerable students sitting in their classrooms. In rural New England, a future teacher could easily walk through their entire life without meeting or knowing an LGBTQ+ person. To send that person into a school to run a classroom with LGBTQ+ students is irresponsible, and it is detrimental the LGBTQ+ community. If teachers are not properly educated about the LGBTQ+ student, future educators will not have courage, knowledge, or skills to implement LGBTQ+ curriculum within our schools. Additionally, I posit that if universities were to require aspirational teachers to take an LGBTQ+ class, it would shift the way high school institutions consider the LGBTQ+ community. Beyond pragmatic reasons, a required LGBTQ+ class for future teachers would also send a message to states promoting “No Promo Homo” laws that America’s education system is finished politicizing the LGBTQ+ minority—it would be a message of solidarity and support.

Clear school policy that names the LGBTQ+ community is critical to supporting LGBTQ+ curriculum. LGBTQ+ curriculum is still a novel idea, and is not commonly seen in most schools. This will be new curriculum to many students, so schools should be ready for inappropriate comments, bullying, and backlash. Schools must be prepared to support LGBTQ+ students and teachers by having clear and explicit school policy already in place. Discrimination policies must name the LGBTQ+ community. The Los Angeles Unified
School District is the gold standard of having inclusive, clear, and explicit school policy. For example, the LAUSD clearly specifies that their school district considers the bullying and harassment of the LGBTQ+ community an act of discrimination:

The District prohibits discrimination, harassment, intimidation and bullying based on actual or perceived race or ethnicity, gender/sex (including gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and pregnancy-related medical conditions) sexual orientation, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, immigration status, physical or mental status, marital status, registered domestic partner status, age (40 and above), genetic information, political belief or affiliation (not union related), a person’s association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics, or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law, ordinance, or regulation in any program or activity it conducts or to which it provides significant assistance.62

LAUSD is explicit in naming specific groups they consider to be acts of discrimination, which is crucial to preventing bullying and harassment of marginalized groups, particularly when these groups are subject to content in classes.

Other districts are vague in their language when it comes to discrimination. These school districts leave situations open for subjectivity based on the student’s, teacher’s, and administrator’s judgements or perceived actions. Note the difference in language between the LAUSD and a school district in Mississippi:

The [name of district] does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or disability in the provision of educational programs and services or employment opportunities and benefits. The following office has been designated to handle inquiries and complaints regarding the non-discrimination policies of the above-mentioned entity.63

This is policy that is dangerous to the LGBTQ+ student because they are not explicitly named as a protected group within their school. As an educator, I would never implement LGBTQ+ curriculum within this school district. It would be dangerous as a teacher (whether heterosexual, homosexual, cis gendered, or transgendered), and it would be dangerous to the LGBTQ+ students within the school. This is weak discrimination policy that is not adequately protecting all of its students or staff.

After creating clear definitions of discrimination, bullying, and harassment, the next step is to establish a reporting system that is easy, organized, and confidential. Finally, and most importantly schools need to create explicit consequences for violating the discrimination policy.64 These consequences should clear to the entire learning community—students, teachers, administrators, and the wider community. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “School staff can help prevent bullying by establishing and enforcing school rules and policies that clearly describe how students are expected to treat each other. Consequences for violations of the rules should be clearly defined as well.” Clear expectations in how students and teachers treat LGBTQ+ students

are needed because fully accepting, or not politicizing LGBTQ+ students in public schools, is still a new idea with little support currently in place.

Restorative Practice is sweeping the nation’s schools as a system of discipline. Restorative Practice is being systematized in schools to intentionally blur consequences. While it greatly reduces suspensions of students of color, this is a system that ignores the need for LGBTQ+ students to have clear consequences for bullying. *Circle Forward* is the book my district handed out to all teachers because this is the definitive book on Restorative Practices for public schools. However, *Circle Forward*, shamefully ignores the LGBTQ+ student because this is a system born out of research which benefits students of color. In the introduction, Nancy Riestenberg approaches Restorative Practice with a narrow definition of diversity: quantifiable minorities. She cites data to back her narrow lens:

In 2014, the U.S. Secretary of Education and the U.S. Attorney General highlighted the need for alternatives to exclusionary discipline as well as the importance of a positive school climate in a “Dear Colleague” letter to all superintendents of schools in the United States. In that letter, they cite the data that shows that students of color and students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended or expelled, and they state this disproportionality may be a violation of civil rights laws [...] This is good news of those of us who have learned the principals and practices of restorative justice and adapted them schools. We have seen the positive outcomes: reduced suspensions; reduced repeat suspensions.65

*Circle Forward* goes on to give instruction for an array of circles primarily centered on race:

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• What Do We Know about Race? Circle
• What Difference Does Race Make? Circle
• Exploring Our Feelings about Race Circle
• Exploring White Privilege Circle
• Exploring the Impact of Social Inequality Circle

The following are the circles the book provides for gender and sexuality:
• Privilege and Oppression Circle
• Exploring Dimensions of Our Identity Circle
• The Gender Box Circle
• Thinking about Gender and Violence Circle
• Thinking about Gender Inequality Circle

None of the above circles are intended specifically for the LGBTQ+ student. “Exploring Dimensions of Our Identity Circle” focuses on what makes the individual unique and what connects the individual to the group.67 “The Gender Box Circle” aims to show students that gender roles are a construct.68 “Thinking about Gender and Violence Circle” uses a story to show the privileges men have over women in our current society.69 “Thinking about Gender Inequality Circle” seeks to destigmatize teen pregnancy.70 The “Privilege and Oppression Circle” is the only circle that names “gay/lesbian/bisexual”71 among a host of other marginalized people. None of these circles directly tackle the oppression of LGBTQ+

66 Idib, 179; 182; 184; 186; 190
67 Idib, 103
68 Idib, 106
69 Idib, 193
70 Idib, 196
71 Idib, 175
students within schools. While this behavioral system brands itself as being inclusive to all students, the acronym LGBTQ+ is not mentioned anywhere in this book, including sections on bullying. It peripherally addresses LGBTQ+ students in saying, “Circles that focus on talking about differences—particularly sexual orientation, but also ethnicity, race, nationality, family structure, religion, gender norms and other aspects of identity—promote a culture of acceptance, not just tolerance.” Restorative Circles are premised on the assumption that by being honest and vulnerable, students and staff will build more empathy within the school. However, this presumes that students are willing to accept and embrace who they are. If a student is being bullied because they are perceived as gay, that student will not feel comfortable sitting in a circle to address their bully—that orbits too close to forcing a student out of the closet. Circle Forward does not include a section on LGBTQ+ students’ approach toward circles, in fact, it barely names the LGBTQ+ student at all; this is thoughtless and reckless. In chapter three, I share a personal anecdote which further shows the problem of Restorative Practice in relation to the LGBTQ+ student.

I have been to four full-day professional development meetings, I have been paid to give a presentation to new district employees about the benefits of Restorative Practice, I have been paid to serve on my building’s Restorative Practice Committee, and I have been offered and all-expense-paid trip to attend a five-day conference in Seattle centered on Restorative Practices for black boys in schools. My district has spent thousands of dollars on consultants to transition the district to become a “restorative district.” Restorative Practice is a wonderful tool in creating classroom community which helps prevent bullying and other behavioral issues. However, it should not be mistaken as an overarching behavioral system.
When used as a behavioral policy, it acts to harm LGBTQ+ students by requiring honesty and vulnerability with their own identity. Being open and honest about our identities is a wonderful idea, but that is a complicated internal struggle for most LGBTQ+ students. Instead, schools need concrete policy with clear consequences to support LGBTQ+ students, and to support teachers delivering LGBTQ+ curriculum.

Schools must stop politicizing the LGBTQ+ student, and treat these students as any other minority. However, schools should have structures in place to support LGBTQ+ curriculum. When professional development is delivered effectively, it reaches all staff in order to build knowledge about LGBTQ+ students, culture, history, and best practices of supporting LGBTQ+ students. Comprehensive teacher training programs send new teachers into the classroom with the knowledge and skills necessary to support LGBTQ+ students, and to deliver LGBTQ+ curriculum. Finally, clear boundaries—school policy—must be in place to ensure that all students respect LGBTQ+ students and staff. There cannot be any question about when students are harassing or bullying other students and staff, and consequences of those actions must be clear and enforced by teachers and administration.
Chapter 6

Unlocking LGBTQ+ Curriculum

Water, is taught by thirst.
Land — by the oceans passed.
Transport — by throe —
Peace — by its battles told —
Love, by Memorial Mold —
    Birds, by the Snow.
    --Emily Dickson, 135

I originally planned to frame this section by creating the case that LGBTQ+ students benefit from seeing themselves in curriculum. But when I sat down to write this section, I realized that this is an argument that has been made time and time again. Further, if the reader still does not see the need for LGBTQ+ curriculum, then they have not been paying to attention to the previous five chapters; or perhaps they do not agree with the LGBTQ+ “lifestyle,” in which case, they are reading the wrong thesis. In defending the need for LGBTQ+ curriculum, I am politicizing the LGBTQ+ student. The LGBTQ+ identity is real, so let us all assume that LGBTQ+ students need to see themselves in the curriculum just like any other student sitting in the classroom. So I think a better place to start this section is how other students—students who do not identify as LGBTQ+—benefit from LGBTQ+ curriculum.
I am a white, gay male, yet I enjoy reading Toni Morrison, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Sherman Alexie. I read these authors because I want to know more about the black experience, the female experience, and what life looks like for indigenous people living on reservations. I want to try to understand the struggle for black people to claim their bodies from centuries of white oppression in an attempt to make a human connection with people outside of my own life experiences. Sherman Alexie asks me to consider the centuries of oppression and degradation my own ancestors inflicted upon his ancestors. He makes me consider the oppression my government continues to inflict on his people. Alexie also makes me wonder if oppression breeds oppression given recent accusations against him from three different women. My point is that while I am not black, female, or Spokane, I am curious about how my identity and experiences can relate to their identity and experiences; I am interested in how humans connect. While I don’t feel obligated to present evidence that humans are curious to see a wider perspective in order to connect to other humans, there are studies that support heteronormative benefits of LGBTQ+ curriculum. Evidence is not required to understand that humans make meaning through other humans’ experiences. That is part of the human condition. LGBTQ+ students are a group of humans that exist. Schools must acknowledge their existence like any other minority. It is 2020—the time for politicizing LGBTQ+ people needs to end, and schools should model this for the rest of America.

LGBTQ+ students’ identities orbit around sexual and gender orientation, so a natural place for schools to begin scaffolding LGBTQ+ curriculum is with a more robust

sexual education curriculum. If the LGBTQ+ identity is going to be successfully and positively named and supported within schools, we need a strong sexual education foundation to build upon. If we are going to be inclusive of the LGBTQ+ identity in public schools, then we need a true separation of church and state. We can no longer teach sexual education from our puritanical lens—it narrows the perspective, and is not a true representation of all of our values in America. In fact, if we were to examine modern television, we are a long way from two separate his and her beds. Emily Dickinson’s poem does a wonderful job of showing the deficit-based perspective we use when building sex-ed. curriculum. The robust sex-ed. curriculum I have in mind would benefit more than LGBTQ+ students. It would benefit all students.

The New York Times Magazine ran a feature story called “What Teenagers are Learning from Online Porn,” which sheds the false assumption that teenagers are not accessing porn. The article acknowledges that the majority of teenagers in high school are watching porn: 93% of males under 18, and 62% of girls under 18. The article also examines how porn is affecting the way teenagers approach sex. The article makes it clear that porn is having an effect on teenagers’ sexual behaviors: “The percentage of 18-to-24-year-old women who reported trying anal sex rose to 40 percent in 2009 from 16 percent in 1992, according to the largest survey on American sexual behavior in decades, co-authored by Herbenick and published in The Journal of Sexual Medicine. In data from that

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same survey, 20 percent of 18-to-19 year old females had tried anal sex; about 6 percent of 14-to-17-year-old females had. And in a 2016 Swedish study of nearly 400 16-year-old girls, the percentage of girls who had tried anal sex doubled if they watched pornography.” The internet, specifically porn, is educating our teenagers on how to have sex. This is a problem because porn does not always depict healthy sexual relationships or the reality of how sex works, especially in case of a teenager’s first experience. For example, virgin porn is often rough and violent, and does not show any pre-sex conversation of consent and boundaries because the actor is frequently not a virgin and the film is a show.

The article showcases a Boston Public afterschool program called Porn Literacy, which is funded by Boston’s public-health agency to reduce sexual violence. Porn Literacy covers a litany of topics which are relevant in the age of information:

In the first class, Daley led an exercise in which the group defined porn terms (B.D.S.M., kink, soft-core, hard-core), so that, as she put it, “everyone is on the same page” and “you can avoid clicking on things you don’t want to see.” [...] Later, Daley held up images of a 1940s pinup girl, a Japanese geisha and Kim Kardashian, to talk about how cultural values about beauty and bodies change over time. In future classes, they would talk about types of intimacy not depicted in porn and nonexist pickup lines. Finally, Daley would offer a lesson about sexting and sexting laws and the risks of so-called revenge porn (in which, say, a teenager circulates a naked selfie of an ex without consent). And to the teenagers’ surprise, they learned that receiving or sending consensual naked photos, even to your boyfriend or girlfriend, can be against
the law if the person in the photo is a minor. Now, in the third week of class, Daley’s goal was to undercut porn’s allure for teenagers by exposing the underbelly of the business. “When you understand it’s not just two people on the screen but an industry,” she told me, “it’s not as sexy.” To that end, Daley started class by detailing a midlevel female performer’s salary (taken from the 2008 documentary “The Price of Pleasure”): “Blow job: $300,” Daley read from a list. “Anal: $1,000. Double penetration: $1,200. Gang bang: $1,300 for three guys. $100 for each additional guy.”

This is a class that directly speaks about sexual acts in order for students can learn what to do and what not to do when becoming sexually active. This is not curriculum that promotes sex, but rather it is a curriculum that acknowledges that we no longer live in 1950s America, and the deficit-based sex-ed. curriculum is no longer relevant or working. The porn industry has taken the lead in teaching our children about sex, which is dangerous and irresponsible. Schools need to recalibrate, and society needs to separate their religious ideologies from their democratic values. Most students are watching porn, so society needs to let schools discuss and show safe and realistic depictions of sex.

How does this affect LGBTQ+ students? I am the GSA advisor for my school. Every year LGBTQ+ students have a conversation during GSA around how they do not see themselves in their sex-ed. curriculum. The students explained that much of the sex-ed. curriculum was about STD prevention and contraceptives. When I reached out to our health teachers, they confirmed the deficit-based slant toward sex-ed. because, as teachers, their jobs are at risk of approaching sexual education in any other way. Showing sex and explaining how gay men douche, have anal sex, and may encounter fecal matter—many of the topics the GSA students are concerned about—is risky for many teachers in America.
The health teachers and the GSA sat down on February 17, 2020 to discuss their concerns about the curriculum. One of our trans students brought up his experience of constantly explaining to his peers parts of his life that are personal and intimate. For example, why he has to skip a ski race because it is imperative that he receive hormone therapy, or why he missed weeks of school because he underwent top surgery. Or explaining top-surgery. He expressed how freeing it would be for him if his peers received that information in health class so explanations of the trans community would not always fall on his shoulders. To be fair to our health department, the GSA agreed that our health department is not treating heteronormative sex differently than LGBTQ+ sex. The meeting ended with students agreeing they want to understand how to physically prepare for sex and have sex.

A robust sex-ed. curriculum is crucial in that it both educates LGBTQ+ students around the act of gay, lesbian, and trans sex, and it acts as an ally for LGBTQ+ students in that it could help normalize LGBTQ+ sex. The effect of LGBTQ+ sex not being talked about contributes to creating an abnormal or fetishized stigma around LGBTQ+ sex. Presenting students with a baseline knowledge of LGBTQ+ sexual behavior sends a message that it is normal and acceptable to talk about. If this baseline existed, the deficit-based approach to sex in other disciplines would be able to bend toward a more asset-based approach.

In 2019, I taught a class called *Spotlighting Justice* which focuses on social justice through the lens of literature. Because the English department at my school does not have a queer text, I decided our first text would be *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer. This play is

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the journey of the gay community asking for money, research, and recognition to combat the AIDS epidemic in New York City during the 1980s. The play shows a blueprint for social justice while also highlighting the oppression of the gay community in its most turbulent time. The gay community was just finding an identity when AIDS suddenly stole so many who were contributing to the identity. For the first time in modern history, men were able to openly, and without shame, have sex with other men. And suddenly the world was asking them to stop. The value system the gay community had to discover gave way to questions about sex and masculinity: “…men do not just naturally not love—they learn not to. I am not a whore. I just sometimes make mistakes and look for love in the wrong places.” So while the play is ideal for showing what a social justice movement looks like from the ground up, it is also vulnerable to students interpreting the gay community as delivering the AIDS crisis to the world. The play also runs the risk of perpetuating the stereotype that all gay men are promiscuous. This is problematic given that this play is the only text students will read in high school about the gay community.

Why not present students with a different, more positive story about the gay community? There are two reasons: most LGBTQ+ stories are hinged on the discovery of the protagonist’s sexual identity, and that journey involves (mostly) healthy sexual experiences. Until schools have a robust sex-ed. curriculum to lay the foundation for talking about sex in a positive way, to teach a book that reflects consent and healthy sexual discovery, would be an extremely risky book to teach. Again, look at the reaction from the head of my department when I suggested a coming-of-age novel about the healthy exploration of a teenager’s sexual identity: “I am fascinated that you want to teach a book

with pussy fucking, ass fucking, finger fucking, peach fucking, fucking in alleys, fucking on beaches, fucking under your parents’ roof, fucking two different people in one day.

Fascinated. Prepare your argument for why this riveting novel belongs in a high school classroom. I am hugely skeptical and willing to listen.” We teach The Handmaid’s Tale, a book where the protagonist is constantly being raped, to show the importance of consent. We teach Animal Farm to showcase the success of democracy. We read Of Mice and Men to educate students about friendship and equality, and we teach The Odyssey to show the value of home. All of these books teach these lessons through a deficit-based lens.

Our curriculum—and the curriculum of so many other high schools in America—is premised on the absence of healthy relationships. Emily Dickenson’s poem is what guides our central texts, and it works very well. Dickenson’s poem holds truth—to know thirst is to know water. To know isolation is to understand connection. To live through oppression is thrive on freedom. But this line of thought does not work for everything. To teach consent by showing rape is irreconcilable. To ask students to understand homosexuality through AIDS is a misrepresentation and injustice to LGBTQ+ people everywhere. The homosexual community was the first to be devastated by AIDS, but the generation lost in its wake should not be interpreted as a generation that self-inflicted their own death through sexual deviance. We need to honor the LGBTQ+ community more thoughtfully, and that requires having a more holistic, honest, and direct curriculum.

In 2012, I was working for a book publisher in San Francisco. I was having lunch with a coworker who was palpably nervous about a date she was going on after work. Victoria was great at dating, and so my confusion was obvious. She explained that this was her first Tinder date, and she seemed uneasy about what that entailed. At the time, it was a new phone app, which matched people based on proximity. Many folks considered it to be
a hook-up app, and Victoria worried about the expectations a Tinder date implied. I unsympathetically laughed as my experience with dating and hook-up sites were synonymous. Grindr, the gay…dating app, landed on homosexuals’ phones everywhere in 2009. So while Victoria was nervous about her Tinder date, I had been anonymously hooking up with men years before Victoria ever dreamed of an app like Tinder.

In fact, in 2003—six years before Victoria’s first online date—I met a boy off the internet at the age of 17. He was the first boy I kissed and fucked all in the same night. I was wildly confused about my sexuality, and I felt that I needed answers before I went to college in the fall. I found a website called Manhunt, which was the predecessor to the commonly used app, Grindr. I chatted with a 21 year-old undergraduate at Wichita State University. I told him I was 18, and he didn’t ask questions. We fooled around, and then he asked me to fuck him. When he asked me to penetrate him, I remember relief lifting from my body. En route to his dorm room, I was panicking about how little I actually knew about anal sex. How did men decide who was going to bottom and who was going to top? Was I supposed to do anything to prepare? Was it going to hurt? I was pretty sure I needed lotion or something, but all I had was a condom. Maybe the condom was lubricated, but I was not sure. I watched plenty of gay porn, so I thought I would be able to handle this moment, but suddenly I realized porn never included the logistics. Did people converse about roles before? The porn I watched had very little conversation.

My story is not uncommon. Few gay men that I have shared stories with have had a sweet RomCom story to tell about their first time with another man. Usually they are as horrifying, or worse than my own experience. While the New York Times Magazine feature story focuses on cis straight porn, and the unhealthy messages cis genders are internalizing about bedroom norms, the message is still as relevant and urgent, maybe more so, for the
LGBTQ+ community. Gallup, one of the creators of the Porn Literacy course says it best: “Our parents bring us up to have good manners, a work ethic. But nobody brings us up to behave well in bed.” Is it any wonder why people are speaking out about sexual assault in record numbers? Is it shocking that my first sexual experience was disconnected and transactional? Our youth is not developing a healthy sexual identity from the semantics of inclusive language, or through definitions of consent. They need to see the logistics of sex, connection, consent, and healthy sexual exploration. If we leave it to PornHub to teach our youth about sex, stories like my own will continue to be commonplace, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth. Our society bows to the dollar, so we are unlikely to change the porn industry, but schools can be more upfront, honest, and clear with their sex-ed. curriculum. Literature can extend into the gaps that health class cannot cover. But teachers need permission and security in order to break away from teaching books based on the ideology of Dickenson’s poem—absence.

How can teachers be more upfront and honest in our approach to sex in a post-Michael Jackson, post-Catholic Church, post-Kavanaugh, post-Harvey Weinstein world? Many teachers refuse to talk about this work with colleagues out of fear of being characterized as something dark and insidious. So how can we expect to have authentic, vulnerable conversations with students about sex? The answer is by reaching out to our community. It is imperative that teachers continue to talk internally to each other about this work. Every one of my English colleagues has mentioned a book they would like to teach. But because the book has a graphic, or sometimes even subtle sex scene, they back down. However, none of us think twice about teaching The Handmaid’s Tale or The Color Purple. We can show sexual violence because how could parents think we would ever promote sexual violence? Yet how could parents think a teacher is promoting sex? There is a difference
between promotion and acknowledgement. Acknowledging that teenagers are developing their sexual identity is wildly different from promoting sex. Science already acknowledges that high schoolers are pubescent or post-pubescent humans—that is precisely why we have sex-education in high school. Teachers need to have the courage to approach sex the same way we approach all of our curriculum: *how can I make this relevant?* Supporting each other in conceptualizing this work is essential—this is where interdisciplinary teaching can live.

Teachers must have the support of their administration and school board. At the beginning of the second semester, I teach John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*. For students to understand that the American Dream is not created equal, I have a slide show with basic statics: what’s the percentage of white people in the US that own a home? What is the percentage of black people that own a home in the US? What the percentage of white people that move from the lowest income bracket to the middle-income bracket? What the percentage of black people that move from the lowest income bracket to the middle-income bracket? My students who identify as white are frequently blown away. In that moment, they shed some of their naivety. My students who identify as people of color have a, “yeah, and…?” reaction. This is not news to them. After giving the slideshow, a student who identifies as person of color told her mother that we were reading a book with the n-word in it, and that I told the class that people of color cannot advance in our system in the same way as white people. All of these things were true, but the parent did not have any context around these truths. I received an aggressive email from the student’s parent saying that she would be going after my job. I immediately forwarded the email to my administrator, who called the parent in for a meeting, and gave her some context. This is how an administrator who fully supports their teachers should act in that situation. The same reaction is required in rolling out a new approach to a more progressive and relevant sex-ed. curriculum.
Undoubtedly, some parents will not agree with the curriculum, and they will come after individual teachers. Administration must support their teachers in those moments.

Finally, teachers cannot do this work without the support of the community. Generosity with the curriculum, and generosity with each other should be the guiding principal in this work. When rolling out a sex-ed. curriculum that could progress other disciplines’ curriculums, a responsible school that values its community would ensure that parents have adequate information on the curriculum: specifics on what it looks like, reasoning behind the shift, and where it might affect other disciplines. This type of community education would require other members of the community to step up to the plate. I imagine this looking like panels that include doctors, lawyers, administrators, and teachers fielding questions. I imagine counselors running discussion groups in order for parents to conceptualize this curriculum with other parents. And I imagine students, parents, and teachers having an opportunity to discuss the curriculum.

On January 19, 2019, I discussed The New York Time Magazine article in class with students. I was nervous they would be bashful or feel shame. They were not—they were ready to engage. Overall, they were enthusiastic to talk about this article and the effects of a robust sex-ed. curriculum where they are able to talk more freely about logistics of consent and sex through a medium nearly all are tuned into. The students are willing, but it is the adults—teachers and parents—who are not. My first sexual experience could have been avoided if I saw myself and the things I was thinking and doing with in the curriculum. Instead my experience was transactional, cold, hidden, and full of shame. This trauma for this type of experience latches onto a person for a lifetime, and it has shaped who I am as a human. I have the platform to protect future generations of LGBTQ+ youth from a sexual encounter that is full of shame, but I need a more practical and honest sex-ed. curriculum;
until we have something that resembles that curriculum, other disciplines do not have a platform to stand on in regard to teaching healthy images of sex, and allowing students to safely form healthy sexual identities. Stories connect us to one another. Until students can sympathize, even empathize with a gay character’s quest for a sexual identity, gay sex will remain taboo, foreign, and unspeakable, thereby silencing the LGBTQ+ student.
Conclusion

Recalibrating

“The one and only skill that resolves the crisis of meaning is that of acceptance.”
–Alan Downs, The Velvet Rage

The world has never been more accessible. We live in a reality where I can access an unimaginable well of knowledge, fly across the globe in 24 hours, and speak my desire to box and find it on my doorstep the following day. Most of our time is spent on the internet, consuming information and correspondences without much thought or reflection as to their impact. Information is flowing at such a rapid speed, there is no time for thought or reflection, only reaction. While writing that sentence, I received five new emails. Data is continuously being mined, aggregated, and shaped into action without considering the full scope, but rather with intention of crossing the action off our never-ending to-do list. Our thoughtless reactions have contributed to so much misery in our contemporary society: endless wars, bottomless greed, partisan politics, desperate envy, entitled sloth, needless famine, and widespread plague. If we continue to place emphasis on the “I,” we perpetuate the current capitalistic value system. However, if we stop reacting, recalibrate our values to care for our communities before our own desires, we can begin noticing all of the members within our communities. Noticing everyone around us allows for all voices to be considered
and heard. The dialogue Freire dreamed of can become a reality, which is the democratic value system we desperately need.

People who are working to educate our youth are the people who should be modeling this democratic vision of society. Educators have a responsibility to see the erased students, and to point out the injustice. David Purpel beautifully articulated this responsibility:

Surely, teachers and educators can and should participate in efforts to raise public awareness and understanding of the immense unnecessary human suffering that surrounds us. We as concerned educators and citizens can contribute not only our insights and understanding but our moral energies and our share of outrage, compassion, and commitment. As educators we have a significant amount of respect from the larger public and considerable access to our students and colleagues. It is wise to remember the adage that silence can be consent and to be alert to the consequences of our not speaking out on the obscenities of social injustice.

As educators, all educators, we have a duty to LGBTQ+ students. These are students sitting in our classroom being aggressively erased from our schools because we cannot take a moment to pause, and see past our data-driven decisions. Educators must stop the show when they see the data skewing the reality; disruption is key.

I am not asking educators to save the world. Plagues, famine, and wars are reflection of a deep seeded, animalistic value of the “me” and the “I,” and that is too enmeshed in our capitalistic society to break apart. However, I am asking that educators see the byproduct of the overarching data-driven oppression: institutionalized oppression. If equity research in higher education named LGBTQ+ students and considered LGBTQ+ people a minority, a
conversation could emerge about how LGBTQ+ students relate to the opportunity gap. This would promote research, which would make its way into secondary education and shift the spotlight onto the LGBTQ+ student. Because we are unlikely to chink the armor of capitalism, more data is needed for policy makers, elected officials, school boards, and superintendents to allocate resources to support LGBTQ+ students—playing by the rules of capitalism is inevitable. But that data will never exist if we do not start including LGBTQ+ students when we talk about the opportunity gap.

If academic research found a correlation between LGBTQ+ students and the opportunity gap, disrupting institutionalized oppression would be successful. Teacher training programs could rethink their approach toward the LGBTQ+ student, professional development for the LGBTQ+ student would emerge, and schools would view their disciplinary policies in a more holistic light. Harassment of LGBTQ+ students would be checked, teachers and administrators would feel empowered by knowledge to support their LGBTQ+ population, and LGBTQ+ curriculum could begin to take shape.

School wide LGBTQ+ curriculum should be built around a strong sex-ed. curriculum. A robust sex-ed. curriculum would help break the societal taboo of assuming that teenagers are having sex. A pragmatic sex-ed. curriculum would allow for students to address their concerns about having sex with more than a deficit-based knowledge because their sex-ed. class did not acknowledge an asset-based approach. A sex-ed. class with a wide perspective would normalize types of sex, breaking taboos about gay, trans, and lesbian sex, and this would lift the shame from LGBTQ+ students while unburdening them from having to explain their identity.

A colleague once told me that educators behave much better at faculty meetings and professional development when students are present, and often these meetings are more
productive and relevant. I cannot agree more. I hope the research, evidence, and anecdotes have been powerful in unearthing systems that continue to oppress LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and the wider LGBTQ+ community. However, I think it is important to heed my own advice and set research aside to hear from students themselves.

On February 11, 2020, a group of LGBTQ+ students, and supporters from the community presented to the school board in response to the Critical Gender [name of state] community discussion taking place. Several doctors and community members made their request to better support our LGBTQ+ youth, and students described their experience in our district: “Listening to other people share their opinions about my identity is a regular occurrence, and it is exhausting,” [name of student] said. “It feels like it is our responsibility to educate our peers and teachers about our right to exist.”

Having attended the school board meeting, the energy was high—the LGBTQ+ community was finally getting acknowledged. I was proud of these students for standing up and claiming their space. However, adults should be ashamed that we are forcing LGBTQ+ students to ask for space. After the students spoke, a local non-profit organization that supports LGBTQ+ youth presented a comprehensive professional development plan for the district. Again, this is an example of the wider LGBTQ+ community claiming space by doing the jobs of school board members, administrators, and educators.

Through poetry and essays, students have expressed their invisibility, fear, and feeling of being silenced. One freshmen student wrote their state of the union essay—an

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essay that is submitted to the office of Bernie Sanders—on the bullying of LGBTQ+ students in America:

There was one day I got punched in the head […] The administration at [name of school] didn’t do anything. They said they’d look into it, they investigated it for a day, then closed the investigation, nothing was ever done. This happens far too often all around America, so many kids in the LGBTQ community are bullied, harassed, and many struggle with mental illness because of it […] One solution to this problem is to train staff to recognize homophobia and transphobia because one of the major problems is recognition, the staff doesn’t recognize homophobia and transphobia as that, they just think of it as teasing.81

Why does this student feel the need to write their state of the union essay on the bullying of LGBTQ+ students? Because they have experienced it, and so they recognize the cause and the solutions. They also felt the injustice of being bullied without consequence. It is not this student’s responsibility to point out that educators, administrators, and schools are not supporting LGBTQ+ students. I find it embarrassing and neglectful that the education system is so slow, or outright refuses, to act on this student’s experience, which data shows is not an isolated incident.82

A few days after rolling out the timeline and poems, the curriculum I mentioned in chapter five, I walked into my classroom and found an anonymous poem a student left on my desk: “Silently hoping for a change/Stubbornly waiting for everyone to be more accepting/Scared of judgement and hate that would come my way/Society is not ready for

81 Appendix O
82 Center for Disease Control, Youth Risk Behavior Survey
my identity/ Maybe someday.”

Most of the students in my school of just under 1000 students know that I am gay. And yet, this student feels so much shame about their identity, that they cannot hand me their poem—a teacher who is out and proud, the teacher sponsor of the GSA—because I would know their identity. This speaks volumes toward the shame that society is instilling in our LGBTQ+ youth, and that shame starts in schools.

Finally, a straight ally who writes for the school newspaper wrote a beautiful piece around toxic masculinity. While he does not identify as LGBTQ+, he does see LGBTQ+ students and the injustice these students are subject to on a daily basis:

At [name of school], we are taught to be celebrate diversity and embrace our differences. We clearly need to stop promoting toxic masculinity and start embracing the idea of manhood as diverse in and of itself. We need to stop using “gay” to insult men who tend to act more feminine. We need to stop using “gay” to scorn perceived “weakness.” We need to stop using gay to discourage empathy and kindness. We need to stop believing there is one way to “be a man.” What if being a “man” meant something different in our society? If we showed benevolence and welcomed the diversity every person has within them, then what? Being a man should mean confronting our own shortcomings, striving to be the best people we can be rather than fighting against one another for power. The human connections that can arise out of being more caring, loving and accepting can build support systems where fewer people are left out, and more people feel whole.

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84 Appendix Q
I could not have written a more eloquent and honest opinion piece. This is a teenager who saw the LGBTQ+ experience and stood up for these students to his own peers in a public space. This student is doing a better job in promoting and protecting the LGBTQ+ student than many educators, administrators, school boards, elected officials, and policy wonks. This student is seeing someone who is not quantifiable yet is clearly suffering. Again, adults should feel ashamed.

It is not currently popular to speak about education, in particular, using deficit-based language. Educational scholars have rebranded the achievement gap as the opportunity gap, and words like empowerment are being replaced with words like sovereign with the idea that nobody should be allowed to give power. I acknowledge that this thesis goes against this popular approach in that it primarily acts to unearth and showcase the deficits within our schools regarding LGBTQ+ students. But I think the asset-based approach serves to narrow perspectives and overlook deep-seeded problems, which then limits our approach to solving problems. I hope the reader walks away from this thesis understanding that how we treat LGBTQ+ students in our schools translates to how we treat LGBTQ+ people outside of schools, and vice-versa. It is a cycle, and by understanding the cycle of oppression, we can act to disrupt the cycles of oppression. Let us as educators recalibrate our moral compass in hopes of recalibrating our country’s moral compass. Let us progress, and be better human beings.
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Sherwin, G. and T. Jennings. “Feared, forgotten, or forbidden: Sexual orientation topics in secondary teacher preparation programs in the U.S.” *Teaching Education* 17, no. 3: 207–223


Effective Instruction Professional Learning Pathways

**Best Practices New Teacher Cohort** is offered for new teachers with fewer than three years of prior teaching experience. Teachers will receive ongoing professional development by working directly with school coaches and consultants on curriculum, best practices, and pedagogy throughout the year.

*Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas, for teachers with fewer than 3 years teaching experience.*

**Building Capacity & Resources for Restorative Practices** is for educators who have at least a year of experience with using restorative practices to build relationships and community within your school or classroom. This pathway will explore the idea of restorative pedagogy and develop curriculum that integrates social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum with circle outlines and templates for use district-wide. This would include developing circle outlines that focus on building community and classroom agreements in the first six weeks of school as well as circles that support common school and student issues such as social media interactions, equity conversations, cell phone use, preparation for school lockdown drills, and other topics as determined and requested by educators.

*Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas*

**Co-teaching Instructional Strategies** have increasingly become more popular as education moves to more collaborative models of instruction. This pathway will help you reflect on what you can bring to a co-teaching framework, and reflect on aspects of co-teaching that are essential for you and a co-teacher to succeed. Some of the areas open for discovery are the rationale behind co-teaching, different co-teaching models, how to co-teach with a specialist, and how to apply specific strategies to foster learning in a collaborative environment. This pathway is going to be led by external & internal facilitators.

*Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas*

**Culturally Responsive Classroom Management** is designed to help educators create and maintain caring, respectful classroom communities in which all learners feel safe, valued, cared about, respected, and empowered to learn and grow. The course focuses on the development of social and emotional competencies necessary for building and maintaining positive 21st-century communities. When teachers create these kinds of environments, their learners can then hope to be rigorously challenged and engaged in academics. In particular, the course addresses the special challenges of creating community in the increasingly diverse classrooms in U.S. public schools. Although the original research in classroom management conducted more than 20 years ago, continues to provide useful direction for teachers creating inclusive, task-focused learning environments with a diverse student population requires more. Participants will consider the role culture plays in teaching and learning, and what it means to be "culturally responsive" in order to establish a classroom in which students can succeed academically and grow socially.

*Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas*

**Healing Centered Practices** takes a deep dive into the current research related to healing centered principles related to trauma and its impact on learning. Learners will develop a deeper understanding and improve skills to support students with challenges related to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). This pathway is especially geared towards guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists. Additionally, teachers who are interested in leading some of this professional work in your 2020-2021 may want to participate in this pathway.

*Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas*

**High-Leverage Instructional Strategies** will learn about and practice some of the high leverage instructional strategies that should be employed in all classrooms preK-12. This will be grounded heavily in the work of Jon Saphier (see Research for Better Teaching) and others. Related texts include The Skilled Teacher, Teach Like a Champion, Making Student Thinking Visible, and High Expectations Teaching: How We Persuade Students to Believe and Act on "Smart Is Something You Can Get". There may be an opportunity to break this into smaller, discipline focused groups, should many people enroll.

*Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas*
Inspired Educator, Engaged Learner: Experiential, Brain-Based Approaches to Enhance Differentiation, Engagement, Equity, and Social and Emotional Learning

This interactive set of workshops and support during the year-long strand explores experiential, brain-based techniques to inspire and promote engagement, buy-in, and ownership of learning. Participants will learn innovative methods to get their students moving, talking, and reflecting, and novel ways to differentiate instruction and enhance learning. Educators will fill their toolboxes with strategies to engage and connect learners, promote equity and inclusion, create a positive and supportive learning community, and maximize both social-emotional learning and academic outcomes. Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas

Introduction to Orton-Gillingham explores the Orton-Gillingham (OG) approach which is a foundation framework for multi-sensory, structured language instruction. Specifically designed for K-5 classroom teachers, this strand addresses the foundational skills within the Common Core State Standards. Learn how to use this flexible approach in the classroom setting to benefit all learners. Participants will become familiar with the OG design and how to incorporate the lessons in small group and whole class settings. The content will focus on teaching systematic phonics (including phonemic awareness), teaching syllable types and syllable division patterns and teaching morphemes within the OG lesson structure. Offered to: PK-5, all content areas

Restorative Responses to Harm is only for educators who have at least a year of experience with using restorative practices to build relationships and community within your school or classroom via circles, restorative communication strategies, and more. Educators in this pathway will deepen their understanding of how to see student behavior and interactions through the lens of restorative principles, explore and practice “on the fly” restorative responses to harm in conflict in school environments, and explore your school’s readiness for Tier 2 work. Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas with 1 year experience using RP

Systems, Relationships and Routines asks the question, “Who’s doing the hardest work in your classroom, you or the students?” If you are exhausted at the end of each day because you find yourself having to speak up over students, repeatedly redirecting them, tracking down students missing from class or writing more office referrals than you’d like, there is a better way. While there isn’t one perfect solution, there are many practices which, when used together, will help you build a classroom that allows and encourages all students to learn and grow. We will review and learn about practices to: create classroom expectations with your students, build relationships in your community to increase motivation to learn and belong, ensure routines meet your needs and those of the students, look at behavior as a window into student's thinking, process with students so they can hear you, measure your consistency, recognize when it’s time to re-set, slow down to speed up, and access parents/guardians as your allies. This strand will be pulling from practices that include: PBIS, RP, Mindfulness, Second Step, and Responsive Classrooms. All are research-based and effective in building strong classroom communities where members and their learning is respected and students are supportive of one another. Offered to: PK-6 & 6-12, all content areas

Teaching Emergent Multilinguals in a General Education Setting allows participants to learn how to address the different needs of English Learners (emergent multilinguals) in the "mainstream" or content classroom. You will learn how to: understand the ways in which EL students' prior experiences may contribute to or challenge their access to the content of your classroom, match EL students' language levels with the language demands of your classroom, add or align language objectives to the content standards and learning objectives in your lesson planning, design and use appropriate supports to help EL students find success with your course content, and collaborate with EL teachers, Multilingual Liaisons, parents, and others to help EL students achieve their highest potential. Strategies and models for differentiated course materials and learning tools for use with ELs will be shared. Some "big ideas" about second language acquisition theories will be applied to lesson planning leading to success for all learners in the classroom. Offered to: PK-8, all content areas
Teaching for Social Justice considers "While contemporary approaches to teaching for social justice are influenced by a diverse array of educational, philosophical, and political movements, published accounts of teaching for social justice draw most heavily from five conceptual and pedagogical philosophies: democratic education, critical pedagogy, multicultural education, culturally responsive education, and social justice education." Dover (2013)

Teachers will learn how to create classroom tasks using social justice lens. Teachers will also learn how to co-create lessons with their students to improve the level of student engagement and meaning-making of curriculum content. Teachers will learn to integrate students' culture and interests into the curriculum to empower students to read and write the world. Offered to: 6-12, all content areas.

Teaching Using a Proficiency-Based Learning Model allows educators to further their understanding of proficiency-based learning (PBL). The focus will be on understanding PBL as a philosophy, identifying and implementing PBL strategies at the classroom level that do not rely on systems change, and creating assessment methods to best fulfill the PBL vision. All levels of experience with PBL welcome. This pathway will be facilitated in part by in-house coaches and external experts. Offered to: 6-12, all content areas.

Using Effective Group Work to Maximize Learning for All Students introduces participants to Complex Instruction, an instructional approach that emerged from mathematics education and is applicable across content areas. Complex Instruction promotes an equitable classroom culture through development of: (1) high cognitive demand tasks that allow students of all abilities to contribute, (2) group work structures and teacher moves that disrupt traditional participation patterns, (3) techniques that help teachers promote participation and learning for all students. Offered to: Pk-6 & 6-12, all content areas.

Using Student Questions and Ideas to Drive Instruction and Increase Engagement asks, how can we value student questions and ideas in order to drive instruction and ensure that it is meaningful and relevant to all students? In this pathway we will apply a lens of sustainability and equity as we learn and practice questioning and discussion techniques to support student sensemaking. You will work collaboratively to uncover, refine, and apply instructional techniques to energize your existing curriculum. Students will be more authentically engaged in the heavy lifting of figuring out concepts and generating more questions to build in student ownership and sensemaking. There will be opportunities for dialogue and exploration within content areas and across grade bands. Offered to: Pk-6 & 6-12, all content areas.

Vocabulary Instruction Across Content Areas will focus on developing vocabulary instructional strategies across the curriculum. Teachers will explore current research around vocabulary instruction and work to implement a variety of engaging strategies. This work will be supported by facilitators from the Stern Center, the Flynn Center (Words Come Alive) and teachers. Offered to: 3-8, all content areas.

Workshop Approach to Mathematics explores how Math Menu can help to meet the needs of every child through a variety of instructional techniques aimed at deep understanding of math concepts. This is an introduction to supporting all learners through a variety of classroom approaches. It will include an introduction to the All Learners Lesson (Main Lesson/Menu), approaches for working with High Leverage Concepts, Formative Probes, ways to promote student discourse, and techniques for differentiation. The goal is for participants to learn with strategies to support all students to demonstrate understanding of grade level High Leverage Concepts. Offered to: K-6.
Writing Across the Curriculum PK-5: Using the NGSS crosscutting concepts as a tool to improve writing in social studies and science. Many of you are comfortable with launching writing workshops and celebrating the types of writing emerging from those busy hives. We have all observed students fully engaged in writing fiction, whether it be poetry, memoir, or fantasy. Non-fiction is often more challenging for young writers because content plays a more substantive role. In this workshop we will share how the NGSS crosscutting concepts are a useful writing tool that can help students bring that same level of enthusiasm and strategies to their writing in science, social studies, and perhaps even their beloved fiction. Participants in this professional development strand will: 1) develop their own strong foundation in the NGSS crosscutting concepts; 2) learn how to use this framework in teaching writing in science and social studies. The initial workshop will provide a deep exploration of the seven concepts. The subsequent workshops will focus on how this conceptual framework naturally appears and can be leveraged in our students’ reading, writing, and problem-solving as well as broadening their understanding of the physical and social worlds. Together we will explore the following topics and will invite suggestions from participants to meet their needs: Crosscutting Concepts (CCC) Primer: getting familiar with the concepts; Science and children’s literature: a surprisingly powerful friendship; Using the CCC as a structure for science writing; notebooks and beyond; Using the CCC as a structure for all writing (including fiction); Unpacking social studies with the CCC.

Writing Across the Curriculum 6-12: Over the course of five sessions, teachers (grades 6-12) will identify writing opportunities in their existing curricula and then develop tasks that deepen student learning. The goals behind this PD are for content area teachers to: 1) Let their discipline drive and shape the writing, rather than the other way around. Certain types of writing are simply more appropriate in English class than they are in science class, for example. 2) Embed more writing in their practice—both informal, “writing to learn” tasks (like a “mental model” or a claim, evidence, reasoning paragraph after a science investigation) and more formal, “writing to show learning” tasks, like formal essays and research papers. 3) Walk away with strategies, assignments, and rubrics they can use right away. Offered to: 6-12, all content areas.
## Appendix B

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Appendix C

Settlement Agreement between

The United States of America

and

[Redacted] (the "District"), the United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Educational Opportunities Section and the Office of the United States Attorney for the District of Vermont (the "United States") (collectively the "Parties") voluntarily enter into this Settlement Agreement ("Agreement") to improve the District's ability to prevent and appropriately respond to peer-on-peer harassment based on sex consistent with the District's obligations under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §2000e et seq. ("Title IV"), which authorizes the Department to address certain complaints of discrimination in public schools. Under this Agreement, the District will receive technical assistance from the MidAtlantic Equity Center ("Equity to support a review of its sex-based harassment policies, practices, and procedures to make them consistent with one another and with Federal law. In addition, the District, with assistance from the Equity Center, will review and revise its training on and implementation protocols for such policies to ensure consistent procedures for reporting, investigating, and responding to sex-based harassment and will assist schools in building the capacity to comply with those policies and procedures. Such capacity-building will include training and professional development at the District-level as well as at the school-level for students, families, and staff at Sustainability Academy.

HARASSMENT AND BULLYING COMPLAINTS AND INCIDENTS INFORMATION TO BE TRACKED

1. The name, grade, school, race, national origin, sex, religion, and/or disability, and other relevant information about the targeted student(s);
2. The person(s) reporting the incident (if different than the targeted student);
3. The student(s) involved or alleged to be involved in the harassing or bullying conduct;
4. All known witnesses to the alleged incident;
5. Indication of whether the targeted student(s) have been targeted on previous occasions;
6. Indication of whether the offending student is alleged to have bullied or harassed the targeted student(s) or any other student(s) on previous occasions;
7. The date the report was made or the date when the District first learned of the incident;
8. Specific details on the date, time, nature, content and location of the incident, including all supporting documentation;
9. The date(s) the students involved in or witnessing the incident were interviewed and the name(s) of the employee(s) conducting the interview(s);
10. A summary of the investigating official's findings and the basis for those findings; and
11. A summary of the District's response to the incident, including any interim safety measures taken pending resolution of the report.

ITEMS IN ANNUAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT REPORT

1. A review of school climate survey data and findings and the actions taken by the District in response to those findings;
2. A review of all reports of harassment and District- and school-level responses;
3. A determination of whether reported incidents of harassment have increased or decreased in number and severity, overall and by protected class;
4. An assessment of the frequency and extent to which incidents of harassment have been investigated and addressed in accordance with District policy;
5. A description of areas in need of corrective action and/or additional resources; and
Recommendations for improving the District's anti-harassment practices and timelines for the implementation of such recommendations
POLICY F 29R

POLICY F 29R: PREVENTION OF HARASSMENT, HAZING & BULLYING OF STUDENTS

I. Statement of Policy

[Redacted] (hereinafter “District”) is committed to providing all of its students with a safe and supportive school environment in which all members of the school community are treated with respect.

It is the policy of the District to prohibit the unlawful harassment of students based on race, color, religion, creed, national origin, marital status, sex (including but not limited to pregnancy, parental and marital status), sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity or disability. Harassment may also constitute a violation of Vermont's Public Accommodations Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and/or Title IX of the federal Education Amendments Act of 1972.

It is also the policy of the District to prohibit the unlawful hazing and bullying of students. Conduct which constitutes hazing may be subject to civil penalties.

The District shall address all complaints of harassment, hazing and bullying according to the procedures accompanying this policy, and shall take appropriate action against any person subject to the jurisdiction of the board who violates this policy. Nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit punishment of a student for conduct which, although it does not rise to the level of harassment, bullying, or hazing as defined herein, otherwise violates one or more of the board’s disciplinary policies or the school’s code of conduct.

The Procedures are expressly incorporated by reference as though fully included within this Policy. The Procedures are separated from the policy for ease of use as may be required.

II. Implementation

The superintendent or his/her designee shall:
1. Adopt a procedure directing staff, parents and guardians how to report violations of this policy and file complaints under this policy. (See Procedures on the Prevention of Harassment, Hazing and Bullying of Students)

2. Annually, select two or more designated employees at each school campus and/or school program, preferably one male and one female, to receive complaints of hazing, bullying and/or harassment and publicize their availability in any publication of the District that sets forth the comprehensive rules, procedures, and standards of conduct for the school. In addition, the District may appoint district-wide Designated Employees to receive and act on complaints. Each school building and program shall post pictures of its Designated Employees and their contact information. The District’s web site shall include the names and contact information for all Designated Employees. Each school building and program will identify their Designated Employees with their contact information in the first communication or newsletter sent home at the beginning of each school year. On an annual basis, the superintendent or his/her designee shall write a letter to local news outlets, (e.g., New North End News, etc.) to notify residents of the names of Designated Employees and their contact information.

3. Designate one or more Equity Coordinators to oversee all aspects of the implementation of this policy as it relates to obligations imposed by federal law regarding discrimination. This role may be also be held by a Designated Employee.

4. Respond to notifications of possible violations of this policy in order to promptly and effectively address all complaints of hazing, harassment, and/or bullying.

5. Take action on substantiated complaints. In cases where hazing, harassment and/or bullying is substantiated, the District shall take prompt and appropriate remedial action reasonably calculated to stop the hazing, harassment and/or bullying; prevent its recurrence; and to remedy the impact of the offending conduct on the victim(s), where appropriate. Such action may include a wide range of responses from education to serious discipline.

Serious discipline may include termination for employees and, for students, expulsion or removal from school property. It may also involve penalties or sanctions for both organizations and individuals who engage in hazing.

Revocation or suspension of an organization’s permission to operate or exist
within the District's purview may also be considered if that organization knowingly permits, authorizes or condones hazing.

III. Constitutionally Protected Speech

It is the intent of the District to apply and enforce this policy in a manner that is consistent with student rights to free expression under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The purpose of this policy is to: (1) prohibit conduct or communication that is directed at a person's protected characteristics as defined below and that has the purpose or effect of substantially disrupting the educational learning process and/or access to educational resources or creates a hostile learning environment; (2) prohibit conduct intended to ridicule, humiliate or intimidate students in a manner as defined under this policy.

IV. Definitions. For the purposes of this policy and the accompanying procedures, the following definitions apply:

A. “Bullying” means any overt act or combination of acts, including an act conducted by electronic means, directed against a student by another student or group of students and which:
   a. Is repeated over time;
   b. Is intended to ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate the student; and
   c. (i) occurs during the school day on school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored activity, or before or after the school day on a school bus or at a school-sponsored activity; or
   (ii) does not occur during the school day on school property, on a school bus or at a school-sponsored activity and can be shown to pose a clear and substantial interference with another student's right to access educational programs.

B. “Complaint” means an oral or written report information provided by a student or any person to an employee alleging that a student has been subjected to conduct that may rise to the level of hazing, harassment or bullying.

C. “Complaining student” means a student who has provided oral or written information about conduct that may rise to the level of hazing, harassment or bullying, or a student who is the target of alleged hazing, harassment or bullying.

D. “Designated employee” means an employee who has been designated by the school to receive complaints of hazing, harassment and bullying pursuant to
(1) Sexual harassment, which means unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, that
includes sexual violence/sexual assault, sexual advances, requests for sexual
favors, and other verbal, written, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature,
and includes situations when one or both of the following occur:
(i) Submission to that conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or
condition of a student’s education, academic status, or progress; or
(ii) Submission to or rejection of such conduct by a student is used as a
component of the basis for decisions affecting that student.

Sexual harassment may also include student-on-student conduct or conduct of a
non-employee third party that creates a hostile environment. A hostile
environment exists where the harassing conduct is severe, persistent or pervasive
so as to deny or limit the student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the
educational program on the basis of sex.

Sexual harassment also occurs where there exists a “Relationship of a Sexual
Nature.” “Relationship of a Sexual Nature” means any kind of physical or verbal
conduct by an employee with a student, engaged in by the employee for the
purpose of obtaining power over the student through sexual activity or to gratify a
sexual desire. Any District employee’s “Relationship of a Sexual Nature” is
prohibited. The District will regard any Relationship of a Sexual Nature between
an employee and a student as unwelcome by the student.

Further examples of sexual harassment may be found under the District Policy D
7 Sexual Harassment.

(2) Racial harassment, which means conduct directed at the characteristics of a
student’s or a student’s family member’s actual or perceived race or color, and
includes the use of epithets, stereotypes, racial slurs, comments, insults,
derogatory remarks, gestures, threats, graffiti, display, or circulation of written or
visual material, and taunts on manner of speech and negative references to
cultural customs.

(3) Harassment of members of other protected categories, means conduct directed at
the characteristics of a student’s or a student’s family member’s actual or
perceived creed, national origin, marital status, disability, sex, (including but not
limited to pregnancy, parental and marital status), sexual orientation, gender
expression or gender identity and includes the use of epithets, stereotypes, slurs,
comments, insults, derogatory remarks, gestures, threats, graffiti, display, or
circulation of written or visual material, taunts on manner of speech, and negative
references to customs related to any of these protected categories.
J. “Hazing” means any intentional, knowing or reckless act committed by a student, whether individually or in concert with others, against another student: In connection with pledging, being initiated into, affiliating with, holding office in, or maintaining membership in any organization which is affiliated with the educational institution; and

(1) Which is intended to have the effect of, or should reasonably be expected to have the effect of, endangering the mental or physical health of the student.

Hazing shall not include any activity or conduct that furthers legitimate curricular, extra-curricular, or military training program goals, provided that:

(1) The goals are approved by the educational institution; and
(2) The activity or conduct furthers the goals in a manner that is appropriate, contemplated by the educational institution, and normal and customary for similar programs at other educational institutions.

With respect to Hazing, “Student” means any person who:
(A) is registered in or in attendance at an educational institution;
(B) has been accepted for admission at the educational institution where the hazing incident occurs; or
(C) intends to attend an educational institution during any of its regular sessions after an official academic break;

K. “Notice” means a written complaint or oral information that hazing, harassment or bullying may have occurred which has been provided to a designated employee from another employee, the student allegedly subjected to the hazing, harassment or bullying, another student, a parent or guardian, or any other individual who has reasonable cause to believe the alleged conduct may have occurred. If the school learns of possible hazing, harassment or bullying through other means, for example, if information about hazing, harassment or bullying is received from a third party (such as from a witness to an incident or an anonymous letter or telephone call), different factors will affect the school’s response. These factors include the source and nature of the information; the seriousness of the alleged incident; the specificity of the information; the objectivity and credibility of the source of the report; whether any individuals can be identified who were subjected to the alleged harassment; and whether those individuals want to pursue the matter. In addition, for purposes of violations of federal anti-discrimination laws, notice may occur when an employee of the district, including any individual who a student could reasonably believe has this authority or responsibility, knows or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known about potential unlawful harassment or bullying.
Handout I: Anti-Bullying Quiz

(Answer True or False)

1. Nearly one-third of American teens are involved in bullying.
   (True) (False)

2. Less than 10% of American teens admit to bullying others.
   (True) (False)

3. Students who are bullied in school are usually attentive students with good attendance.
   (True) (False)

4. Most students who bully are insecure.
   (True) (False)

5. Contrary to stereotypes, male bullies are not usually bigger and physically stronger than their peers.
   (True) (False)

6. Students who witness bullying often refuse to remain friends with the victim and feel guilty for not reporting the incident.
   (True) (False)

7. Bullies have trouble making friends.
   (True) (False)

8. Bullies do poorly in school compared to others who do not bully.
   (True) (False)

9. Most bullies discontinue violent or aggressive behavior in adulthood.
   (True) (False)

10. If you are being bullied it’s best to handle it alone.
    (True) (False)
Appendix F

Interview Questions

ENGLISH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. Background. Please tell us about yourself – what led you to become an English teacher and why you would like to teach at [school name]. Describe your specific experiences teaching English you have had?

3. Collaboration. As ninth grade teachers, we are expected to work with our discipline team, our co-teacher, and the Humanities team at large. We co-create curriculum through each of these relationships. What do you see as some benefits and struggles to doing this work? Can you describe any relevant experiences you have had?

4. Planning and Proficiencies. Describe a unit of study that you recently taught or are teaching now. How did you go about planning the unit and setting learning targets? Describe the assessments you incorporated. For students who did not meet the learning targets, what interventions did you undertake? Overall, what worked or did not work about the unit?

5. Diversity/Differentiation. We have students from many different cultural backgrounds in our classes. Tell us about your experience in working with students on IEPs or students who are English Language Learners. How do you differentiate instruction to meet individual needs? How would you approach connecting, supporting, and engaging all students, including those who may have less academic experience in a formal math class?

6. Skills. Describe ways you incorporate technology and innovative instructional techniques into your English instruction.

7. Student Relationships. Tell us about ways you have built relationships with students and been involved in building a positive school climate. What experience do you have with teacher advisories?

8. Student Management. Not every student behaves perfectly. If a student or several students are disrupting class, how would you deal with them?

9. Personal Interests. Tell us about yourself in other ways. For instance, what was your favorite class in college and why? What do you do for fun? What co-curricular or other school activities would you be interested in getting involved with at [school name]?

10. Questions for us?

Diversity Experience and Cultural Competence Interview Questions
What experience do you have working with:
   a. Students who are English Language Learners?
   b. Students who are from low-income families?
   c. Students who are refugees?

How do you respond in a situation that forces you to think about values and beliefs very
different from your own? Please give an example.

As an educator, give us an example of a training or educational program you have
participated in to help develop your cultural competency?

How would you approach a situation in a school in which you find children of color are
being disproportionately disciplined relative to white children?

Do you think privilege (of any kind) has an impact on the classroom environment? Why
or why not? How will you build awareness around privilege to your staff, and how will
you measure progress?

As an educator, describe a situation where you have become aware of your own
cultural bias and what you learned from it? What would you do differently now?

Provide specific examples in which you have demonstrated active leadership on issues
of diversity awareness, cultural competence, and equity?

How do you integrate "diversity" in the teaching/classroom environment? How have you
provided leadership among the teachers in regards to "diversity" initiatives?
What have you done to further your own learning around diversity awareness,
multiculturalism and/or social justice?

STANDARD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Please tell us about yourself – your professional background, experiences, and interests –
   and why you would like to teach at [school name].

2. Describe a recent class you taught to help us understand what a typical lesson in your class
   looks like. How do you usually start and end classes and what types of instructional strategies
do you typically use with students? Given that we teach in 80 minute blocks every other day,
please give us examples of how you would use time effectively for instruction in your classes.
3. Describe the unit of study that you have brought with you today. How did you go about planning the unit? How did you collaborate with others in developing the unit? What assessments are incorporated into the unit? How did you go about developing those assessments? Overall, what worked or did not work about the unit?

4. Tell us about your experience in working with students with disabilities or students who are English Language Learners. What do you believe are your responsibilities as a classroom teacher in working with a student with learning challenges? Please give us some examples of how you differentiate instruction to meet individual needs.

5. Long with the school district is committed to hiring teachers who have experiences in working with populations from different cultures and backgrounds. Two of the questions you were asked to write about were: "Discuss with us how you have become more aware of issues of cultural, ethnic, or racial difference as well as social inequity in order to prepare yourself to work effectively in a diverse, multi-cultural environment." How would you handle "A white student delivers what appears to be a racist comment in class." Please share your responses to these questions.

6. Is using a Professional Learning Communities approach that encourages teachers to work together, monitor student progress, and engage in collegial study for professional development. What is your experience in working and planning with teachers and aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices?

7. Teachers approach homework and grading practices in different ways. What is your philosophy about homework and about grading? Describe some recent homework assignments you have given. How was the homework used in class? Was the homework graded? Regarding grading, what factors do you take into account when deciding what will be graded and how? Is make-up work or re-writes/re-testing a possibility in your classes?

8. What have you learned about motivating students in your experiences in the classroom? If two-thirds of your class is under-performing what would you do?

9. Not every student behaves perfectly. If a student or several students are disrupting class, how would you deal with them?

10. Please give us some examples about how you use technology to support instruction in your classroom.

11. Do you have any experience with homerooms or teacher advisories? Tell us about ways you have built relationships with students and been involved in building a positive school climate.

12. What was your favorite class in college and why? Tell us about a book(s) you recently read.
and enjoyed.

13. What do you do for fun? What co-curricular or other school activities would you be interested in getting involved with?

14. Do you have any questions for us?
Appendix G

Voices for LGBTQ+

Now that you possess some tools for writing poetry, let’s put this knowledge to good use. Policy and laws--government sanctioned protections--cannot occur without society asking for social movements. Poetry has historically been used to spark passion within communities in order to create protections for marginalized people. Now is your opportunity to cry out for equality for the LGBTQ+ community.

Before You Begin

1. Think about your identity. How do you identify?.
2. Think how oppression of the LGBTQ+ community makes you feel.
3. How does your identity relate to that injustice? Example: Do you identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community? Are you an ally for a group or cause? Why? What about LGBTQ+ causes or injustices spark passion for you

Writing the Poem

1. What is the point of the poem?
   a. Is it asking for something?
   b. Is it shedding light and perspective on the LGBTQ+ community?
   c. Is it showing something about the LGBTQ+ community, for example a specific moment from the timeline?
2. Think about how your identity and experiences relate to the LGBTQ+ community. From what point of view do you want to write the poem?
   a. From your identity
   b. From the oppressors identity
   c. From the oppressed identity

Examples

A Poem for Pulse

Warm Life
Appendix H

Voices for Equality

Now that you possess some tools for writing poetry, let’s put this knowledge to good use. Policy and laws--government sanctioned protections--cannot occur without society asking for social movements. Poetry has historically been used to spark passion within communities in order to create protections for marginalized people. Now is your opportunity to cry out for equality.

Before You Begin

1. Think about your identity. How do you identify?
2. Think how injustices, oppression, and marginalized identities make you feel
3. How does your identity relate to that injustice? Example: Are you part of a marginalized group? Are you an ally for a group or cause? Why? What about the group, cause or injustice sparks passion for you

Writing the Poem

1. What is the point of the poem?
   a. Is it asking for something?
   b. Is it shedding light and perspective on identities?
   c. Is it showing something, for example specific oppression
2. From what point of view do you want to write the poem? Think about how your identity and experiences relate to the injustice or identities you are writing about.
   a. From your identity
   b. From the oppressors identity
   c. From the oppressed identity

Examples

Cry Your Tears

Rainforest

We Are Not Responsible
December 17, 2019
150 Colchester Ave.
05401

Greetings,

Recently, I witnessed an event in one of the elementary schools that was so troubling that I resolved that it must be aggressively addressed. This campaign is my undertaking alone, but there are many folks in the staff and faculty, and the Burlington community in general who share its concerns. I do not underestimate the risk to my livelihood (nor of being socially ostracized and being targeted for threats of, and acts of violence) by making public my thoughts; the same risk silences the objections of many of my colleagues.

It feels absurd to have to preface this appeal to reason by declaring that I wish only happiness, security, and full human rights for everyone touched by our schools, but the current ideological backdrop makes it necessary. Such are our times. My lens through which I perceive this event and its implications is shaped by common sense, and respect for scientific fact. I am not driven by a religious or politically conservative agenda.

The Event:

One of the school’s faculty members presented to the children a lesson on interacting with trans-gender peers. They began by introducing a poster (available at transstudent.org) which I learned is commonly posted in other schools in the district. This individual used the poster as a prompt, and referred to it repeatedly.

They went on to discuss human genitalia, emphasizing that although most people are born with definitively male or female anatomy, occasionally, some are intersexed, but in all cases, an infant’s sex is assigned by the delivering obstetrician. That last point is highlighted in the poster, and merits some critical review. They then introduced the concept of gender binary (while completely neglecting the long-accepted definition of gender as a social construct reinforced in our patriarchal culture), as a choice that
individuals may make, deciding to be either male or female irrespective of their obvious physical attributes.

Further on, they elaborated that all transgender-identified people deserve respect [an idea with which I fully agree], and that their choice of self-expression and the theoretical framework supporting it must never be questioned [with which I completely disagree]. This faculty member repeatedly made clear beyond any doubt what perspective the children were expected to adopt: that self-identification trumps biology. I know how these discussions are staged, and we teachers do it all the time - guiding a lesson to an expected conclusion while giving the appearance of impartiality - although we seldom admit it. It's done most often to deliver an official narrative under the rubric, "Social Studies."

The lesson naturally raised the issue of public restrooms. Our visitor made the conclusion for the children that since an individual's choice of gender expression supersedes all other considerations, then no one of either sex, or of any age, should question the presence of any person in a public restroom. Let me emphasize this point - according to the curriculum as presented, no public restroom should be viewed as sex-segregated, because someone might self-identify as transgender, and their feelings need to be protected. Anyone can claim access to space that until recently was considered safely sex-segregated, including these men.

The examples in that Twitter thread merely scratch the surface of social media posts by dangerous, and sometimes predatory autogynephilic men who identify as trans.

My strongest objection to the content of this lesson is the way any critique or public questioning of the underlying ideology is discouraged. The children were actively discouraged from taking an opposing viewpoint. Under these circumstances, trans ideology is not an ideology at all, but rather an orthodoxy, placed beyond rational discussion.

That the district slipped in this obviously controversial but banal curriculum without consulting the public is understandable. Some administrators at the highest level must have bowed to political pressures, but wanted to avoid scrutiny. They almost succeeded.

Trans ideology is fundamentally flawed in that its fundamental premise has no basis in reality. A person's sex is assigned not at birth, but at conception, and they come into the world with either one set of gonads or the other (ovaries or testes), which produce either ova or sperm. That is the most definitive and diagnostic determinant of sex. Neither the magic words "I identify as..." nor the application of cosmetics, fashion, or extreme medical intervention can change a person's sex.

Transgenderism is simply performance of stereotypes of gender. It actually reinforces the gender
binary, contrary to its projected beliefs. Rather than encouraging children to love who they are, it elevates “gender dysphoria” and recommends the path of extreme interventions. The implications extend far beyond the bathroom door: women’s athletics at every level and in every domain are now confronted by men pretending to participate as women.

Safe spaces for women, such as shelters and rape crisis centers are compromised by the encroachment of the trans movement. Affirmative action programs that factor in a woman’s sex for study or employment in historically male dominated fields are next in line.

Just who does Title IX protect, if anyone may claim its protections?

Is this something that public schools should be uncritically and unaccountably helping to validate and normalize?

Do we want our children to think independently, critically, and boldly? Or do we want them to accede to group-think and social conformity?

These are not abstract or academic questions. They are real, and they are present.
My informal survey of other public school districts informs me that the same lack of transparency and accountability in has been the norm across the state.

In view of all this, my demands are simple:
1) I propose that the district immediately halt any further presentations of the trans orthodoxy curriculum;
2) I propose that the same staff members who presented it already, return to those classrooms and correct the disinformation previously taught;
3) I propose that the District host at least one open public forum devoted to the content and goals of this curriculum;
4) I propose that the District host at least one panel discussion critiquing the implementation of trans orthodoxy in the schools.

Regarding item #4, I will follow up with a short list of panelists who will fairly present my side of the debate. There are effectively only two sides to the debate, and the District has clearly demonstrated which side it is on. I intend no disrespect, but the furtive manner by which this sneaked into the schools shows that the District cannot be trusted to be an honest broker in assuring equal consideration to both sides. This conversation is obviously long overdue.

Respectfully,

Sermon Rationale/198
Appendix J

Fwd: LGBTQ + Allyship: Creating Gender-Celebrating School Environments – A “Beyond the Basics” Workshop

Just forwarded this to Noel asking if I could go. The challenge is it’s the second day of spring conferences. With that said, it would support our learning the DOJ wants to see happening. Maybe we can get a small team to do if he approves and will pay for it?

Sent from my iPhone. Please excuse any typos.

Begin forwarded message:

Date: February 7, 2020 at 7:28 AM EST
To: [Redacted]
Subject: LGBTQ + Allyship: Creating Gender-Celebrating School Environments – A “Beyond the Basics” Workshop

LGBTQ + Allyship: Creating Gender-Celebrating School Environments – A “Beyond the Basics” Workshop

Target Audience: Educators and administrators who have engaged in foundational learning of gender and sexual identity in youth. Especially valuable for those who have begun implementing gender-affirming changes within their schools and are seeking guidance on next steps.

The dynamics involved in supporting LGBTQ+ students are constantly evolving. Best
practices can change quickly, but implementing new procedures takes time. Making cultural shifts that change hearts and minds, however, requires patience and persistence. If your school has already established gender-neutral bathrooms and/or updated other policies and practices to be inclusive of students of all genders and sexualities, it can be hard to imagine next steps.

Participants will learn to distinguish between different levels of commitment to inclusion and allyship. We will also define and understand the roles of implicit bias and intersecting identities in addressing challenges students may face at school. Participants will leave this workshop with strategies for coalition-building and shifting root causes of inequity at school. Join us as we explore the difference between increasing safety at school and creating genuinely affirming and celebratory environments for students of all genders and sexualities.

advocacy organization. She has worked at universities in Pennsylvania, Texas, and Vermont and has 15 years of LGBTQ+ advocacy and education experience. Mara also works in advocating for racial justice and understanding and managing implicit bias.

March 27, 2020

* 8:30-3:30 *
$190 (Lunch included)

* Register for Workshop *  * Download Printable Flyer *

For more information, contact

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You are receiving this email because you or a colleague have attended a similar offering in the past and you wish to benefit VT children and youth.

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Fri, Feb 7, 2020 at 7:42 AM
I'm in.

Fri, Feb 7, 2020 at 10:30 AM

This is truly needed in our school. Count me in as well.

Fri, Feb 7, 2020 at 1:02 PM

We all will be assigned a half dozen senior PLPs to witness those days.

Sent from my iPhone

Fri, Feb 7, 2020 at 1:57 PM

Correct. Also, just heard from Noel. He said no for the conference because of the PLP senior conferences. Understandable. Too bad the timing didn't work out.

Sent from my iPhone. Please excuse any typos.

We all will be assigned a half dozen senior PLPs to witness those days.

[Quoted text hidden]
Appendix K

Please READ before tomorrow!

7 messages

Mon, Jan 27, 2020 at 3:21 PM

Good afternoon,

It just came to my attention that a group called "Gender Critical" will be hosting an event tomorrow evening at the Fletcher Free Library. Although this group may have a different "view" that it falls under, do not be confused... this is an ANTI-TRANS group. There topic for the evening according to the Fletcher Free Library is...

"Discussion group for who oppose the subversion of Women's Rights by the transgender agenda."

The Pride Center of just issued a statement earlier today...

I wanted to make you aware of this, because some of our most vulnerable students identify as transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming. We need to make sure that we as a school and faculty show our compassion and make sure we stay true to our motto, "All are Welcome."

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to reach out to me, and I support you in anyway I can.

Best

Mon, Jan 27, 2020 at 8:43 PM

Attn: The event has been cancelled by the organizers.

Sent from my iPhone.

Wed, Jan 29, 2020 at 7:01 AM

[Sent from iPhone]
It's back on. Just FYI...

Sent from my iPad

Wed, Jan 29, 2020 at 8:32 AM

What we have here with Trans Activist Organization and Gender Critical Organization is a Liberal circular firing squad, and I see zero need for BHS Staff Email to be used FOR or AGAINST either group. Just my two cents.

Sent from my iPad

Wed, Jan 29, 2020 at 8:48 AM

I expect that people may complain about the 'reply all,' but as a mother of a trans adolescent, I respectfully disagree that this does not bear discussion in the high school setting. There is a lot of junk science out there and misinformation that serves to hurt children at a most difficult time in their development. My 2 cents.

Beth

Wed, Jan 29, 2020 at 9:33 AM

Hello All:

Please shut this thread down. It will absolutely not prove to be productive via email. Thank you.

Noel
Appendix L

Andrew,

I apologize for the time lag here, I realized I did not have your address. But I've been thinking a great deal about your questions, and that thinking has left me wondering whether I do enough, whether I have ever done enough, to protect and support LGBTQ kids, my early membership in the [BLANK] movement notwithstanding.

Below is a section pulled from a recent series of Medium posts (with links beneath that). I wanted you to give me your thoughts on this. I think allowing kids their identities and protecting and supporting those identities is an essential responsibility of adults. At the same time I know I’ve tried to allow educators to be safe in their identities – back at Michigan State a fellow doc student and I wrote a journal piece about teachers who were gay and/or disabled and the stress put on them when the responsibility for all kids in those categories was dumped on them and usually only them. (Because Adam and I were nothing if not serial provocateurs, the article almost slipped through the editors with the title “When Retards and Faggots Do Teacher” – part of our constant attempt to queer language).

That said, this is a huge problem I see in almost every secondary school in this country. Somehow we have come to believe that having lots of rainbow stickers on classroom doors is good. But I wonder why, within any institution dedicated to children, we would have to point out where certain children are safe and will be honored. For me, because we don't have “straight kids welcome here” we are calling out LGBTQ kids and controlling their identity. This is just as problematic for me – though I am fully guilty of not writing about it or speaking about it – as the notion of 'special education accommodations' is in my primary work. See [link](http://speedchange.blogspot.com/2008/05/may-day-retard-theory.html)

I would never pretend to know, to understand, to feel the variety of human gender and human sexuality. I might have more experiences than most, but I remain (as I write below) that I'm a white, fairly straight male who gets all those privileges, and is thus blind to many things. But I do think that the simple act of forcing LGBTQ kids to “come out” imposes a massive psychic burden on our children. Even if I had been on speaking terms with my parents as a teen I would never have to have a “dad, I think I like girls” conversation, and that is one of the greatest privileges straight kids possess.
None of this is written to help you out in your dilemma which I will be making more central to our messages. If I knew what to do or how to do it I sure hope I'd be doing it. But I do want to help process this with you.

Much of that is huge, but other things are not. In the last high school I worked on we simply eliminated gang bathrooms, instead having just a row of individual spaces with a toilet and a sink. That was a zero-cost move toward the physical part of identity safety, so why wouldn't everyone do it?

Thanks for reading, talk soon,
Appendix M

Sexual Health Education
4 messages

Mon, Feb 10, 2020 at 5:32 PM

Hi Andrew,

After our conversation at the winter ball I spoke with Gayle regarding what we talked about. We both would be happy to come to one of the GSA meetings to hear the concerns from the students and get their perspective on what they feel they need and may not be getting in Health with regards to sexual health.

I feel that we have a pretty inclusive/comprehensive curriculum with regards to sexual health. If we can address it we will. If we can not we will direct the students to those that can. If we are not meeting the needs of the students we would like to know so we can correct that.

Please let me know a date that would work for you and the students.

Thanks, Allyson

Hi Allyson & Gayle,

Gayle has been generous enough to sit down with me and look at the curriculum, but that was a conversation prompted by my Social Justice class/a paper for my grad school program. In what little I know about your sexual education program, it is a comprehensive curriculum.

To be clear, this is not an assault on your curriculum. Frequently—including today—the GSA circles back to the conversation of not seeing themselves within our curriculum. The English department and our sex ed curriculum are often brought up during this conversation. The English questions I can answer or bring back to our department. The sex ed questions...not as easily.

If one of you would be willing to hear them out, I think they would very much appreciate it! I think the crux of their conversation is that they want to know how to have sex, and that’s unclear to them. Based on what I gather from our conversations, they feel like the sex ed lessons are based on
prevention of STDs, and they particularly want to know about things like how anal sex works (is it painful, etc.), anal douching, lesbian sex, a conversation about changing gender marking anatomy. Again, I have no idea if any of that is possible in the state of Vermont, I'm just passing along what I am able to gather from our conversations.

Letting them address teachers who can speak to the curriculum would be great. We meet every Monday after school. Monday of next week Sparks is coming in... I'm wondering if one or both of you would be willing to come in Monday the 17th. If not, let me know a Monday that works for you.

Thanks for your time, and carrying the conversation forward.

Best,

Andrew

[Quote text hidden]

---

Andrew LeValley
He/Him Pronouns
English Teacher

[Quote text hidden]

Hey Friends,

All makes sense. brought his issue up today in the Lead Teacher meeting and made it sound a little different than what you are describing - more along the lines Health classes were not being mindful of sex, gender, relationships, etc.

Would love to come Feb 17th. I think it is important to listen, I will also say to you (not the students) that it feels as though they are making some assumptions that students in heterosexual relationships "know" and have things all figured out. It's interesting because all of the examples listed are covered in health - pain during sex, douching, sex changes, and anytime we say sex or explain it is used in these contexts: anal, vaginal and oral. We also discuss masturbation ... we try to cover (along with the UVM medical doctors) as much as we can without losing our license and being respectful to everyone in the room.

It would be great to get the students' perspective because they aren't hearing those topics. We need to do a better job helping students make connections to content and application in real life.

Allyson, Feb 17th work for you?

Thanks, Gayle

[Quote text hidden]
Appendix N

Outright Proposal for Work on Improving LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

1. School Board Gender-Affirming Schools Basics: Spring 2020
   Baseline LGBTQ+ skill-up training for school board members
   Group receives an 8 hour immersion training with the following contents
   - Introduction and pronoun usage overview
   - Implicit bias foundation
   - YRBS data review
   - Gender roles and social impacts activity
   - Gender and Sexuality model overview
   - Interpersonal case scenario activity
   - Empathy-building exercises
   - Actionable equity strategic planning

2. Gender & Sexuality 101 trainings: Spring and Fall 2020
   Basic LGBTQ+ trainings for all employees including
   - Staff/faculty/administrators from all schools and programs
   - Substitute teachers
   - District-level administrators
   - Food services employees, grounds staff, bus drivers
   Each group receives a 2 hour training with the following contents
   - Introduction and empathy-building exercise
   - Gender and Sexuality Overview
   - Case Scenario Activity
   - Introduction to actionable allyship exercise

3. Gender & Sexuality 101 community workshops: Spring and Fall 2020
   Basic LGBTQ+ workshops available to caregivers and community supporting students
   - Caregivers/community of elementary students
   - Caregivers/community of secondary students
   Each group receives a 90 minute workshop with the following contents
   - Introduction and empathy-building exercise
   - Gender and Sexuality Overview
   - Q&A
   - Introduction to actionable allyship exercise

4. Topical Webinars (can be shaped by input from district on emerging needs)
   Deeper dive into LGBTQ+ topics – 30 minutes content & 15 minutes Q&A.
   Possible topics include:
   - Talking to young children about gender
   - Inclusive classroom/lesson content strategies
• making sex ed more inclusive
• LGBTQ+ vocabulary and pronouns

5. **Data/Technology Consult**
Troubleshooting deep dive on LGBTQ+-inclusive data systems coordination and management - 2 hours
• data systems coordinator
• data managers

**Handouts and Posters for Passive Programming**
Ways to Make School Safer for LGBTQ+ Youth
[http://www.transstudent.org/product/5ways10](http://www.transstudent.org/product/5ways10)

Gender Pronouns [http://www.transstudent.org/product/pronouns10](http://www.transstudent.org/product/pronouns10)
Over the years, it's become clear that kids in the LGBTQ community face bullying at a much higher rate than those who aren't. I started at [Redacted] in 2016. The first month there was good, not much happened, it was 6th grade. I was making friends, I had a group to sit with at lunch, it was pretty good. The second-month started, and I was outed as gay. This happens far too often all around America, people are outed, the very personal decision of coming out, ripped out of their hands.

When I was outed, I had no one to go to. All of the people who I thought were my friends suddenly turned on me. Suddenly I was isolated, I had no friends, I was being bullied and harassed. I was called gay slurs, I was punched. I decided to come out to my parents, they were completely supportive. I told them about the bullying that I was facing at school, they didn't understand the extent of it though.

There was the one day that I got punched in the head, the teacher was out of the room so he didn't see it, I went in the hallway and told him what happened. Nothing was done, the next class I had was in study hall. I emailed my mom what happened, she didn't see it though because she was at work. That night when she came home, I told her what happened. She had no contact from the school about it, the school knew what happened, but they didn't contact anyone in my family. My parents went to [Redacted] and met with guidance, the schools excuse for no contact with my family was that there was a misunderstanding and no one ended up emailing her.
The administration at [redacted] didn’t do anything. They said they’d look into it, they investigated it for a day, then closed the investigation, nothing was ever done. This happens far too often all around America, so many kids in the LGBTQ community are bullied, harassed, and many struggle with mental illness because of it. I’m one of the lucky ones though, I have a supportive family, which so many don’t have [redacted] didn’t care when I went to them about what I was going through, they decided that the bullying and harassment I was facing wasn’t important enough and wasn’t affecting enough people for them to do anything. The homophobia and discrimination faced by so many LGBTQ youth in America today is a pressing issue. In [redacted] LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than others. One solution to this problem is to train staff to recognize homophobia and transphobia because one of the major problems is recognition, the staff doesn’t recognize homophobia and transphobia as that, they just think of it as teasing. Kids in the LGBTQ community are bullied at a much higher rate and we need to address.
Appendix P

Maybe someday

Fight that feeling
Fake a smile
Flirt with girls
Find a way
To hide

Tread lightly
Try to blend in
To not let them see
That I might be
Different

Don’t stare at him
Distract yourself
Dodge the insults and stares
Doubt your every
Move

Miserable like a rainy day
My feet dragging
Mad at myself
Mind racing with many thoughts
Story of my life

Silently hoping for a change
Stubbornly waiting for everyone to be more accepting
Scared of judgement and hate that would come my way
Society is not ready for my identity
Maybe someday
Choose to be a better man

Last year I was in the locker room changing into my running clothes for cross country practice when some boys started commenting on the length of the shorts my teammates and I were wearing. In cross country a lot of the boys prefer wearing shorter shorts as they are cooler and more comfortable to run in. One of the boys said that our shorts looked “gay” and that a girl should be wearing them, not a guy.

The use of the word “gay” as an insult towards other boys is unacceptable. The notion that the way you dress or act makes you “gay” and being “gay” means being weak is wrong and needs to stop.

“Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Boys and Men” defines “masculinity ideology” as “a particular constellation of standards that have held sway over large segments of the population, including: anti-femininity, achievement, exclusivity, and violence.” This ideology is sometimes called “toxic masculinity”. Toxic masculinity promotes a culture where men are encouraged to hide their traits associated with weaknesses and compete with one another to be the best man. Therefore, toxic masculinity discourages participation in choirs, orchestras, bands, plays, musicals, non-sport clubs, art, literary clubs and much more.

What bothers me more is how homophobic toxic men are and how brutal the affects of that hate is on LGBT youth. 

The 2017 National High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey concluded that LGBT youth are four times more likely to self harm and four and a half times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth. This toxic culture excludes those who do not conform and self-loathing is one of its consequences.

At school we are taught to celebrate the diversity and embrace our differences. We clearly need to stop promoting toxic masculinity and start embracing the idea of manhood as diverse in and of itself.

We need to stop using “gay” to insult men who tend to act more feminine. We need to stop using “gay” to scorn perceived “weakness”. We need to stop using “gay” to discourage empathy and kindness. We need to stop believing there is only one way to “be a man”.

What if being a “man” meant something different in our society? If we showed benevolence and welcomed the diversity every person has within them, then what? Being a man should mean confronting our own shortcomings, striving to be the best people we can be rather than fighting against one another for power. The human connections that can arise out of being more caring, loving and accepting can build support systems where fewer people are left out, and more people feel whole.