LGBTQ+ in Secondary Education

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LGBTQ students and families come from a wide variety of backgrounds within secondary school environment. Within the United States, " Approximately 4.3% of adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). That means that there are more than 10.7 million LGBTQ adults in the U.S." (Day, 2017, p. 1). Although the United states has seen positive reforms for these students and families, curriculum itself may still be lacking in terms of providing an equitable experience for these learners and we may be failing them as educators if we do not appropriately educate ourselves on their unique needs. The purpose of this paper is on how school environment and curriculum can be changed to better support LGBTQ students.

Our job as educators is to ensure that the curriculum and climate are structured in ways that are conducive for a wide variety of learners. This not only means that the content itself is differentiated based on different learning styles and preferences, but also that students can see themselves represented in what they are learning and can feel safe in doing so. Pisco indicates in her research study that LGBTQ students' progress is impeded through an adverse climate in our public schools. "Three specific factors contributing to this adverse climate are: (a) students' safety, (b) school policies, and (c) teacher inaction." (Pisco, 2020, p. 5).

Although schools do integrate antibullying policies to curb the impact of an adverse climate, they tend to not do enough as over 60% of LGTBQ students' indicated in Pisco's study that they reported feeling unsafe at school. Many of these antibullying policies are also too generic, with little guidance and training provided to teachers on interventions within the classroom in addressing LGBTQ student's safety. This teacher inaction can come into place when biased comments that come up during class are not addressed or are addressed in ways that

create an unsafe and or unwelcoming environment for LGBTQ students. "Therefore, teacher inaction based on policy perpetuates a school climate where LGBTQ+ youth feel unsupported, and therefore, disconnected." (Pisco, 2020, p. 6). Two additional authors, Muraco and Russell, summarized several studies on how bullying impacts lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young adults. In one of these studies, the authors state that …

> "A total 245 LGBT young adults between the ages of 21 and 25 were surveyed. These adults answered questions about their experiences of school bullying based on their LGBT identity when they were between the ages of 13 and 19. Links between bullying, depression, suicidal ideation, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and social integration in young adulthood were then examined. Findings show: Compared to lesbians and bisexual young women, gay and bisexual young men and transgender young adults reported higher levels of LGBT school victimization." (Muraco & Russell, 2011, p. 1)

Curriculum itself also does not do enough in creating a conducive learning environment for LGBTQ students. If students do not see themselves portrayed in what they are reading, they may feel disconnected from the learning itself. "Because of the severe need for LGBTQ+ resources, high school libraries should offer more literature with queer characters and teachers should practice bibliotherapy with these books in their classrooms." (Henderson, 2017, p. 1) These textual resources cannot simply just be available in a school library but must be integrated into core context classes as well. This authentic integration can help to provide a more equitable experience for LGTBQ students in differentiating the content to fit their unique needs and to create a learning environment that supports these students in the wider curriculum through

acceptance. The indicate the current disparity between schools providing this type of material, Henderson indicates in his study that "public high school media centers in one southern state only held ~0.4% of suggested LGBTQ+ reading materials." (Henderson, 2017, p. 5). If the school library only provided a fraction of what is suggested to meet the needs of these students, how much is integrated within core content classes themselves? Henderson additionally states that …

> "if a teen can find a book that relates a similar experience to what they are going through in their own life, they should be able to utilize the information in the book towards their own issues in reality. Furthermore, non-LGBTQ+ students can benefit from the housing of these materials as it allows them to become more understanding of their queer classmates." (Henderson, 2017, p. 3).

Although there have been positive reforms for LGBTQ individuals within the United States, LGBTQ students are still not being provided an equitable learning experience within the secondary educational environment. These educational reforms should focus on providing a more supportive learning environment and curriculum resources that are conducive for these learners. Through a systematic approach to improving educational systems and policies in these ways, we as educators can help to better provide for their unique needs.

References

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