

Pre-Service Educators and Professional Development on LGBTQ Youth in Higher Education

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School leaders are charged with the duty to create a school climate that is safe, welcoming, positive, and protective of all, including LGBTQ students. In order for LGBTQ students to be fully included and affirmed in their schools, administrators need opportunities to learn about and recognize the need for a continuous process of interrupting the systematic exclusion and stigmatization of LGBTQ students in all arenas of school life: curriculum, social culture, policy, extracurricular activities, school ceremonies, and rituals (Payne & Smith, 2017). Few teacher preparation programs in the United States include LGBTQ issues as required coursework for future teachers (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008) and no state requires LGBTQ multicultural competence to qualify for teacher certification. There, too, is little research on in-service professional development (Towery, 2007) and even less on the efficacy of school-based interventions in support of LGBTQ students. The education a pre-service educator receives is crucial to not only their success, but the success of their students. Though pre-service teachers who don't obtain professional development on students who identify as LGBTQ prior to entering the classroom, are not able to serve their students fully.

According to Jennings' (2012) examination of formal curriculum for 55 public universities school leadership graduate programs, 59.5% of programs do not include sexual orientation. And the bigger issue is that pre-service preparation programs don't require LGBTQ professional development. The most frequently reported reason for the omission was that accreditation agencies do not require it (Payne & Smith, 2017). Teachers cite their preparation programs as not training them to address such topics in school (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner & Tompkins, 2014). Programs that did include sexual orientation ranked it as their lowest "diversity" priority, and Jennings determined that "both non-[LGBT] inclusive programs and [LGBT-] inclusive programs ranked sexual orientation so low as to be statistically indistinguishable from one another" (p. 10). Teachers' self-reported of being unprepared to address LGBTQ bullying during their teacher education programs (e.g., Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Jennings & Sherwin, 2008; Mathison, 1998). If teacher education programs continue to send pre-service instructors into the field without this knowledge base, creating a safe space for all students becomes difficult.

With little or no preparation during their pre-service programs (Athanasas & Larrabee, 2003; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008; Sherwin & Jennings, 2006) and with little opportunity for professional development (Payne & Smith, 2010), one may conclude that educators' inability to effectively address homophobia and heterosexism is closely tied to a lack of education. Gay and Kirkland (2003) discussed the importance of developing "culturally critical consciousness and self-reflective teachers" (p. 181), who are aware of the diverse lives their students live, and could reflect on the impact of power and privilege within the curriculum, in the hopes to strive for improvement. This calls for

teachers to be better prepared in addressing bullying, even towards marginalized groups, notably, LGBTQ youth (Milburn & Palladino, 2012).

New teachers graduate from their teacher education programs without the appropriate knowledge and skills to be the effective allies their students were looking for (Milburn & Palladino, 2012). Pre-service programs can no longer rely on their prospective school districts for guidance on LGBTQ youth. Many teachers have also noted a general lack of resources and understanding of the topic to address LGBTQ bullying in their respective schools (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Ginsberg, 1998; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Mathison, 1998). The deficit in knowledge, perhaps ignored in their teacher education programs, has left teachers feeling unable to be successful in navigating LGBTQ bullying and harassment situations (Milburn & Palladino, 2012).

While in their teacher education programs, preservice teachers are commonly asked to “describe the ideal classroom.” For example, Hall (2006) found responses to such a prompt to be consistent in the push to create, “clean, colorful, bright, safe, spacious, welcoming, intellectual, nurturing, respectful, humorous, understanding, encouraging, fun and fair” (p. 149) classrooms and schools. Yet, the reality for many of our LGBTQ and gender nonconforming students is a school environment that they attend on a day-to-day basis that is the opposite of the above desired traits (Milburn & Palladino, 2012) because of the lack of preparedness of their instructors.

Teacher education programs address various forms of diversity, yet the attention to sexual orientation and gender identity topics are often absent or de-emphasized (Jennings & Sherwin, 2008). Many teachers rely on the knowledge and skills obtained through their teacher preparation programs to address issues and concerns in their classrooms and schools (Milburn & Palladino, 2012). When teacher preparation programs fail to address a portion of students, a change needs to be made in the pursuit of providing all students with a safe and successful place to learn (Milburn & Palladino, 2012). Szalacha (2003) found that unless a student knew a particular teacher who was proactive on issues of tolerance and inclusivity, students were unaware of any professional development their teachers had, and teacher training alone did not produce a significant effect on school climate.

The importance of including LGBTQ in higher education programs (Goldstein, Russell, & Daley, 2007; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Taylor et al., 2009, 2011) are critical as many future teachers are not prepared to address LGBTQ youth. The opportunity for teacher candidates to understand how to incorporate anti-discrimination work in their teaching practice is a key component of school and education reform (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner & Tompkins, 2014). Social justice policies and procedures exist in many school settings, but unless new teachers have the opportunity to explore and apply their grounded knowledge from professional development, these well-meaning policies are often neglected or ignored (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner & Tompkins, 2014).

In conclusion, there needs to be a development of pedagogy that does not oppress; one that truly embraces, celebrates, and honors all learners (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner & Tompkins, 2014) on “issues of homophobia and heterosexism in the classroom” (Stiegler, 2008, p. 117). Teacher educators need to prepare pre-service teachers to understand their role in the development of inclusive spaces for sexual minority, transgender, and gender non-conforming youth in schools (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner & Tompkins, 2017).

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