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What is this feeling I am feeling?:

Providing an LGBTQ+ Curriculum and School Environment

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LS 400: Senior Capstone

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Abstract

Full inclusion within classroom and school environments has been a topic within education for some time. Research has identified ways to make the general education classroom as inclusive as possible, while still continuing to provide the least restrictive way of educating students. However, the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning + perspectives and curriculum in public education has showed little to no improvement. An argument is made that when an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum and school environment is provided; students are more likely to succeed academically and feel safer while attending school. In order for all students to thrive within school and feel a sense of belonging, they must see themselves and see the importance of what is being taught. Considerations of the issue should include the perspectives of teachers, counselors, and community resource members, because they are primarily the ones involved in fulfilling the curriculum, providing a safe environment and may offer resources on how curriculum and school environment go hand and hand for the students. Based on an analysis of the interviews and the research literature, three action options emerged as ways to improve LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum and school environment. Providing teachers with LGBTQ+ development days and creating a GSA club on every school campus is arguably the most effective way to achieve the goals of a fully inclusive school curriculum and environment.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Curriculum, School Environment, Full Inclusion

What is this feeling I am feeling?:**Providing an LGBTQ+ Curriculum and School Environment**

The term LGBTQ+ is a widely accepted term that refers to people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and or queer/questioning and more. In order to develop a supportive perspective on the identities of these individuals, one must get educated on the proper terminology. A lesbian is a person who identifies themselves as female and who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to other females. The term gay is a person who identifies as male and who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to other males. A bisexual person can be identified as either male or female but has an emotional and/or physical attraction towards two genders. Transgender is a person whose gender identity does not match with the gender assigned at birth. The Q in LGBTQ has two meanings; the first meaning is “queer” in which these individuals prefer not to be labeled whereas the second meaning stands for “questioning” at which these individuals are in the process of understanding and exploring their gender identity and/or preference (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2016). In order to support and accept the LGBTQ+ community, school institutions need to take a stand to positively portray and provide an LGBTQ+ curriculum and school environment.

What is the issue?

In 2011, the passage of California’s Senate Bill 48, also known as “The FAIR Education Act”, mandates that California public schools adopt a curriculum that is fair, inclusive and accurately represents culturally and racially diverse groups. Among these groups are topics on gender, sexual orientation and the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans. If that is the case, why is it that schools are centered around academic scores and standards and disregard to provide an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum and school environment? It

has been argued that schools and curriculum should not take part and stay separated when discussing social justice topics. Some may argue that schools are there to provide education on curriculum and standards and prepare students to pass their exams and avoid inclusion at all cost. The injustice in avoiding full inclusion results in the lack of awareness of minority groups that are oftentimes looked over and unrepresented. A particular group that is heavily impacted is LGBTQ+ students. Exploration of sexual identity, orientation and gender is a key aspect of a young person's development. This developmental process varies between each individual and teaching students as a "one size fits all" is neglecting those students who are exploring themselves. The education system has adopted a heteronormative- the notion that heterosexuality as the "normal" and favored sexual orientation- mentality that in fact has put more LGBTQ+ students at risk. Tompkins (2017) wrote "We live in a heteronormative world, and many students spend their days in classrooms that are extensions of the world outside them" and when students are forced to spend 6-8 hours of their day in an environment that is not accepting of them they may be forced to live in a closet within themselves. The lack of inclusion within a school and students living within a closet can lead to bullying, discrimination, mental health issues, and worst of all, suicide.

Why is it an issue?

School institutions, regardless of grade level, are meant to provide students a place where they feel safe, supported and accepted. However, throughout society, bullying has been significantly high, primarily in schools. According to Swearer and Hymel (2015), "bullying is a unique but complex form of interpersonal aggression, which takes many forms, serves different functions, and is manifested in different patterns of relations" (p. 344). Bullying no longer takes place face to face on school grounds but has now progressed into cyberbullying online through

the many forms of social media heavily available to children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2018) compared bullying amongst heterosexual students and LGBTQ students. The CDC found that nationwide LGBTQ students faced more bullying compared to their heterosexual peers. As shown in Table 1 on cyber bullying, 13.3% of heterosexual students have experienced harassment online compared to 27.1% of LGBT and 22% of questioning students (CDC, 2018). Table 2 shows the percentage of bullying on school property; 33% of LGBT and 24.3% of questioning students were bullied on school property compared to 17.1% of non-LGBTQ peers.

TABLE 1: Percentage of high school students who were electronically bullied, * by sexual identity — United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017

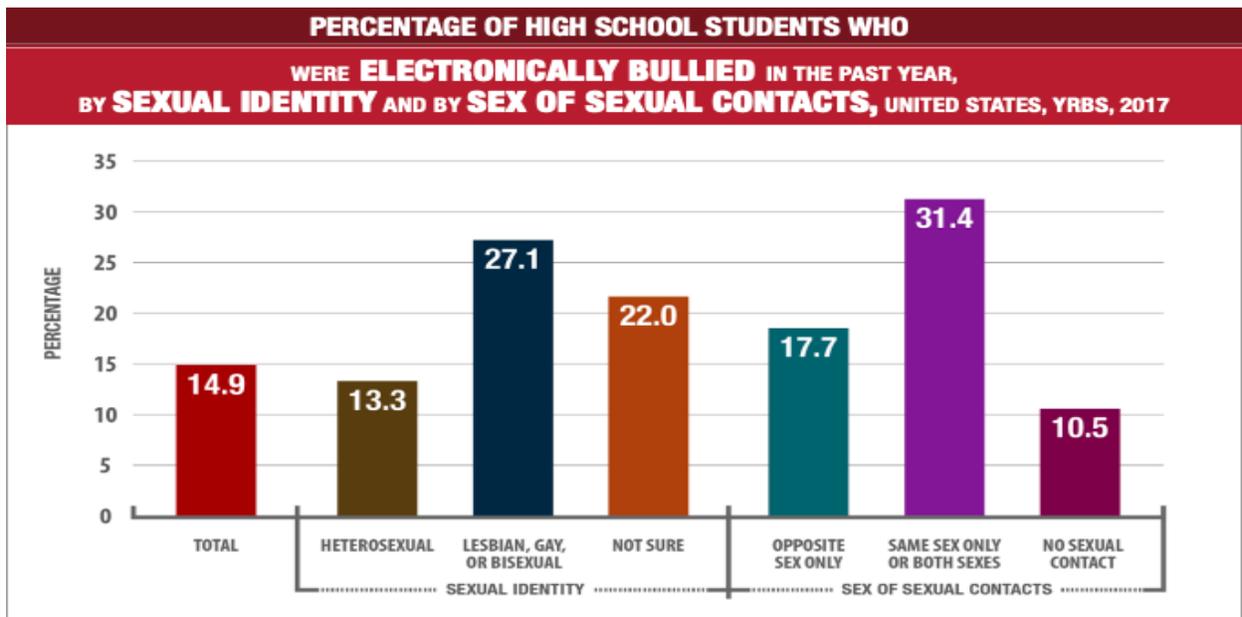
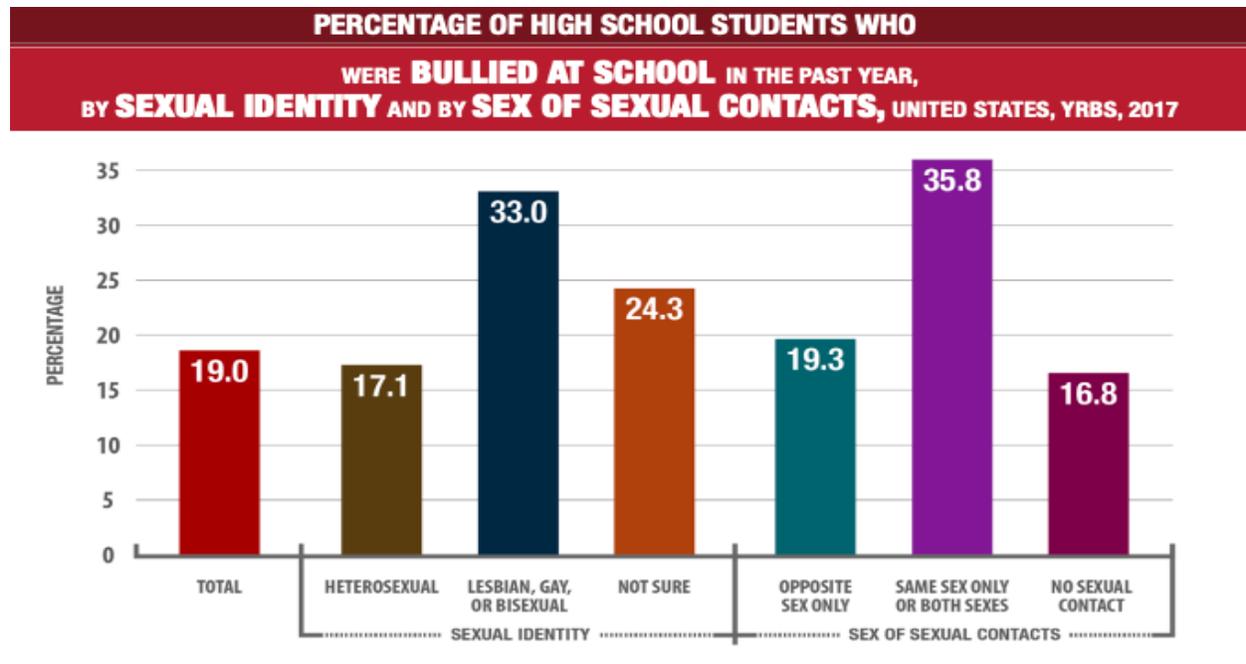


TABLE 2: Percentage of high school students who were bullied on school property, * by sexual identity— United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017



(Note: Reprinted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, retrieved from

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trendsreport.pdf>)

Bullying an individual part of the LGBTQ+ community is not just about being verbal or physical but includes derogatory slurs the LGBTQ+ students hear. Words and phrases such as, “that’s so gay”, “faggot” and “No Homo”, is still an active attack of violence on the community. These are not just words that are being said but are homophobic remarks that dehumanizes the LGBTQ+ community. The use of derogatory slurs reinforces the heteronormative society and says that being LGBTQ+ is undesirable and bad.

Being represented as undesirable and bad is nothing new for the LGBTQ+ community. For decades, this particular group has faced many forms of discrimination and hate. There has even been laws put in place to deliberately discriminate and negatively portray the LGBTQ+ community. As of January 2018, there are currently seven states that enforce “no promo homo” laws: Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Utah. According to GLSEN (2018), state laws and policies play a vital role in the way

an education system is run. Laws and policies play a role in the way schools are funded and governed all the way to the school environment and the experiences being provided for these students (GLSEN, 2018). “No Promo Homo” stands for “No Promotion of Homosexuality”. This law prohibits the mentioning of the LGBTQ+ community and IF there will be mentioning, it is to portray the LGBTQ+ community in a negative and unacceptable way to the public. It also mandates that schools should be teaching a heterosexual or abstinence-only sexual education class. Having a law such as “no promo homo” leaves these students who are questioning their identity or have already come to terms as being LGBTQ+ being unrepresented and isolated from their peers. This may force these students to go through an internal battle within themselves.

These internal battles, bullying, discrimination, hate and shame the LGBTQ+ community face are prone to more mental health conditions compared to their heterosexual peers. The Trevor’s Project, a non-profit organization who focuses on suicide prevention for LGBTQ+ youth, conducted an LGBTQ youth mental health survey in 2020 and found that 55% of LGBTQ youth were experiencing symptoms of major depressive disorder within the past two weeks of its study. In 2018, a study done by the *Human Rights Campaign* and the University of Connecticut found that 95% of LGBTQ+ youth have trouble sleeping at night due to the fear, anxiety and depression. The anxiety and depression these youth often times feel have led some to participate in self harm, attempted suicide or even died by suicide.

The LGBTQ+ youth are at a higher risk of self-harm, suicide and suicide ideation. Between the ages of 10-24, suicide is one of the leading causes of death. 38.2% of LGB and 27.9% of questioning students have made a suicide plan compared to 11.9% of their heterosexual peers (CDC, 2016). Between a 12-month period, 2.0% of heterosexual students have attempted suicide that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that was treated by a doctor or nurse.

Whereas 9.4% of LGB and 4.7% of questioning students had attempted suicide (CDC, 2016).

Table 4 represents the amount of attempted suicide between the LGBTQ youth and their heterosexual peers. Sadly enough, even with statistics showing the LGBTQ+ youth are at a higher risk of suicide, the school systems fail to provide resources for these students. They fail to provide an outlet for these students to tap into when they're feeling at their lowest. The education system is failing the LGBTQ+ community and it is time for that to change!

What should be done?

As mentioned earlier, schools, regardless of grade level, are meant to provide students a place where they feel safe, supportive and accepted. A way of doing this is by building a curriculum that represents and includes everyone, especially the LGBTQ+ youth. McGarry (2013), discusses how important an inclusive curriculum is and addresses the need to discuss LGBTQ+ topics not just within sex education classes. He writes, "If we believe that providing positive role models for students during this period of self-discovery is an important action that schools can take to support their students, then we also must believe that lesson plans throughout the curriculum should include positive representation of LGBT people" (p.27). Having an inclusive curriculum provides a "mirrors and windows" environment where students see themselves being represented by the curriculum along with raising awareness and supporting students' capacity to connect, empathize and support their LGBTQ+ peers. Further studies by the Gay, Lesbian, and straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that in an inclusive curriculum and school environment, the students found their experience to be less hostile and felt a greater connection to their school environment. The discussion about identity can be directly tied in with social emotional learning (SEL). This allows students to explore their own selves at any age level. A chance to explore the way they view their own identity and personal experiences to be

able decide what type of relationships they may want. Along with an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum it is important to establish groups, such as GSA clubs, and safe places within the school.

GSA stands for "Gender and Sexuality Alliances". It is a student-led club with support of teachers and faculty that is found typically in middle schools and high schools. The GSA club is intended to provide LGBTQ+ youth and their heterosexual allies a safe, affirmative and supportive space. The purpose of the GSA club throughout the school is not only to provide these students a safe place but to also bring awareness throughout the school. GSA clubs host and plan events on campus such as, "National Coming Out Day", "Day of Silence", "Solidarity Week" and "Pride Month". Students have reported that schools with a GSA club were less likely to feel unsafe and on average missed less days of school compared to peers where a GSA club was not provided (GLSEN, 2019). Providing a GSA club on campus for students is a start for creating that change on campus.

Not only does a change on campus happen with the students, it also requires the full support of teachers to step up and create "safe places" within their classrooms for all students to feel included and welcomed. A safe place can be any classroom with any teacher who is committing and acknowledging the importance of having a safe haven for all students but more importantly, LGBTQ+ students. This is a classroom that these students can walk into to escape derogatory slurs, bullying and discrimination. Assembly bill 2246 raises awareness of LGBTQ+ suicide and in section 1C it states, "the number one person whom a pupil would turn to for helping a friend who might be suicidal was a teacher" (2016). A teacher who has created a safe place within their classroom makes this possible to build trust within the students.

Building trust and respect within a classroom and school environment includes referring to individuals by their preferred name and pronouns. The heteronormative society we live only acknowledges two forms of gender, male and female. However, there are many who do not identify themselves on the male/female binary scale. Some may identify as “non-binary”, “gender fluid” and even prefer gender-expansive pronouns such as “they them, and theirs” in replacement of “he, him, his” (Martin & Choporis, 2020). Avoiding misgendering relays the message to the students that they matter, respected and their voice is heard.

As a school institution, you’re not just serving the students, but you are also serving their families. Family support is crucial to the well-being of the LGBTQ+ youth. 75% of LGBTQ+ youth who still live with their parents have come out to at least one parent (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). Schools should also provide support such as educational material, support groups, and online resources for parents and families to understand, help and get involved with their child’s life. Schools taking an active role in becoming an ally for the LGBTQ+ community begins to break down heteronormative expectations, humanizes LGBTQ+ individuals, and ensures equal access for all.

Conclusion

In the year 2020 you would assume that we have progressed enough to provide all students with a fair, inclusive and equally represented curriculum and an inclusive school environment, however, after extensive research and interviewing local community members, that does not seem to be the case. Not yet at least. It will take school institutions, LGBTQ+ individuals, allies, parents and our community to come together to combat the issues such as bullying, discrimination, hate, anti-LGBTQ laws and policies to provide every student a school

environment where they feel safe, supported and included. It is the responsibility of the schools to ensure that the LGBTQ+ youth they serve have the opportunity to thrive in an affirming space.

Method

For this Capstone Project, I investigated how school institutions can provide an LGBTQ+ Curriculum and School Environment. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, I formulated an action that responds to the focus issue in a way that represents, inspires, informs, and involves a particular audience.

Area A

My study took place in two areas throughout Monterey County along with receiving assistance from a CSUMB professor who specializes in professional development. The first place is located in South Monterey County. For the sake of anonymity, I will refer to the first place as “Area A”. Area A has a population of 17, 516 people. According to the 2018 census, area A is a dominantly Mexican population and culture with 91.8% of people are of Hispanic or Latino descent. The median household income in area A is \$53,275. Area A has a total of four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. The elementary schools and middle school are served by the same school district. I will be referring to the school as “Area A Unified School District (AAUSD)”. AAUSD is a K-8 district. AAUSD serves 3,550 students within the area. The ethnic background of AAUSD is primarily Mexican descent. Spanish is the number one language, aside from English, spoken within the district. Within the district, .1% of students speak Arabic, .6% speak Mixteco, 7.1% speak another language and 49.9% speak Spanish. Of the 3,550 students AAUSD serves, 2,086 students are identified as English Language Learners. Area A’s high school is part of a different town 10 miles south of area A. Area A’s high school is part of another town's district 10 miles south of area A. The high school will be called El Camino

High. El Camino High serves a total of 1,218 students throughout Area A. 97.7% of El Camino High's students are Hispanic or Latino.

Elm Middle School

The first school that I used for my research in area A is the only middle school part of AAUSD. For anonymity, I will refer to this school as Elm Middle School. Elm middle school is a 6th-8th grade school, serving a total of 1,091 students throughout area A. 97.9% of students enrolled are Hispanic or Latino. 91.4% of students come from a family with a socioeconomically disadvantaged upbringing. The campus of Elm middle school is built up of 27 permanent classrooms, 26 portable classrooms, six restroom facilities throughout campus, one locker room for boys and one for the girls. The second school used for my research in area A is El Camino High. El Camino High serves a total of 1,218 students throughout Area A. 97.7% of El Camino High's students are Hispanic or Latino. The school has 20 permanent classrooms and 18 portable classrooms. The main campus was built in 1999 and until this year, 2020, has gone through construction to renovate the whole front main area.

Participants

I interviewed two participants that are from area A and work at Elm Middle School. The first participant interviewed is named M.G. M.G is a 7th grade history teacher who also serves as the GSA's club sponsor. The second participant interviewed is named A.T. A.T is a school counselor at Elm Middle School. She also works hand in hand with M.G to support the LGBTQ+ and allied youth who participate in the GSA club. Each participant was interviewed and asked specific questions related to their duties on campus along with 5 core questions specifically to my research topic.

Core Interview Questions

1. What do you see as the problem with an LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum; or are there any concerns when it comes to implementing an LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum?
2. What is currently being done to improve LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum - by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
3. What do you think should be done about implementing an LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum?
4. What do you think are the obstacles when implementing an LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum?

M.G Interview Questions

1. What exactly is a GSA club and what role does this club play within the school?
2. How has having this sort of club impacted students who participate in the club and the overall school environment?
3. How can teachers and school officials help support GSAs?
4. How can the GSA club and the school work together to prevent bullying?

A.T Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your position and the services you offer?
2. How do you think not having a supportive LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum affects children/youth's mental health?
3. What advice or support can you offer schools who are trying to implement an inclusive school environment?

Area B

The second place where my study took place is in one of the most populous cities in Monterey County. For anonymity, I will call this city area B. Area B has a population of 155,465 people. 78.7% of area B's population is Hispanic or Latino. Area B's median household income is \$58,598. Throughout area B, I interviewed two participants from area B. The first participant is an LGBTQ+ service coordinator at a local community resource center. The second participant is a Psychiatric Social Worker who works for Monterey County.

The Maple Center

The community resource center that I used for my research project serves youth ages 16-24 years of age. Throughout my assignment I will refer to the community resource as The Maple Center. The Maple center is located in area B on the south side of the city. What makes the Maple center unique is the building it is in. It looks like a regular vintage house with a bay window and a porch on its exterior view. If the signage was not out front on its lawn, you would assume it was a normal house. This makes the Maple center feel cozy and more inviting for the youth. The main goal of the Maple center is to empower at risk youth by providing them with different resources such as housing, education, employment, LGBTQ+ services and more.

Participants

The first person interviewed from area A is an LGBTQ+ service coordinator at The Maple Center. His name will be J.A. J.A has been doing LGBTQ+ community work in the Monterey Bay area both as a volunteer and as a professional for 20 years. The second participant interviewed is named M.B. M.B is a Psychiatric Social Worker with Monterey County for the past two years. Both J.A and M.B have a strong connection to my topic as they both not only work directly with LGBTQ+ individuals, but they are also part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Each participant was interviewed and asked specific questions related to their job description along with 5 core questions specifically to my research topic.

J.A Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about what “The Maple Center” is and what type of resources do you offer for the LGBTQ+ youth?
2. In what ways can schools’ partner with “The Maple Center” to bring awareness, support and inclusion?

M.B Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your position and the services you offer?
2. How do you think not having a supportive LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum affects children/youth’s mental health?
3. What advice or support can you offer schools who are trying to implement an inclusive school environment?

The final participant used in my capstone research is a CSUMB professor who also partners with Santa Cruz County to provide professional development specifically on LGBTQ+ curriculum. This final participant is named R.D. R.D. partners with an organization that offers training to school districts on LGBTQ+ topics and ways of teaching. R.D was interviewed and asked specific questions related to his job description along with 5 core questions specifically to my research topic.

R.D. Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your position and what type of training do you partner with?

2. How do you think not having a supportive LGBTQ+ inclusive school environment and curriculum affects children/youth?
3. What advice or support can you offer schools who are trying to implement an inclusive school environment?

Researcher

I am a 27-year-old female who is bisexual. This topic is important to me because at a young age of 13-years-old I began questioning my sexual identity. I found myself attracted to my best friend who was the same sex as I was but was unable to put a name to what I was feeling. I grew up in area A and grew up in a Mexican culture with parents who believed that a relationship should be between a man and a woman. I knew my family would never understand and I had no place where I felt accepted and free to be myself. An initial assumption that I had to filter out when collecting data was thinking that everyone would realize the importance of this topic. However, through collecting interview data and extensive research, I found this topic to be a sensitive issue for some school institutions and school officials to accept and would prefer to ignore the issue out of fear of community opinions.

Procedure

In my research there were a total of five participants. The participants being interviewed have chosen whether or not they would like to participate in this research project. After each participant consented, they were scheduled a specific date and time to conduct an Interview. Due to the global pandemic, COVID-19, face-to-face interviews took place through a virtual zoom meeting. At the time of the interview, should they choose to participate, they will still have a choice not to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with. At any point of the interview, they may choose to end the interview and choose not to participate at any point. Interviews were

all recorded with participant consent. A semi-structured interview format will be used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews took approximately 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

Data Analysis

The data was coded and analyzed based on each participant's response to their interview questions for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, I interviewed 2 teachers, 1 middle school counselor, 1 psychiatric social worker, and 1 LGBTQ+ service coordinator from a community resource to determine how to create an LGBTQ+ Inclusive curriculum and school environment. Having an LGBTQ+ Inclusive curriculum and school environment is important to provide the students who are part of this community a safe place where they are represented and feel accepted. The lack of representation for LGBTQ+ topics in school makes an environment where students do not feel supported and often times feel as though they must live a closeted life. For this reason it is essential to provide a curriculum and environment where LGBTQ+ students both see themselves represented and increase understanding and acceptance from peers. Based on an analysis of the interviews with each participant and the research literature, three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time required, reach, and effectiveness. Teachers are constantly working against time constraints when creating lessons, teaching students, and the rest that comes with being a teacher. As a result, it is extremely important to take into consideration how effective the action options are. Reach is an important aspect to consider when determining how possible the action is. Lastly, effectiveness is the main component to consider as it determines how

successful the action option is not only for the students but also the school environment. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

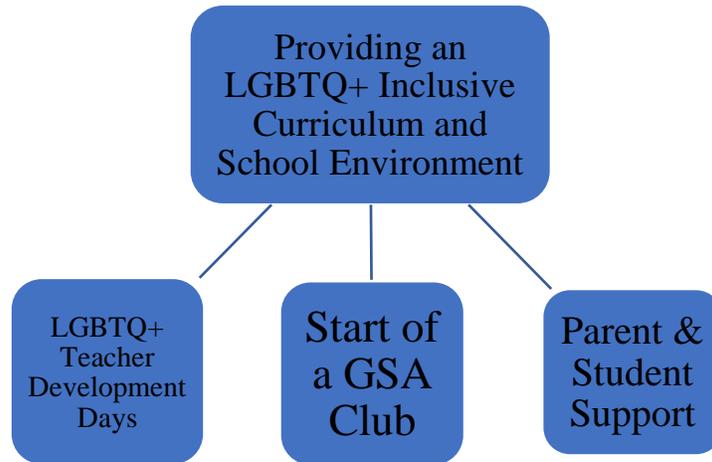


Image 1. Themes which emerged from the data and literature.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Time Required	Reach	Effectiveness
LGBTQ+ Teacher Development Days: 2 times a year	High	Medium	Medium
GSA Clubs: providing a place for LGBTQ+ students and alleys to gain support and share experiences	High	High	High
Parent and Students Support: create a safe place for LGBTQ+ students and parents to receive assistance and counseling	High	Low	Low

LGBTQ+ Teacher Development Days

Throughout the interviews, time was a recurring issue that was expressed from teachers.

LGBTQ+ topics within the curriculum are brief and superficial , therefore, in order for a teacher

to create a lesson plan, most of the research and planning is happening on their own time.

Although this theme emerged repeatedly across the interviews, a complication was duly noted.

One teacher explained, who also runs the GSA club at their middle school, the lack of LGBTQ+ topics within the curriculum makes teachers steer away from expanding on lessons, and asking teachers to take an additional two to three hours out of their already packed lives to do research and develop a lesson about a topic that they may be widely unfamiliar and or uncomfortable with is almost impossible (M.G, personal communication, October 2, 2020). Teachers are always working against time whether it is in or out the classroom.

As a result, after examining both the literature and interview data, the action option of implementing LGBTQ+ teacher development days throughout the school year presented itself. Teachers are already accustomed to having training on other various topics, so including training specifically on LGBTQ+ issues and ways of teaching can be beneficial and combat the battle against time. Training will not only broaden the teacher's knowledge about ways to teach an LGBTQ+ curriculum, but it will also bring awareness, understanding and acceptance to those who may not understand. Implementing systematic teacher training throughout the school year via "Teacher Development (TD) Days ", will allow teachers to use school time to further their educational development on LGBTQ+ curriculum. Study Participant, R.D, partners with his county to provide education workshops, staff/student support, and an LGBTQ+ task force known as "Safe School Project" to school districts. Throughout these training sessions, he has developed an 8th grade and 11th grade history curriculum, lessons and backgrounds that highlights major LGBTQ+ events in history. This can be obtained through the implementation of teacher development days. Providing teacher development days will alleviate the amount of time teachers are having to sacrifice to do their own research. As for reach and effectiveness,

providing teacher development days will equip the teachers with the materials needed to provide a fully inclusive classroom.

GSA Clubs

The need to empower LGBTQ+ students and provide a sense of belonging through a GSA club was another theme that emerged throughout the research process. GSA clubs are student-run organizations that's main goal is to unite LGBTQ+ and allied youth. A counselor at a middle school noted the positive impact having a GSA club at their school had on the mental health of the students. Now these students are confiding with each other and the club as opposed to seeking mental health services solely from her (A.T, personal communication, October 2, 2020). GSA clubs are now expanding outside of the club and into the school campus through bringing awareness to the LGBTQ+ community. GSA clubs allow for students to step up as leaders and bring social change to the school environment. However, when implementing a GSA club on campus, a participant brought forth a complication. Administrators have denied the start of a GSA club due to the fear of backlash from the community and parents. Especially the parents and community that are built up of a strong traditional and religious background.

As a result, implementing a GSA club breaks the cycle, breaks the norms and traditional ways of teaching. Creating a GSA club on campus not only requires time from a teacher or faculty member, but also the students. A GSA club requires a teacher or faculty to serve as an advisor. GSA clubs also come with establishing safe places in other teachers' classrooms. The GSA club and safe places on campus serve as outlets for the students to be who they are (M.G, personal communication, October 2, 2020). The effectiveness of having a GSA on campus provides a place for students to express all the different things on their mind with peers who may

be going through the same things and peers who are just there to support. The reach of having a GSA club on campus can be highly doable with the help of a teacher or faculty.

Parent and Student Support

The final theme that emerged during the research process was the connection between the parents and students. Almost all participants touched on the importance of family support, especially for LGBTQ+ students. The support of an adolescent coming out to their family ultimately results in the students' feeling of being out and free, "up to 75% of sexual minority adolescents who live at home have disclosed their identity to at least one parent" (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012, p. 112). Being able to live free whether it is at home, at school, or out in the community offers hope and acceptance for the students. However, through research it has oftentimes been the opposite of supportive. A family's initial response may be anger, denial, guilt, fear, shame and even violence. One participant expressed these reactions from the families and parents have caused youth to come into their office with suicide ideation and unfortunately have been admitted into the hospital for a medical hold out fear of them taking their own life (M.B, personal communication, November 3, 2020). During the process of a child coming out to their parents, it is possible that: "parents struggle to come to terms with their own internalized homophobia and managing the cognitive dissonance created by having a sexual minority child" (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012, p. 113). This may cause parents to become isolated from their peers and other family members thinking that no one will understand what they are going through.

This is when the third theme emerges by offering the support to the parents' and family members of LGBTQ+ students. This would create a place where LGBTQ+ students feel safe to have these conversations with their loved ones and a chance for families to learn about what their child is experiencing and find ways to cope with the news they are receiving. It is

important to provide a place where families are with others like them going through this new process and path to ultimately acceptance of their child. Therefore, it is important for school institutions to have knowledge and tools to help support not only the LGBTQ+ students, but also their families. Providing support for LGBTQ+ students and their families would require a tremendous amount of time and effort from school counselors and other professionals. The amount of time put in to provide these services would not benefit because of how little reach schools would have to the parents. Resulting in the effectiveness of these services being unsuccessful.

Recommendation

Of all three action options given above, I recommend providing Teacher Development days along with opening a GSA club on every school campus. Based on the literature and the data collected in the interview process, I am confident that these two options are the best way to support and represent the LGBTQ+ students. This section will discuss the concessions, limitations, and possible negative outcomes that these action options may entail.

Concessions. While I chose teacher development days and GSA clubs as the best options, parent and student support have considerable strengths for schools to consider in the future. For example, the literature points out that family support leads youth to a greater perception of self, greater social support and overall general physical and mental health (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). Parent and student support is extremely beneficial in supporting the student's development, while providing support for the families. Undoubtedly, these action options have noteworthy strengths when providing the LGBTQ+ a safe school environment.

Limitations. While choosing teacher development days and GSA clubs as my recommended options, there are still limitations to note about each of these. For example, time

will always be something working against teachers. Although teachers will be participating in TD days during school time, it still requires time for teachers to continue research on their own. When implementing a GSA club on campus, a limitation to consider would be not having enough students to participate and be willing to sign up out of fear of coming out.

Potential negative outcomes. Despite my recommendations being the best choices to implement, there are potential negative outcomes to consider. One negative outcome to consider would be teachers own biases and homophobia against the LGBTQ+ community. These teachers may be unwilling and uncomfortable participating in such training or to conduct lessons on LGBTQ+ topics. The implementation of a GSA club on campus, brings forth the consideration of the safety for the students. Although GSA clubs have been known to reduce bullying, it does “out” students and place them in a vulnerable position of being targeted for being part of the LGBTQ+ community. These potential negative outcomes ultimately may result in the opposite of what is intended to happen and may push LGBTQ+ students deeper into a scared and lonely hole within themselves.

Conclusion

Despite all limitations or potential negative outcomes, my recommendation for teacher development days and GSA clubs still stand strong on how to implement an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum and school environment. The reach and effectiveness of teacher development days are both medium, whereas, GSA clubs are high, however, I find that TD days and GSA clubs go hand and hand when discussing the support, representation and acceptance of LGBTQ+ students. If these two options existed when I was in school and began struggling with my sexual identity, I believe I would have sought support and came out at a much younger age than I did. School institutions and teachers make a promise to serve all types of students and provide an inclusive

environment for them to feel safe and learn in. These action options will force school institutions and teachers to remember their purpose of who they are serving and will serve teachers a reminder of why they became teachers in the first place.

Action Documentation

Full inclusion is the realization that “one-size-fits-all” does not work for a school institution. Full inclusion means providing access to all students and promoting the best possible outcomes for all students. However, the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning+ (LGBTQ+) perspectives and curriculum in public education has showed little to no improvement. After researching literature and conducting interviews with multiple teachers, counselors, and community partners; three action options emerged on how to implement an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum and school environment. The first action option is an LGBTQ+ Teacher Development Days 2 times a year. The second action option is implementing a GSA club at every school. Thirdly, schools providing parent and student support was the final action option. From the research and interviews, LGBTQ+ teacher development days and implementing GSA clubs on campus were the two recommended courses of action. These two action options really go hand-in-hand when discussing *full inclusion*. It provides LGBTQ+ students to feel supported and represented not just on campus but within the classroom and curriculum. Moving forward with these recommendations, I will be sending a letter along with a copy of my capstone paper to the superintendent, principal and teachers interviewed. The letter will explain that after analyzing the literature and conducting interviews, the two action options that emerged would be the best way to support LGBTQ+ students. Additionally, the letter will provide contact information to community partners that can support with providing Teacher Development Days and ways to implement GSA clubs on campus. The intent of the

letter is to offer support and recommendations on ways to provide full inclusion on their campus.

To the Superintendent, Principal and Teachers:

I would first like to thank you all for allowing me to conduct my research at your campus and for taking the time out of your already hectic schedules to assist me in gathering information. I benefited greatly from speaking to the teachers and counselors who participated in this study. This data focused on how to provide an Inclusive LGBTQ+ Curriculum and School Environment. After carefully examining the literature and interview data, I would like to share ways in which I believe would be helpful to ensure your campus is providing an Inclusive LGBTQ+ Curriculum and School Environment. The purpose of this letter is to share my capstone paper and resources with you and your faculty in hopes that you find it helpful to implement an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum and school environment.

Throughout my interviews, every teacher expressed the difficulties of not having enough knowledge or information to conduct a full lesson on LGBTQ+ topics and issues. Another issue mentioned by teacher's is how time is a factor to consider. Due to the lack of information, teachers are having to do a lot of the research on their own if they wanted to conduct an LGBTQ+ lesson. This is where the literature provided the first emergent theme of implementing Teacher Developmental (TD) Days at least 2x a year that solely relate to LGBTQ+ topics. Implementing TD days establish a time, during the school day, where teachers can be trained on how to include LGBTQ+ topics within a lesson. Another highly expressed solution from teachers and other community partners on how to implement an inclusive school environment is by having a GSA club on every campus. A GSA club is a place where LGBTQ+ students and allies can unite and build a community and sense of belonging. The literature correlated that to provide a positive environment, a GSA club should be implemented on every campus.

In closing, I would like to thank you all for taking the time to be part of my research and for reading my capstone paper. I hope that after reading my paper you would take into consideration the outcomes that emerged and ensure you are providing an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum and school environment. I have also provided the names and contact information for two community partners within the area that can help assist with developing TD days and insight on how to establish a GSA club.

Sincerely,

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Critical Reflection

Beginning the semester, I was a bit overwhelmed and nervous entering my LS 400: *Senior Capstone* course, yet alone a virtual capstone course. Previous courses had prepared me for LS 400 by getting me to think of an Education action that is meaningful to me to write about. An LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum and school environment has always been something dear to me as it directly impacts me being a future teacher who is part of the LGBTQ+ community. Due to COVID-19, this course was fully virtual. It took a lot of creativity and work figuring out how to still conduct research and interviews while being virtual. Time was an issue that I battled against when scheduling Zoom interviews for each participant. Majority of my interviewees are teachers who are also adapting and adjusting to distant learning, so them taking time out of their already stressful and busy day to interview with me was extremely appreciated.

Another aspect that I was nervous for was the topic of my research paper. I knew my topic is a controversial subject that I felt that some people within the education system would not feel comfortable to partake in interviews. However, to my surprise, I was able to find interviewee's and community partnerships who are already in the frontline fighting, promoting and working towards a fully inclusive curriculum and school environment within my own community. Through the support of my capstone professor and my interviewee's I was able to conduct the research needed to write this paper.

Throughout the process of this paper I realized the importance of staying true to myself. Through one interview that was conducted, teaching in a heteronormative institution was discussed and this where an "Ah-ha" moment happen. The fact that I directly relate to this topic and understand what LGBTQ+ students experience being part of the same heteronormative institution. Being able to have conversations with peers, principals, and superintendents about

my identity and remaining true and honest from the start was an important take away. Wanting to provide an inclusive environment is not only for the students but for the teachers and workers as well.

Synthesis and Integration

My time as an undergraduate student at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) has been one of the most challenging, overwhelming, yet eye opening experience. My time as an undergraduate student has shaped me and molded me into the future teacher that I want to become for my future students. The required Liberal Studies (LS) MLOs, the required coursework, and this Action Research Project impacted and equipped me in my professional development. Beginning with MLO 1: Developing Educator, has prepared me with the confidence to think, write and speak critically regarding my research project and as a California public educator. The project allowed me to speak and build relationships with other professionals within the education system and form connections with community partners centered around a common goal. Secondly, MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar, allowed me to dive into the importance of diversity and inclusion within the education system. Through the sharing of different experiences of each participant within this project, action options emerged on how to provide an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum and school environment. Lastly, MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist, allowed me to recognize my ability of being able to complete a coherent depth of study that requires examining literature and conducting extensive interviews. In order to become the professional that I envision to be, I believe that I need to continue researching my passions and recognizing how they impact the classroom and my future students. I also need to remain true to myself and carry the confidence as a professional within the education field. As a future educator, I have the power to make an impact on the lives of the students that set foot

within my classroom. It is my responsibility to provide a safe, nurturing and inclusive classroom for all. A classroom where the students feel empowered, represented and most importantly a sense of belonging.

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