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School-Wide Policies to Support ELL Students with LGBTQIA+ Identities

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by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Gender and sexual identity are topics that are still highly controversial in many segments of society in the United States. Although the LGBTQIA+ community has made strides in equality and representation over the last couple of decades, individuals from these communities face discrimination in many facets of American life. Educational institutions are intended to be environments where all students feel supported and academically accomplished. However, it is often the case that students who deviate from heterosexual and cisgender norms find themselves in positions of marginalization, and rarely see their own identities reflected in the curricula they are tasked to learn. I have observed this dynamic in my two years as a multilingual teacher. Gender and sexual identity have a direct impact on the way that LGBTQIA+ youth feel about themselves in a school environment. LGBTQIA+ students are three times as likely to report their mental health status as being "always not good" compared to their cisgender and heterosexual peers (Massachusetts Commission, 2023). This leads to higher rates of dropping out, self-harm, and suicide attempts.

The urgency to provide support for LGBTQIA+ students is why my capstone project explores the question of *What school-wide policies can be implemented to support ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities?* The project consists of a website that has resources and training materials broken into different topics:

1) LGBTQIA+ youth statistics to demonstrate the need for this project to key stakeholders.

2) Professional development resources for teachers and staff that primarily work

with ELL students that may have a LGBTQIA+ identity.

3) Inclusive curriculum and classroom pedagogy that align with professional standards that support multilingual students with diverse genders and sexual identities.

4) Resources for ELL students with LGBTQIA+ backgrounds to support them in navigating challenging situations at school.

5) Administrative strategies that implement school policies that benefit and support ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities to benefit their well-being and ensure their safety.

For context, each topic stems from my personal and educational background where I have observed various areas of need among ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities. The discussion of these topics will be expanded within Chapter 3.

Rationale

Both of my parents immigrated from Haiti to the U.S. in the 1980s. I was born in Massachusetts; however, I grew up being inundated with the homophobia that is prevalent in Haitian culture. This caused a barrier for me to discover my identity outside of the expected norms of performative masculinity. My feelings of being restricted by a hypermasculine upbringing were compounded by the lack of queer representation in American culture. Throughout my childhood, I always contended with this feeling that being a boy was not something I fully aligned with internally. My outward appearance dictated how I was regarded in society and also how I viewed myself within the prism of idealized masculinity. Not being able to reach those standards affected how I quantified my value as a person.

Growing up in Cambridge, Massachusetts I was exposed to a multitude of diversity. Like myself, many of my classmates came from ethnic backgrounds and wide-ranging faiths. My high school had a gay-straight alliance, and a few teachers and administrators were openly queer. Despite the representation, there still existed a culture of homophobia among my peers who were also first-generation from immigrant backgrounds. When I was 34 years old, I came out as transfeminine and pansexual to my family and friends. It was a time when I finally allowed my authentic self to shine through, and that the world was ready to meet me. My coming out led to difficult conversations with my family members but ultimately they were able to accept me for who I am. Right now, I have a foundational understanding of myself that has made it easier for me to participate in the world with a sense of confidence and empathy.

I have been an English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) educator since 2013. My first teaching experience was at an international school in a school in the northeast for students on F1 Visas. In my career, I have taught adult immigrants, senior citizens, and young people from various nationalities and ethnicities. The bulk of my career has been spent at non-profit organizations with a student population that is new to the country and relies on an emphasis on survival English skills. I have been in my current role as a multilingual teacher since 2022 with first and second-generation high school students. In my career, I have noticed the lack of awareness of LGBTQIA+ presence in the curriculum and social aspects of the programs.

An ongoing theme throughout my years of teaching is that when topics surrounding the LGBTQIA+ community have been brought up in classes, they have been met with tentativeness, confusion, and derision to engage in discourse. Adding to the

difficulties were that the curriculums mainly focused on heterosexual and cis-gendered daily life, making those identities the default. I began to feel like the lack of material that focused on non-traditional identities and lifestyles was a disservice to my students. This led me to consider the students that I had who were openly queer or in the process of figuring out their identity. They deserved to see themselves reflected positively and objectively in their learning experiences.

Inspirations

Some key figures and events over the past decade have informed my motivation to create this project. I was 12 years old when a gay student named Matthew Shepard was killed in Laramie, Wyoming in 1998. It was a national story that highlighted the danger and brutality that LGBTQIA+ individuals face by who they are (*The Guardian*, 2014). It was a pivotal case that focused a spotlight on LGBTQIA+ policies on a state and federal level, as well as inspiring legislation against hate crimes. Even though at the time I did not have a clear understanding of my own identity, I felt a kinship with Shepard. The case terrified and disturbed me, but also helped galvanize my sense of justice and recognition of other's rights to live freely.

Some other events that impacted me greatly were learning about the uprising that occurred in the Stonewall Inn in 1969, the adaptation of the 14th Amendment allowing same-sex marriage legalization in 2015, and the Pulse Nightclub shootings in 2016. The LGBTQIA+ community has always had a role in American history. Education in America should reflect the contributions and struggles of individuals who have consistently been stripped of their rights. I did not grow up in an environment that fostered pride in my queer identity, and I believe everyone should have the opportunity to

be recognized and celebrated for who they are.

Content and Background Information

I am currently a multilingual teacher at an alternative high school in the Northeast of the U.S.The school offers credit recovery courses and employs the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports model (PBIS) and a curriculum that is standards-aligned, rigorous, and affirms student identity. A majority of the students are from Caribbean and Central American communities and primarily speak Spanish as their first language. These are also cultures that are deeply rooted in patriarchal attitudes and beliefs. Currently, there are no resources or supports available to ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities in the school. Teachers and support staff are also not formally trained on how to approach LGBTQIA+ themes.

Research has shown that bullying leads to negative physical and mental health outcomes for LGBTQIA+ youth. Riesner et al. (2020) suggested that schools benefit from taking a holistic approach to preventing gender and sexual identity bullying and harassment, including complete school buy-in of the mission, staff training, and providing resources and support groups to students. Both LGBTQIA+ and heteronormative individuals need to recognize, understand, celebrate, and support the vast diversity that is in our society.

My proposal for a capstone project is the construction of a website as a resource for school staff, administration, and students to engage more with LGBTQIA+ issues and themes. My reasoning for choosing to create a website as a format for my project is its ability to be frequently updated with information. It also can serve multiple target audiences, while being easily accessible in private for confidentiality. Sections of the

website will include LGBTQIA+ statistics, resources for teachers and staff, inclusive curriculum and classroom pedagogy, interactive resources for students, and administrative strategies for supporting LGBTQIA+ members of a diverse, international school community. My own experience living in the dual culture of American and Haitian has informed my approach to what I deem pertinent content and resources for young people who have had similar life trajectories.

The goal of this project is to address the complex intersection of ELL students' cultural values and the personal identities of LGBTQIA+ teenagers from immigrant backgrounds with a website that is well-informed, user responsive, and developed to provide professional and student resources that evolve along with a constantly changing society. Specifically, since ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities often encounter challenges within the U.S. educational system. It will therefore be important to include the multicultural aspects that are layered within LGBTQIA+ identity dynamics as the focus for the website.

The following chapters will detail my capstone project, not only the presentation but also ways it can be utilized. Chapter 2 is a literature review of the foundation of the website, including causes of stigma-based bullying and its impact on mental and physical health, responsive curriculum and pedagogy, and the role of family and community in the lives of LGBTQIA+ students. Chapter 3 describes how the project will be designed and implemented, research that supports the model of the project, a timeline for implementation, and an assessment of data collection to indicate the project's effectiveness.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Since the beginning of the 2020s, rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) youth in education have been a hyper-focused topic in the United States. There are 1,994,000 youth aged 13-17 who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Conron, 2020) Some states have implemented policies that have shaped how LGBTQIA+ themes are approached in classrooms. For example, in 2022, Florida passed the Parental Rights in Education bill, also known as the "Don't Say Gay" law that prohibits discussions of gender and sexual diversity within Florida classrooms. It also bans school teachers and personnel from disclosing their own sexual and gender identities. Supporters of the "Don't Say Gay" bill believe that the teaching of LGBTQIA+ themes and issues in classrooms encroaches on parental rights and is a form of indoctrination.

The Parental Rights in Education Bill has been highly criticized by members and allies of the LBGTQIA+ community as being oppressive and leading to more challenges for a group that already experiences marginalization to a high degree. Parents, families, schools, and institutions strongly impact creating safe and inclusive environments for all learners. Focusing on the role that teachers, administrators, and peers can take in establishing equity and mutual respect, I pose the research question: *What school-wide policies can be implemented to support ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities?*

This literature review will explore the factors of harassment and bullying based on gender and sexual characteristics, adaptations to curriculums and pedagogy to be LGBTQIA+ inclusive and accessible, mental and physical health outcomes for

LGBTQIA+ youth-targeted and school, and ways that schools, communities, and families can provide holistic and comprehensive support.

Stigma-Based Bullying

A persistent challenge that students who are gender and sexual minorities face is bullying and harassment based on their identities. Reisner et. al (2020) suggested strategies to prevent negative physical and mental health outcomes from LGBTQIA+ bullying and harassment in schools. The results showed that a majority of participants felt like they needed the leadership of their school to establish a protocol on how to approach LGBTQIA+ bullying and harassment in the classroom. The study concluded that there are three different areas to address regarding LGBTQIA+ bullying and harassment: Knowledge of LGBTQIA+ topics, intervention skills training for School Health Professionals (SHPs), and personal biases and attitudes of staff members. SHPs need training on how to support LGBTQIA+ students of color with their unique intersectional challenges. Schools benefit from taking a holistic approach to preventing gender and sexual identity-based bullying and harassment, including complete school investment in the mission, comprehensive staff training, and providing resources and support groups to students.

Beyond bullying and harassment, negative treatment of non-heterosexual students creates a critical impact. According to a study conducted by Zimlich (2019), the risk of suicide that LGBTQIA+ teens face is 3.5 times higher compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. The study explored the factors of LGBTQIA+ identity for teens that contribute to a higher suicide rate. It also recommended policy changes in schools to be implemented to lower the suicide rate of sexual and gender minority teens. Accounts

from about 2 million heterosexual and 113,000 sexual minority youths ages 12-20 from 10 different countries were analyzed for life-threatening behaviors. Furthermore, Zimlich (2019) indicated that because of internal conflicts, a lack of general acceptance, and mental health challenges, LGBTQIA+ teens are more susceptible to suicide attempts and ideation. Publication of the data has the potential to lead to awareness of the necessity of prevention programs in schools. Establishing support within school systems and communities for gender and sexual minority teens is key to addressing the alarming suicide rate.

Teachers play a key role in the academic experiences of their LGBTQIA+ students. Elipe et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study on how educators approach LGBTQIA+ themes and issues in the classroom. The main question that the study addressed is whether a reported decrease in homophobic attitudes among staff and students in European Union schools leads to fewer instances of LGBTQIA+ bullying and harassment. The authors of the study conceded that the identities, personal biases, and self-awareness of the educators may have affected data collection. Teacher training in LGBTQIA+ issues and themes is an essential part of eliminating gender and sexual identity-based bullying and harassment in schools.

Political shifts have also contributed to the minority stress of LGBTQIA+ individuals. A longitudinal qualitative study of how the lives of LGBTQIA+ Americans were affected by the Trump-Pence administration from 2017-2020 (Haas & Lannutti, 2024). The study sought to answer if LGBTQIA+ Americans were negatively affected by the policies of the Trump administration. A total of 172 LGBTQIA+ individuals were surveyed about their level of minority stress when Trump was in office. Participants

reported increased incidents of harassment and violence, as well as symptoms of depression and anxiety during Trump's presidency. A common source of concern for participants was how policies implemented by the administration would negatively affect their lives. Based on the conclusion of the study, LGBTQIA+ Americans did experience an increase in discrimination and elevated stress during the Trump presidency. Students and staff may experience anxiety from the unknowns of how a future presidential administration will affect the lives of LGBTQIA+ citizens, which makes establishing a supportive community and understanding individual rights crucial.

The bullying and harassment of LGBTQIA+ students is a severe form of homophobia, making them targets of threats and violence (Lyonga, 2019). For LGBTQIA+ students with ELL backgrounds, this trauma is compounded by the rise of ethnic bullying (Wu, 2023). Such negative conduct creates an unsafe and dysfunctional environment for all learners, making it essential for stakeholders, including teachers, administrative staff, and parents, to take an active role in protecting LGBTQIA+ students from identity-based violence.

Inclusive Curriculum & Classroom Pedagogy

Often in secondary school curriculums, heterosexuality is prominently featured and therefore seen as the default or 'normal' orientation. When LGBTQIA+ students are exposed to themes, figures, and stories that reflect their own identities, they are more likely to gain a stronger understanding of themselves (Millett, 2019). This section explores how adaptations to content material can be applied to curriculums, as well as establishing classroom norms that support diversity and inclusion.

Huss and Fiehn (2017) explored how to implement LGBTQ+ inclusive resources into the collections of an elementary school library. The criteria for what denotes a responsive text involves the gender and sexual identity of the protagonists, illustrations that represent diversity, and unbiased depictions of LGBTQIA+ everyday life. The study also outlines the ways that educators can play a role in developing LGBTQIA+ recognition and inclusion in schools. Another consideration when adding LGBTQIIA+ material to library collections is the privacy of the students who borrow the materials. To promote privacy, the authors suggested establishing self-checkout and self-service within the library, as well as making the materials easily accessible. By having choices on how to access library materials, students become more autonomous and independent of their learning environment.

When implementing LGBTQIA+ literature into a school's curriculum, considerations must be made on whether the themes of the literature align with the needs of students. Sanders and Mathis (2013) developed an inquiry into LGBTQIA+ literature that included in-depth and realistic characters reflecting the queer experience. The selections were highlighted based on their inclusion of queer acceptance, establishment of normalcy, and approach to stereotypes. The article concluded that school curriculums benefit from texts that feature LGBTQIA+ relationships and characters tied to the central theme. It also recommended training for teachers on how to approach these themes for the edification of both queer and cisnormative students.

A barrier that many educators experience approaching LGBTQIA+ themes in the classroom is that they feel ill-equipped to address such topics. Often time constraints and comfort level are cited as reasons why teachers are hesitant to approach LGBTQIA+

themes in the classroom (Cumper et al.,2024). A questionnaire study looked into the positive and negative attitudes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Greece towards discussing gay and lesbian topics in class (Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015). Data analysis shows that the average skews towards positive attitudes regarding teaching material related to gay and lesbian themes in the classroom. Conversely, the teachers reported that they felt they lacked the knowledge and skills to address instances of homophobia among their students. The study emphasized that a teacher does not have to be an expert on LGBTQIA+ topics and themes to address them in the classroom. The research recommended that teachers be trained on how to incorporate the teaching of gender and sexual identity into their practice.

Special education teachers lack the proper training to support LGBTQIA+ students with physical and emotional disabilities (Pohl et al., 2017). There is an added layer of complication for students who have disabilities when they are also LGBTQIA+. School interventions often do not address or consider how the student's gender and sexual identity factor into their challenges in learning. A recommendation from the researchers is that special education teachers reflect on the ways that they could develop the pedagogy in supporting their LGBTQIA+ students with disabilities (Pohl et al., 2017). Another recommendation is teacher education programs that include lectures, enacting situational role-plays, and extensive journaling about experiences. Despite the obstacles of educators feeling like they are unprepared, research has shown that a sense of school connectedness is lower for LGBTQIA+ students (Wilkins et al., 2021). Therefore, early intervention from teachers and staff leads to a reduction in the student's risk-taking behavior.

Gender and sexual minority groups often struggle to see representations of themselves in professions relating to STEM fields. A study by Cooper and Brownell (2016) delved into how LGBTQIA+ identity factors into active learning and social integration. The setting of the study was based in an undergraduate biology class. LGBTQIA+ students in the class reported not experiencing blatant discrimination, however, neither did they feel a sense of inclusion in the classroom. Many of the participants attributed the lack of open homophobia in their classes to positive societal shifts towards same-sex and queer relations. They reported the moments of homophobia in the classroom to be clandestine through peer microaggressions expressed through opinions. The research recommended that educators implement opportunities within lesson plans for students to have the opportunity to self-disclose their gender and sexual identity. In summation, LGBTQIA+ students may experience a high level of anxiety during whole classroom discussions because of fear of their identity not being accepted. Educators can help mitigate those added stressors by creating smaller groups in the classroom with members who have demonstrated respectful and collaborative speech and behavior patterns toward their peers. Awareness of how differences within student groups emerge is also key. Students may form groups along racial and gender identity lines, even in spaces that are purposefully designed for inclusivity (Adelman et al., 2022).

When establishing a holistic support system for LGBTQIA+ ELL students, intentional choices of reading material in the classroom deserve substantial consideration. A study established a set of criteria for LGBTQIA+ literature that feature a positive representation while existing outside the framework of heteronormativity. The themes analyzed within the titles reveal that there are several books with LGBTQIA+ characters

who experience challenges specific to their identity as opposed to general adolescent heteronormative struggles.

Impact on Mental and Physical Health

In addition to microaggressions, many LGBTQIA+ experience various types of trauma which can often overlap with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). This overlap can lead to an increase in substance abuse. Needing to understand more about the impact on mental and physical health, Grigsby et al. (2023) sought to find the connection between ACE, mental health, and substance abuse among sexual and gender-diverse individuals. A significant connection was found between ACE and mental illnesses. Primarily due to ACE, substance use and abuse are prevalent among sexual and gender-diverse individuals. However, the study did not take into account external factors such as poverty and violence in the community and also did not measure the severity of the mental illnesses reported.

High school can be a challenging experience for any teenager, but those dealing with gender and sexual identity struggles face a bigger impact on their mental health. In a 2023 article published in Education Week, a transgender man who runs LGBTQIA+ professional development training discussed his experience with substance abuse and mental health in high school. Although he had support and identity validation from his family, the rigidness of how gender was approached in his school caused him to feel withdrawn and alienated. The man believed that alterations to the school policy such as allowing students to use bathrooms that correlate with their gender identity. When gender neutral bathrooms are implemented in organizations, minority groups feel less targeted and stigmatized (Chaney & Sanchez, 2017). The man also reported that the school using

students' preferred names in school records would have made a positive difference in how he perceived his safety in that environment.

Trauma experienced by an LGBTQIA+ individual in childhood extends throughout a lifetime with substantial consequences. A study analysis explored the connection between cognitive-emotional and behavioral health with physical health outcomes (Nicholas & Bresin, 2024). The study sought to identify how minority stress impacts the health of gender and sexually-diverse individuals. Keywords were screened across three separate databases to identify studies based on gender and sexual minority stressors. Common stressors indicated were identity concealment, internalized stigma, expectations of rejection, and internal conflict. The number of studies published about minority stress increased 6x between 2015 and 2022.

Peer acceptance is a factor in how LGBTQIA+ individuals perceive themselves and manage their well-being. A qualitative study by Closson and Comeau (2021) examined the effects of discrimination within the LGBTQIA+ community. They posed the question of how the sense of identity is shaped for LGBTQIA+ youth within their community. Despite some negative experiences being reported by participants, having a strong sense of identity leads to positive outcomes for LGBTQIA+ youth. As the study acknowledged, a limitation of the findings is that the participants were predominantly caucasian. A more culturally diverse inquiry would likely yield different results.

LGBTQIA+ students of color are subjected to school politics that involve punitive measures and center around whiteness. A study by Orum Hernandez and Barcelos (2023) showed that administration officials disproportionately emphasize policies on the physical safety of LGBTQIA+ youth of color students in school, rather than the inner

emotional turmoil that stems from the intersection of queer and minority group members. The research concluded that school administrators need to recognize the dual identities of their LGBTQIA+ students when implementing anti-bullying policies.

In addition to administrators, school staff members have a role in contributing to the well-being of LGBTQIA+ students. Student Health Centers are not inherently designed to serve students with diverse gender and sexual identities. A study by Willenbrock and Santella (2023) compiled policy and aesthetic modifications that SHCs can adopt to support LGBTQIA+ students. For example, hiring and training staff in LGBTQIA+ cultural competency, as well as including sexual and gender diverse materials in publicly displayed community areas. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of SHCs having comprehensive sexual health screenings and providing prophylactics for diverse gender identities.

Community and Family Support Systems

When LGBTQIA+ students feel a connection with their families and community, they are more likely to achieve academic success. A study sought to identify the impact of LGBTQIA+ family members of LGBTQIA+ youth (Stone et al., 2022). The question posed is whether having LGBTQIA+ relatives helps LGBTQIA+ youth navigate family systems and daily life—qualitative interviews with LGBTQIA+ participants youth and adults regarding the youth's relationship with family members. The results showed that participants who had LGBTQIA+ adult relatives received more emotional support and the ability to navigate complex family dynamics. Participants with LGBTQIA+ adult relatives reported having a more positive life outlook and a willingness to disclose their identities to their families Despite having visible LGBTQIA+ relatives, youth still

struggle to navigate in the heteronormative structure of their families. Youth discovering their gender and sexual identity benefit from having LGBTQIA+ relatives as advocates and role models within their families.

Outside of challenges faced at school, sexual and gender-diverse students experience homelessness at a disproportionate level. A study measured the effectiveness of homeless prevention programs for LGBTQIA+ youth (Gutman et al., 2022). The study was based on the analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles regarding the transition of LGBTQIA+ youth from homelessness to stable housing. Some policies recommended in the articles were LGBTQIA+-specific housing, inclusive spaces, and access to gender-affirming care.

LGBTQIA+ individuals in the criminal legal system face discrimination and a lack of recognition of their sexual and gender identity, with youth being particularly vulnerable. A report was developed to unearth the challenges that LGBTQIA+ face in the prison system, and what can be done to establish trust between these incarcerated individuals and the criminal justice system (Ramirez, 2023). LGBTQIA+ people are 3 times as likely to be incarcerated as heterosexuals. Systematic changes need to be made to address the discrepancy in the treatment of LGBTQIA+ defendants and inmates.

Based on the aforementioned research, schools and institutions have a high impact in creating safe and inclusive spaces for students who are gender and sexual minorities. School staff and officials can benefit from training in how to support LGBTQIA+ students facing adversity. This is crucial because outcomes from harassment and bullying have been shown to put LGBTQIA+ students' lives and mental health at risk. The repercussions of not establishing an inclusive environment in schools can lead to students

experiencing negative coping mechanisms like substance abuse, self-harm, and

homelessness. A positive aspect of adapting curriculums to include LGBTQIA+ themes

is that students who see their identities reflected in classroom material feel a deeper sense

of belonging and inclusivity. Additionally, school resources such as libraries can also

contribute to the sense of belonging for LGBTQIA+ students. Early intervention in

supporting students with their gender and sexual identities could be pivotal in

course-correcting what can be a lifetime of cognitive-emotional challenges.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

The following chapter describes in detail the answer to my research question:

What *school-wide policies can be implemented to support ELL students with LGBTQIA+*

identities? The chapter outlines the website components that students, administrators, and

staff will have access to. This includes LGBTQIA+ demographics, up-to-date resources

for staff and administrators, plans for implementing responsive materials to lesson plans

and curriculums, strategies to adjust pedagogy to approach LGBTQIA+ themes in the

classroom, socioemotional coping skills for students, and school policy initiatives. The

goal of the website is to be a comprehensive resource that all stakeholders can access.

Evidence of the Problem of LGBTQIA+ Discrimination in Schools

According to the Human Rights Council, 88% of LGBTQIA+ students are not out

to all of their classmates, and 92% of LGBTQIA+ students are not out to the teachers and

adults in their school. One in 5 LGBTQIA+ youth have access to inclusive sex education.

Nine in 10 have used the internet to research gender and sexual identity (LGBTQIA+

Youth Report, 2023). Approximately 46% of LGBTQIA+ youth reported not feeling safe

in areas of a school where there is a lack of adult presence, such as student bathrooms and

locker rooms. As a result, the students were three times more likely to skip school

because they felt unsafe. The harms of bullying and teasing should not be

underestimated: 45% of LGBTQIA+ youth surveyed in 2022 seriously considered

attempting suicide. LGBTQIA+ youth of color reported even higher rates of suicide

attempts than their white peers. There is an urgency for the project given that students in

ELL communities are largely people of color.

How Culture Factors Into Homophobia

In many countries in Latin America, the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals are stripped and diminished in favor of conservatism with traditional gender and sexual attitudes (Schulenberg, 2013). Educators benefit from understanding what beliefs students may have adopted from their home life regarding gender and sexual identity while striving to make the classroom a safe and equitable space for everyone. Often students from Latin American countries are contending with the culture of "machismo", an ideology that equates masculinity with dominance, deeply permeating societal norms (Ascencio. 2020). Content on the website supports teachers on how to address interpersonal conflict among students regarding gender and sexual identity. Teachers also have access to strategies on how to become a responsive confidante for students who are struggling with their coming out process.

Best Practices for Education-Based Websites

A necessary consideration is the collection and maintenance of the personal information of the website's users who are minors. For example, in 2023 the educational platform Edmodo was shut down due to its misuse of children's data for targeted advertisement purposes (Holtzclaw, 2023). In addition, parents and guardians of the users were not made aware of the massive data collection. Ethics and the well-being of the users are prioritized on my LGBTQIA+ support website. It does not collect sensitive personal information, and there is no financial gain involved. Online privacy is a protection that must be given to all users.

Because LGBTQIA+ themes and topics can often be distressing, developing the website to be engaging and interactive was essential. The website includes a series of

modules related to LGBTQIA+ topics, such as learning about gender pronouns and strategies for self-advocacy. The modules are designed to encourage independent learning from the students. Students who use the website must engage in knowledge and skill-based tasks that are socially relevant and consistently updated (Barker et al., 2007). The modules include tutorials with integrated audio and videos that can be toggled from English to Spanish.

　　User-friendliness of the website is crucial for its ability to be an effective learning tool. Aspects such as information quality, visual designs, and system interactivity factor into whether users can navigate within the website with ease (Vlasenko et al., 2023). The necessary features of the website are a clear and easily readable layout, current and relevant information, as well as fast and secure messaging among users. These are a few of the website features that are updated routinely based on user feedback.

Safety Features

　　When developing the purpose and outline of the website, I had to consider that safety is often an issue for LGBTQIA+ individuals finding information for resources. It was also important for me to keep in mind that being queer carries inherent risk depending on the environment, and because of that the user needs to have access to a quick exit from the webpage. The website will include a feature allowing users to leave the page by pressing the escape button three times.

Accessibility Features

　　A primary goal of the website is to design it to make it usable for as many stakeholders as possible. Language, cultural differences, as well as experience and knowledge can be barriers for ESL learners to comprehend information (Kim & Matilla,

2011). The website will feature multilingual content that will be accessible through a dropdown menu. Additionally, to ensure that the website content is readable and clear, the language will be written simply and straightforward along with text resizing.

Student Resources

The intended audience for the project are students ages 14-19 primarily from Latin American countries and ELL backgrounds. LGBTQIA+ students are the primary target audience but cis-gendered and heterosexual students are encouraged to use the website for educational and allyship purposes.

Resource Library

A goal of the website was to be a place where students can easily access resources, which necessitates a library that is updated periodically with credible and peer-reviewed material. Some of the resources included in the library are printable PDFs for LGBTQIA+ self-expression and self-care guides. There are also guides to help students navigate their identities among family, peers, and community. Additionally, students can learn strategies on how to ask for support from faculty and other adults in their lives.

Support Groups

It is important for students to feel like they have a connection with their peers regarding the challenges their gender and sexual identity often present. Taking into account that some students may feel uncomfortable or hesitant expressing their thoughts in real time, the website includes a discussion forum with avatars and students' chosen monikers. Students can share their personal experiences, give and receive advice, and

discuss events in their communities. There is also robust content moderation from a trained wellness coach to ensure an inclusive code of conduct.

Additional Features

Because the website is primarily for LGBTQIA+ youth, student resources will be the focal point. Information for national and local hotline and crisis support is readily available on the front page of the site. There is an anonymous tip page where students can submit concerns or problems they are experiencing with bullying and harassment to school administrators. Students can also learn nonviolent de-escalation techniques to advocate for themselves and their peers when facing discrimination or harassment. Multilingual access to educational resources such as articles and videos of LGBTQIA+ history, rights, and issues are featured prominently on the site. Lastly, there is information for grants, scholarships, and other financial aid opportunities for LGBTQIA+ students.

Teacher Resources

Teachers and staff play an essential role in the well-being and safety of their students. A section of the website provides resources teachers can implement in their curriculums and classroom management. The resources are in printable PDF format and include documents such as pronoun forms for newcomer students, strategies for including LGBTQIA+ themes and history in lesson plans, tips on classroom management when gender and sexual-based conflict among students occurs, and an up-to-date glossary on LGBTQIA+ terminology. Teachers also have access to a calendar for workshops and events for LGBTQIA+ education. Because the website aims to support students from Latin American countries, there are cultural competency guides for teachers to gain

contextual insight into their students' backgrounds and how their culture may view LGBTQIA+ issues and themes.

Administrative Policies

An obstacle that administrators often face is that it can be unclear which policies can be implemented to support LGBTQIA+ students. The website will outline bullying and harassment policy templates with proven efficacy that can be applied to school rules and regulations. This includes reporting incidents, investigations, disciplinary actions, and restorative collaboration with families and peers. Additionally, administrators can accommodate for their transgender and nonbinary students by addressing them by their preferred name, allowing them access to restrooms that align with their gender identity, and removing gender-segregated school activities (Garcia, 2024).

Training Programs

Administrators who struggle with understanding how to support LGBTQIA+ students benefit from receiving comprehensive training. For example, empathy-building skills, knowledge of data-driven research that demonstrates the correlation between teen mental health issues and LGBTQIA+ identity, awareness of successful support programs in other schools and districts, and provision of strong professional expectations for faculty and staff.

Project Assessment

In order to assess whether the website has its intended impact on improving school climate for ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities, a sample size from each stakeholder group will participate in a questionnaire based on the Socio-educational Environment Questionnaire (SEQ). The questions will measure participant satisfaction

with interpersonal relationships among students and teachers, as well as the academic and justice climate of the school (Goulet & Morizot, 2023). Additionally, the questionnaire will evaluate the perceived inclusiveness of the school environment, students' emotional well-being, access to adequate school resources such as support networks and counseling services, the effectiveness of school policies, and the level of parental and community involvement in supporting a positive and inclusive school climate.

Timeline

I would need to develop an anonymous survey to identify the percentage of LGBTQIA+ students in the school. I would also have to identify the existing areas of support within the school system. Gathering and organizing my research is another consideration for my timeline. It will take three months to compile the research and develop the website.

Conclusion

A website centered around supporting LGBTQIA+ youth with ELL backgrounds has multiple ways of being an effective resource. Students can access the site as a method to establish peer connections and engage in the school community. Staff and administrators can also use the website to implement inclusive, equitable frameworks that keep students' well-being and academic outcomes in focus. In Chapter 4, I will elaborate on what I learned during my research, what possible challenges may arise from the development of the website, and future recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The question that guided the research for my project is *What school-wide policies can be implemented to support ELL students with LGBTQIA+ identities?* The purpose of chapter four is to reflect on my research findings in developing the website, outline the future implications for stakeholders, expand on any project limitations, and detail my growth as a writer throughout the process.

Author's Reflection

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I did not grow up with an awareness of my queer identity. In high school, I was a quiet student who kept to themselves. I did not have the opportunity to develop a sense of my identity during those crucial teenage years. Learning about the various best practices designed to support LGBTQIA+ youth made me realize how in need of guidance and a sense of self I was at that time. There were periods during the writing process when I felt the emotional weight of my younger self who did not have access to the resources. During these times I would take a step back from my research to recharge. Once I was recharged, I felt freshly motivated to support my current LGBTQIA+ students who need the same amount of care that I did.

One thing I learned from the research for the project was the importance of pacing myself in completing tasks. This capstone project was different from my previous experience in the program because it was the first time that I worked on a single document over a span of a few months. I had the opportunity to refine my work and incorporate feedback from peers and instructors. Because there is a vast amount of

research on LGBTQIA+ Americans, I had to discern which articles, journals, and web resources to include were the most relevant to answering my question. I also used a literature review matrix that helped me keep organized and categorize the articles into different sections. I learned that staying on track for the topic is crucial. For example, at some point, I realized that I was going into too much depth in my summaries of the articles and I had to reframe those paragraphs to hit on the major points.

Through this project, I discovered a wealth of material dedicated to supporting LGBTQIA+ youth, reflecting the countless hours that professionals have invested in this area. Additionally, I gained a deeper appreciation for the time and effort that goes into creating a website, something I hadn't fully understood as a regular user of online resources. One of the most significant insights I gained was the realization of the gaps in resources for LGBTQIA+ youth who are also English language learners. I was surprised to find that there is not as much available information that addresses the unique cultural aspects of this intersecting population. This has opened my eyes to potential areas for future research and resource development

Reflection on the Literature Review

Before I created this project, I was aware of the negative experiences that LGBTQIA+ students endure in schools. However, learning about the more life-threatening consequences of LGBTQIA+ bullying and harassment emboldened my need to be an advocate. The treatment of LGBTQIA+ youth in society puts them at higher risk of suicide and mental health issues (The Trevor Project, 2022). I also realized how prevalent negative mental health outcomes were among multiracial and people of color youth compared to their white peers (Wilkins et al., 2023). Because of this, there needs to be an emphasis on these students to make sure that their well-being and safety

are prioritized. Lastly, the victimization of LGBTQIA+ students factors heavily in their school attendance, participation, and overall engagement. These aspects contribute to potential academic failure and the school-to-prison pipeline (Palmer & Greytak, 2017). These articles were most impactful because they raised my awareness of the gravity of the consequences of addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ students.

Possible Implications and Limitations of the Project

The website has the potential to be a valuable supplemental tool for classroom curriculum and socio-emotional development. Key considerations include hiring a consistent webmaster to maintain the site, evaluating the associated costs, and deciding whether this role would be fulfilled by an outside agency or a school employee, along with their specific responsibilities. Additionally, families and community members may disapprove of LGBTQIA+ education in schools due to religious or ideological beliefs that their child should not be exposed to these issues and themes. For student users, it is necessary to obtain waivers from parents or guardians allowing their children to access the site and create accounts.

Furthermore, the technology gap experienced by many minority communities may limit students' access to the website outside of school, as they may lack computers or reliable internet access at home. Optimizing the website for mobile usage with a minimalist design that uses low data can help address this issue, ensuring easier access for students. Another important consideration is ensuring accessibility for students with disabilities. This includes making the site compatible with screen readers, providing video captions, and ensuring all interactive elements are accessible via keyboard.

Project Development

The development of my project was the first time that I had to create an extensive literature review. Initially, I had difficulty figuring out where to begin with my research. I wanted to focus on the many facets of a school that need to be responsive in the support of their queer students but realized that it may be too broad of a scope for me to encapsulate in my review. I decided to focus on the stakeholders as being the center of the project. Students are directly affected by the failures of not creating an inclusive school environment, therefore they are in need of resources to navigate the challenges that their identities may present. Educators and administrators also benefit from LGBTQIA+ awareness in an ever-changing world.

Considerations for Future Research

The completion of this project has deepened my commitment to advancing LGBTQIA+ education and support. Future research could explore several critical areas to further enhance this field. First, investigating how this project could be adapted for use at the college and university level is essential. Young adults in higher education can also benefit from support systems that address their unique needs. Additionally, there is a need to address the challenges faced by youth who are not enrolled in educational institutions, such as those who are unhoused or receiving medical care. Research could focus on how to provide meaningful support to LGBTQIA+ youth in these vulnerable populations.

Another avenue for future research is incorporating the website into professional development programs for new educational and administrative hires within school districts. This integration could ensure that employees are equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to support LGBTQIA+ students from the outset of their careers. A more focused study on transgender students of color is also warranted. This research

could address the compounded difficulties experienced by individuals navigating the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity, offering targeted support strategies. Finally, exploring how the website can be extended beyond educational setting into corporate environments, incorporating it into DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and sensitivity training programs for companies and organizations could help foster more inclusive workplaces.

Dissemination and Outreach Strategy

The website can be shared with LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups, school districts, and legal aid organizations for LGBTQIA+ people and people of color. The website can also be shared with parents and guardians to help them access valuable resources and information that can support their children's well-being and education. Because of their wide-ranging scope, the U.S. Department of Education would be an ideal partner in making the website accessible to teachers, administrators, and students. Additionally., social media sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn would also be an avenue for the website to reach professionals globally. To ensure the website remains relevant and effective, I plan to gather feedback from users and make continuous improvements based on their input, keeping the project dynamic and responsive to the needs of the stakeholders.

Educational Benefits of an LGBTQIA+ Support Website

My website serves as a valuable resource for the teaching profession and education administration by fostering a deeper understanding of LGBTQIA+ student struggles. Educators can offer the most effective support when they are aware of the barriers these students face, which often include issues of equity and safety. By integrating LGBTQIA+ education, the website helps build empathy among teachers and

administrators, making them more knowledgeable and better equipped to support their students. Furthermore, a strong foundation in understanding LGBTQIA+ issues can help educational institutions proactively address and prevent legal challenges related to bullying, harassment, and discrimination. The website not only aids in protecting student rights, but also has the potential to inspire students to pursue their academic goals and empowers them to become advocates for themselves and their communities. This contributes to a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Conclusion

Creating this project was inspired by reflecting on my own past experiences and my eleven years as an educator. The helplessness I felt as a young person, struggling to feel secure in my identity, parallels the challenges I faced in the classroom when addressing bullying based on gender and sexual identity. Without the proper tools, I could not respond effectively. I believe that educating people about the LGBTQIA+ community and recognizing their positive contributions to society benefits everyone. When individuals are emotionally,mentally, and physically well, it elevates society as a whole. It is crucial to invest in out young people, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds who often need trusted guidance and support to truly thrive.

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