

It Takes a Team: A Framework for LGBTQ-inclusive Leadership and Teaching

It Takes a Team: A Framework for LGBTQ-inclusive Leadership and Teaching

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**Abstract**

For decades, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) students have participated in research investigating their experiences of bullying, harassment, isolation, and exclusion in school, generating data demonstrating that they experience unsafe school conditions which result in both immediate and long-term consequences for LGBTQ youth. While the research base provides discrete intervention recommendations for specific factors negatively effecting LGBTQ youth in schools, it has not yet identified a comprehensive process for creating a systemic, empowering school culture for LGBTQ students and families. Furthermore, a considerable gap in the research base exists regarding related needs in elementary school settings. In this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, I collaborated with the Equity Team of one elementary school to investigate our collective journey toward integrating ongoing, age-appropriate, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction at their site. My primary purpose was to identify and describe salient factors that contribute to successful integration of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at the elementary school level. My findings included the professional development process I used to support the Equity Team’s emerging leadership practices to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, our work as a team to implement LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with their teaching colleagues at the school, and thirdly, a detailed and expansive description of “LGBTQ-inclusive instruction”. Based upon this research, I propose an LGBTQ-inclusive framework that includes a description of the process of professional development facilitation that can be used to support a site Equity team and school staff.

**Dedication:**

I DEDICATE THIS DISSERTATION to my mother, Marilyn Braveman. Marilyn was a fiery woman dedicated to social justice in the NYC education system throughout the 1960s and '70s. She was never prouder than the moment she learned I began my doctoral program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice. May her memory be for a blessing. She lived to know that my brother and I continue to embody her social justice legacy in all that we did and do. Her love and care for friend and community continues through her grandchildren, who continue to better the world in their personal and professional lives.

I also dedicate this dissertation to all the inspiring, courageous and strident social justice professionals that I have had the good fortune to work with-- shoulder-to-shoulder, day-to-day, year-to-year. My hope is that my continued work, and this dissertation acknowledges all of you by pushing forward an agenda of justice, equity, and revolutionary transformation for all our youth in public education. I know we dream it, see it, feel it, and will persist until it's come.

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The time, space and support of this research and dissertation rests on the shoulders and in the hearts of a vast network of people in my personal, professional and spiritual community. You have sustained me throughout this incredible journey and amazing endeavor beyond my dreams. I love you all dearly.

To past and present HUSD staff: Cherryland folks, you are all consummate professionals with amazing heart and soul. You represent what it means to social-justice focused change agents in school, and I know all the students you touch will experience what it means to be respected, loved, inspired and uplifted for all that lives in their souls. Engaging in on-going professional learning with you and conducting participatory action research with you, and being sustained by each of your vision, courage and commitment will forever be in my cells. A hearty shout out to Frank Dardon, Martha Clarin, Heather Burns, Dulce Acevedo, Yunuen Jimenez, Leila Carranza, Mat Clarke and Itoco Garcia for supporting the work at Cherryland. HUSD district staff, I have always appreciated and valued your willingness to engage with me and supporting my vision of equity work I know our students need. May we continue to be strident, forward and fearless. This doctoral work has re-energized and re-inspired me.

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I always thought writing was a solitary occupation, and certainly that is part of the experience. However, my writing and the depth of my thinking has been supported by an ongoing collaborative venture with my entire cohort of fellow dissertation writers- Shea Gregory, My-lan Huynh, Jaski Kohli, Erin Blubaugh, Xioa-fei Zhang, Tatiana Peugnet-Allen, Cynthia Ortiz, Karen Denne, Antonio Martinez, Estalynn Kenyon, Divine Okun

Lastly, to all of us- as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Teachers, students and families and our allies: We are everywhere. We belong everywhere.

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## CHAPTER 1

### **LGBTQ Students' Experience in our Nation's Schools**

For decades, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) students have participated in research investigating their experiences of bullying, harassment and isolation in school (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Russell, Kosciw, Horn & Saewyc, 2010). During the last twenty years, LGBTQ students have provided descriptions of overwhelming levels of anti-gay language, name-calling, bullying, relational aggression, and exclusion from their peers. The 2007 Gay Lesbian Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) survey, for example, revealed that nearly all LGBTQ students surveyed frequently heard homophobic remarks (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008). The most recent GLSEN (2015) biannual national school climate survey continues to illustrate a trend consistently demonstrated by every survey since 2001 (the first one): alarming rates of homophobic and transphobic language, victimization, and harassment accompanied by a lack of positive LGBTQ-inclusive instruction reported by LGBTQ youth (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas & Danischewski, 2016). Additionally, reports from LGBTQ students have illustrated that peer social behavior described above is only one of multiple harmful factors contributing to their experience at school. In particular, students are negatively impacted when they fail to see themselves and the LGBTQ community reflected the contexts of classrooms and through instruction (e.g., Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas & Danischewski, 2016).

These unsafe school conditions result in both immediate and long-term consequences for LGBTQ youth. In the short run, LGBTQ students' ability to fully participate in school is interrupted by higher rates of absenteeism due to hostile school conditions. In the long term, research shows that LGBTQ students are more likely to engage in high-risk behavior, such as drug use, and have emotional problems, including depression, suicidality and other forms of

emotional distress (Birkett et al, 2009; Russell et al, 2010). These factors are often associated with lower academic achievement than that of their non-LGBTQ peers, as well as being less likely to pursue post-secondary education.

### **Teachers' Role in sustaining Trans/Homophobic School Conditions**

Teachers also play a role in sustaining trans/homophobic behavior that oppress LGBTQ students and families at school, including failing to respond when trans/homophobic behavior occurred (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014), which contributes to a lack of trust in teachers by LGBTQ students (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). An additional way teachers contribute to the negative school conditions LGBTQ students experience is by failing to provide instruction that includes positive images, language and themes of LGBTQ people (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014), and by failing express positive beliefs about the LGBTQ community in school (Letts & Sears, 1999; Harris Interactive, 2012; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007). The first major national longitudinal resource on LGBTQ student experience in schools, the biannual GLSEN National School Climate Survey, corroborated that actual teacher implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction across the nation is minimal and inconsistent (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014).

Researchers have reported that some teachers are aware they lack the skills and readiness to provide instruction with LGBTQ content (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Studies have shown that a range differences exist regarding teacher intention and readiness to address this task. For instance, many teachers are willing to do so, but report that they do not actually use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and content (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). As a result, studies

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of teacher use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and content have identified the need for professional development and support to help bridge the gap between teachers' interest and ability to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. In particular, teachers have described the need for support that builds their understanding of LGBTQ students and families, and related pedagogical skills, which would, in turn, create the confidence they need to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with students (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008).

However, along the continuum of teacher readiness to implement LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, there are also teachers who are resistant and oppose the use of LGBTQ-instruction for many reasons. These teachers reported a range of beliefs as justification for not using LGBTQ-inclusive content in curriculum or displaying attitudes and actions that that encourage a sense of safety in school for LGBTQ students (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2007; Harris Interactive, 2012, Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). For example, some teachers studied by Robinson and Ferfolja (2007) believed that using LGBTQ-inclusive content would cause children to become LGBT. Others in this study felt that "difficult" issues like sexuality/gender expression should not be addressed in the classroom unless initiated by students, and then should only be responded to individually. These beliefs create a barrier that may be addressed by helping teachers understand how discourses of heteronormativity inform and sustain the ongoing invisibility of the continuum of gender identity expression and sexuality.

As another example of the complex continuum of teacher beliefs, Prejudice in the Playground (Harris Interactive, 2012) reported that elementary school teachers indicated they feel comfortable responding to physical safety issues that include gender-biased or homophobic dynamics or language. However, they remain reluctant to provide positive images of LGBT students and families in curriculum, despite reports of both comfort with and a desire to include

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other identities and families (e.g. race, adoption and single parent families) in current instructional practices (p 101), which reveals some reticence on their part regarding the explicit inclusion of LGBTQ-focused curriculum. Thus, I argue that, while certainly addressing the experience of secondary school LGBTQ students is critical, the need to address cis/heteronormative thinking and practice to interrupt trans/homophobic behavior needs to begin in elementary school. This need is further supported by the American Educational Research Association's recent call for more scholarly research focused on LGBTQ issues at the elementary school level, based on their assessment of the available body of research on this issue (Wimberly, 2015).

### **Context of this Study**

Hayward Unified School District (HUSD) took up the call to address the experience of LGBTQ students and its LGBTQ community throughout its K-12 schools in the late 1990s. These efforts resulted in the creation of the HUSD Safe and Inclusive Schools Program (SISP) to implement an educational equity action plan to support LGBTQ students, staff and families. As Teacher-on-Special-Assignment, I have been the coordinator of the SISP for two decades. In that role, I have been responsible for providing professional development for our K-12 schools to ensure that our staff learns about our responsibility to, and develops the skills to address the needs of, LGBTQ students and families. As such, I have conducted district-wide professional development on a wide range of topics, including an ongoing district initiative to provide positive images, language and themes of the LGBTQ community throughout K-12 instruction.

Guided primarily by the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act (2000) legislation authored by former Senator Sheila Kuehl which added actual and perceived gender identity and sexual orientation as a protected class in non-discrimination policy, the district

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developed an “LGBT people throughout instruction” effort as one of a dozen proactive and intervention action steps for our schools. Following this, over 18 years ago, a collaborative group of district administrators and teachers (including myself) provided our very first school-based introduction to the then-current state legislation and district policy for addressing the need of our LGBTQ students. This initial professional development session in the 1990s included basic positive definitions of what lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other key vocabulary (e.g., homophobia and gender identity) meant, and how to use them in conversation with staff and students. Participants also learned about their responsibility to respond when homophobic and gender-biased behavior occurred.

When these sessions concluded, I began my work in the role of Coordinator of the SISIP, and initiated a district wide professional development (PD) strand regarding effective ways for staff to intervene when homophobic and gender-biased bullying and harassment occurred in schools. This initiative was followed by PD focusing on proactive steps to improving the experience of LGBTQ students and families at our schools, such as using positive images, language and themes in ongoing K-12 instruction. From there, I led district-wide elementary and secondary professional development for both elementary and secondary pedagogical skills related to creating LGBTQ-inclusion in schools, and specifically on developing, practicing, and ultimately implementing LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction at each school. After approximately ten years of conducting district-based professional development and the accompanying school site based PD sessions with the whole teaching staff, incredible gains were made by hundreds of teachers regarding school safety and inclusive curriculum, and comprehensive changes occurred in a strong number of elementary, middle and high schools along these dimensions. However, given the large number of self-selected participants in the

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district-wide PD development session, I discerned a pattern. The PD sessions would produce high levels of staff interest and engagement; however, rates of follow-up and implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum were lower than expected. I questioned why this was occurring, and wondered how, as a veteran teacher and professional development specialist, I could support stronger outcomes of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at our schools. These lived experiences working with teachers in my district, combined with the need demonstrated by national data describing the daily experience of LGBTQ students across this nation, led me to investigate the factors that results in the successful increase of LGBTQ inclusive throughout the grades and throughout the year in our schools.

I arranged to conduct this research study at a particular elementary school because we have had a long-standing partnership working together on a variety of educational equity initiatives in our district, and I was aware that the trust and rapport I have with staff would be an asset in this study. The school serves as a representative of a number of elementary schools in the district in which I have worked with the staff on introductory concepts about addressing the needs of LGBTQ students and families, LGBTQ-inclusive resources to use in instruction, and the discussing and practicing the use of LGBTQ inclusive language with students. In addition, this elementary school has three teacher leaders serving on a standing Equity Team that works to bring instruction focused on all identity groups in their community into the classrooms at their school. I have worked extensively with these teacher leaders at this site on a district educational equity initiative on addressing needs of students of color, and together we have studied critical race theory, engaged in inter-racial conversations about race and used the team model for the advancement of anti-racist teacher development at their school.

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These three standing members of the Equity Team, who have also participated in the district-wide elementary professional development strand focused on LGBTQ-instruction, were interested in deepening the depth and quantity of LGBTQ-instruction at their site. Thus, the site also represented the challenge of transforming interest in LGBTQ-inclusive instruction into actual implementation at their school. The staff learned about this research study during a staff meeting and were invited to participate. Three additional teachers, all new to the school and who were interested in social justice-focused teaching and addressing the needs of LGBTQ people in schools, also joined the team. Thus, my background with the school provided a mutually supportive opportunity to engage in participatory action research (PAR) to investigate and implement strategies we believed would increase the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction across the grades and throughout the instructional school year. The next section describes our research questions and how PAR design was used to engage the whole team to craft and implement collaborative professional development regarding increasing LGBTQ-inclusive practice at their school.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As noted above, the lack of teacher use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction is a major factor in sustaining the cis/heteronormative practices that result in LGBTQ students' daily experience of marginalization and have multiple associated negative consequences for students in our K-12 schools.

This study examined the collaborative experience of teacher leaders and myself at an elementary school to identify the array of factors that resulted in the successful use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. This study was designed with the intention to accomplish several purposes. The first was to address the call for research focusing on LGBTQ issues in elementary schools

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by examining how the Equity Team integrated the use of LGBTQ-inclusive K-6 curriculum and instruction at their own school. The second was to further explore and define LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy that counters discourses reinforcing the notion that elementary school is too early to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction (because elementary students are innocent young people without a personal context for understanding SOGIE as a continuum). Third, I aimed to identify the processes and factors that enabled the Equity team to support teachers to increase and systemize the use of LGBTQ-inclusive content throughout the grades and the school year. Ultimately, I synthesize the findings into a framework of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching that may be taken up at school sites in multiple contexts.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

As this study investigated the little understood phenomena of creating and maintaining an ongoing use of LGBTQ-Inclusive curriculum and instruction throughout the school, preliminary questions were identified with the knowledge that the collaborative work of researcher/participants would evolve over the course of this research process. This study has three research questions:

- How does one elementary school's Equity Team integrate the use of LGBTQ-inclusive K-6 curriculum and instruction throughout the school?
- What professional knowledge base, practices and characteristics are necessary to support and facilitate teacher learning and implementation of LGBTQ+ curriculum and instruction?
- What professional knowledge base and characteristics, do I, as a professional development facilitator use to successfully to support and facilitate teacher learning and implementation about SOGIE and LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction?



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Through the use of a PAR design, we identified individual and group research goals to investigate and inform our own LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practices as well as its use throughout the school. Themes that emerged from our discussions and were organically developed as conceptual guides for our multi-layered work at the site included: (a) What personal experiences influenced our ability to use LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction as part of our teaching practice and how could that be used to support other teachers? (b) What educational and professional development experiences contributed to our use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and how might that guide our work with the teaching staff? (c) What district and school resources and practices support our use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction? (d) What support would further empower leadership teams and other teachers in this practice? (e) How might this research opportunity result in further actions and practices for your site? With this work, our intention was to transform our own participant/researcher professional practice, as well as motivate and inform teachers at the elementary school for this study and other schools within the district.

This study has the potential to add to the educational research base by providing examples of successful processes and practices for professional development providers, teacher leadership teams and individual teachers. One important focus of this study is demonstrating not only the feasibility but also the importance of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction beginning as early as elementary school. However, readers of this research can apply the model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching to inform secondary school practices as well. Content can be differentiated for secondary students in the same way it is differentiated for different grade levels in this elementary school. Both school district and initial teacher credentialing programs can draw from this research to address the need for all teachers to learn about SOGIE and be

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prepared to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout their teaching careers. Finally, both district and institutions of higher education can use this research to respond to teachers' expressed need to be better prepared to address the needs of the LGBTQ community and of students in their schools.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Conceptual Framework

I propose that asset-based cultural pedagogies, combined with insights from queer theory, can be basis for the development of a pedagogy that aims to interrupt the transmission of heteronormative culture and support a more expansive understanding of sexual orientation and gender. In this section, I will discuss conceptual frameworks from relevant literature inform this study's investigation of LGBTQ-inclusive elementary curriculum and instruction. Specifically, culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and queer theory will inform this study of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching. Although the first three do not explicitly address LGBTQ inclusion, the assets-based culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy conceptual frameworks provide insights for designing and developing a model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching. queer theory provides insight for a core of background information needed to inform both curricular content and decisions about instructional strategies. Specifically, queer theory is used to help both identify and support strategies that disrupt processes that normalize certain groups of people in school and marginalize others with based upon binary paradigms. For this study, I use "binary paradigm" to refer to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

In the section that follows, I first review these frameworks, emphasizing how they construct social and cultural identity of students and families as an asset in education. I will continue with concepts about the skills and knowledge bases that support educators in effectively creating LGBTQ-inclusive learning context in school. I then explain what I draw from the frameworks to guide a study of educators and their teaching practice in an elementary school

committed to successfully infusing LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction throughout their schools academic and social instruction.

### **Culturally Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Pedagogy**

The three models of pedagogy informing this study are culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Each center the social and cultural identity of students and families as assets in teaching and identifies aspects of teaching pedagogy that position teachers to see and understand students' lived home experience as a significant learning strength. Additionally, they each highlight the importance of integrating cultural strengths in instructional and learning experience. Culturally relevant, responsive teaching, and sustaining pedagogy, while related, differ slightly from one another, yet each contributes complimentary attributes of asset-based teacher pedagogy (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Caraballo, 2016; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Specifically, they ground successful academic outcomes for marginalized students in teacher's knowledge and incorporating of students' culture into instructional experience and relationship. Additionally, this knowledge is considered a basis for interrupting the evaluative contexts in educational/schooling experience of students that marginalize some and privilege others.

Each of these three pedagogical frameworks addresses critical aspects of teacher practice. First, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy focuses on the need for an asset-based pedagogy to create successful academic outcomes for students of color. Another hallmark of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is the role of developing students' critical consciousness regarding the power structures that influence their access to larger society. The purpose of this political instruction is to empower youth to be able to navigate a system that marginalizes them (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Culturally Responsive Teaching focuses on the nexus of school and home culture in academic

instruction (Gay, 2010). For example, Gay emphasized the importance of teaching students through their culture's lens and practices, and described this as integrating in-school learning to "out-of school learning" (Gay, 2013, p.49). Gay initially focused her advocacy on the need for accurate content in curriculum that represented ethnically and racially diverse families. However, as Gay developed her model of Culturally Responsive Teaching, the focus shifted from curriculum to teaching pedagogy. Gay researched and explained the need for teachers to develop their own cultural knowledge about ethnically and racially diverse student populations. This knowledge forms the basis for all types of instructional decision making from curriculum selection, teacher-student relationships, and classroom climate, so that students were provided the opportunity to learn through their own cultural lenses (Gay, 2010). Additionally, culturally sustaining pedagogy builds upon responsive and relevant pedagogies by expanding the focus on the role of students' home culture--specifically supporting student embodiment of their culture. In addition, culturally sustaining pedagogy directs educators to engage in ongoing self-education about youth culture. One aspect relevant to this study is the role of keeping a vigilant, ongoing professional inquiry about aspects of youth culture that might include basis replicating oppressive practices of the society around them. Paris (2012) speaks directly to the need for teachers to help students have a critical understanding of this dynamic and to avoid replicating those dynamics of culture.

All three frameworks are emancipatory pedagogies and position the role of teachers as change agents for social and academic equity. Historically, culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching were created to redress the systemic underserving Students of Color and their academic success in education. A more recent addition, culturally sustaining pedagogy has expanded the focus to consider needs of a wider lens of home cultures and student identities.

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culturally sustaining pedagogy reiterates the need to interrupt educational practices that that marginalize student participation in school and asserts the importance for students maintain and represent their contemporary enactment of their heritages.

**Viewing social and cultural identity as assets in education.** Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2010) foreground an intentional “synergistic” relationship between student and family culture with school culture as a critical social equity reform. Ladson-Billing uses the language of “synergy” to reflect traditional school culture as fixed and focused on the dominant (white, middle class) culture to the exclusion to cultures of students of color in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467). Synergy describes a cooperative and interactive process of comingling in-school and home culture that results in a more effective learning environment for students than either when they are not comingled. In complimentary fashion, Gay reiterated teachers must embody positive beliefs, values and attitudes about student/family culture present in their classes. These asset-based beliefs and values are the necessary bedrock for positive teacher-student relationships and are required for successful teaching and learning (Gay, 2010). From this stance, learning environments are constructed based upon valuing and respecting cultures. Further, both Ladson-Billings and Gay emphasized the need for teachers to deliberately validate student identities through instruction. While acknowledging other researchers do not universally ground the primacy of beliefs and values in the development of culturally relevant and responsive teaching pedagogy, Gay’s perspective echoes Ladson-Billings’. Ladson-Billings asserted that culturally relevant practitioners demonstrate a strong personal accountability to their actions based upon their positive beliefs and values about students and their educational rights. Not only do these beliefs and values position teachers as instructors who oppose practices that marginalize cultural

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diversity, but also educators who focus on academic success through supporting students' cultural integrity in school (Ladson Billings, 1995).

Villegas & Lucas (2002) studied a body of conceptual and empirical research regarding preparing pre-service teachers as culturally responsive practitioners, observed linguistically diverse classes, and reflected upon their own experience with pre-service teachers. They identified six attributes of culturally responsive teaching practitioners. These attributes, the authors reported, are the necessary components teacher must develop to go beyond a surface acknowledgement of diversity in classrooms. Villegas & Lucas (2012) explained that culturally responsive teachers develop socio-cultural consciousness, have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, have a knowledge base they use to support student construction of knowledge, learn and know about students' lives, and scaffold instruction that builds and expands upon student knowledge. I will include these features as part of my conceptual lens for studying the practices of elementary teachers using LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction.

Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2010), and Villegas & Lucas (2002) concurred that culturally relevant and responsive teachers create learning environments that reinforce positive student identity, achievement, equity and academic excellence, and strong teacher/student relationships. Each of these authors referenced the need for an asset-based pedagogy to provide students with a socio-cultural consciousness. This stance recognized the need for education to support socially marginalized students with skills that empower their navigation skills outside of the classroom, in a society that is replete with forces that oppress them based upon their racial, ethnic and cultural identities.

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The research base on culturally sustaining pedagogy leads to an expansion of the frameworks begun through scholarship of culturally relevant pedagogy. In particular, as an asset-based pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogical research situates educational systems and content as a socializing function of society. Culturally sustaining pedagogy advances the role of teaching and instruction as a tool for resisting powers of oppression. Paris (2012) and Paris & Alim (2014) expressed the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy for moving away from deficit practices that remove the culture of students of color in schooling experience. Expanding on these approaches, these authors provide the framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy to expand the focus of asset-based cultural pedagogies as recognizing and representing contemporary culture as authentically multicultural. Paris (2012), for example, explained that culturally sustaining pedagogies must support young people “in sustaining the culture and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). This includes the need for teachers to mediate student reproduction of oppressive aspects of society as they maintain and reinvent their personal cultural heritage. More recently, Paris and Alim (2017) specified the importance of understanding that culture is not a static phenomenon, but rather is fluid and evolving. The authors challenge us, as social justice educators, to envision and create schools in which “heterogeneous practices are valued, enacted and sustained” (p. 5).

**Interrupting evaluative contexts in education/school experience.** All three asset-based pedagogies reviewed in this proposal effectively serve to interrupt the evaluative context of dominant social paradigms. Culturally sustaining pedagogy explicitly illustrates how schools and classrooms are evaluative contexts and describes them as “figured worlds” (Caraballo, 2016, p. 4). As Caraballo (2016) explains, school environments implicitly represent values of the culture



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and society that they are a part of. For example, schools in the United States actively reenact dominant culture of whiteness as opposed to valuing the multiple cultures represented by the student body and families in the school community. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is provided as a call for teachers to act as change agents acting to resist systems of oppression by integrating cultures and identities into instruction. Caraballo (2016) uses a conceptual frame of “figured worlds” to illustrate the need for teachers as change agents. He explains that understanding classrooms through the conceptual frame of “figured worlds” acknowledges that without intentional interruption, culture in classrooms enact societal discourses of what it means to be a student who fits into the dominant culture of power and privilege. Take, for example, academic content. Curriculum is imbued with discourses of success, achievement and a complex network of social inequities that marginalize students of color. Put another way, students exercise their identities and make sense of who they are by practicing values enacted in school instructional culture. Academic instruction is so compelling in the daily lives of students that it can leave little to no room for students to practice “being” in ways that don’t match mainstream discourses are reflective of their identity. Many students are left with little room to practice identities authentic to their burgeoning selves. That is, students who do not naturally fit the social constructs of identity traditionally represented in enacted curriculum begin to deny authentic parts of themselves to fit into the ways they are learning they are “supposed” to be.

Through school socialization that is reconfigured to interrupt mainstream evaluative contexts in school experiences, teachers act to support students’ engagement in the discovery of multiple aspects of their identities. This can be accomplished through curriculum that clearly expands upon mainstream relational norms of society (for example, making the relationships across race, ethnicity, and achievement clear). Caraballo (2016) described this student learning

dynamic as “identities-in-practice” and “selves-in-practice” in the figured world of the classroom (p. 5-8). Through daily instructional routines and social interactions, students navigate their school world and develop their identities with the enacted curriculum. Caraballo (2016) argues culturally sustaining pedagogy challenges teachers to exercise a more expansive understanding of cultures. When teachers do so, as students experiment and enact their “identities in practice” in a classroom environment that cultivates multiple identities and literacies “that students already possess” (p. 50). Echoing the calls of scholars of cultural relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy argues for teaching that guides students to develop a metacognitive awareness of discourses of power to understand how to navigate schooling and society (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). A responsive and relevant LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy, then, requires teachers to understand that the figured heteronormative culture enacted in schools constricts the expression or practice of identities beyond the binary of cisgender heterosexuality.

**Reflexivity as a basis for culturally relevant and sustaining practitioners.**

Teachers need to understand their own cultural positionalities as one part of a social context that exists in tandem with the social cultural capital students bring to school. This is a fundamentally important role of an ongoing reflexivity practice. In this context, reflexivity is the ongoing practice of examining one’s own culture and identity in order to be attuned with the cultures and identities of the students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Paris & Alim 2014). Critical reflectivity about how their cultural identity is situated in systems of social access and privilege enables teachers to become conscious and self-disclosing about their own cultural heritage and practices. The consciousness resulting from critical reflectivity allows teachers to recognize that cultural literacies, skills and practices that students bring can and should be

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welcomed as strengths and assets. Additionally, while the three asset-based pedagogies describe the importance of ongoing critical reflexivity, culturally sustaining pedagogy includes self-critique of instructional practice and procedural routines to assure that the cultures teachers empower result in students' ability use their culture in social and academic experiences in the classroom.

For teachers, practicing ongoing reflexivity about their own culture and identity positions them to understand the multiplicity of cultures and identities represented by their students. Paris and Alim (2014) emphasized one additional conceptual tenet of culturally sustaining pedagogy—the importance of asset-based pedagogies to attend to, incorporate, and center the culture of youth, our students, as they represent it to us and enact it in schools. As these authors argue, teacher pedagogy must include an attention to witnessing, validating, and incorporating productive and empowering aspects of student-enacted culture. Of equal importance, Paris and Alim caution, is the need for teachers to recognize and interrupt the reenactment of regressive cultural practice students learn from the society around them. To this point, they contend, “culturally sustaining pedagogy must work with students to critique regressive practices (e.g., homophobia, misogyny, racism) and raise critical consciousness” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 92).

### **Queer Theory**

Although not specifically a pedagogical approach, queer theory (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Sykes, 2011; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010) offers important insights for teachers regarding the relevance of deconstructing binary paradigms in educational settings, such as an articulation of the processes that normalize certain groups of people in school and marginalize others. Queer theory contextualizes instruction as a way to interrupt these processes. Further, queer theory delineates a knowledge base about Sexual

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Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression (SOGIE) related to the limitations of heterosexism and heteronormativity. Heterosexism is the belief set that heterosexuals are superior to any other sexual identity (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). Heteronormativity is a social construct that describes the complex ways heterosexual culture is the norm against which other identities of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression devalued. (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). Put another way, heteronormativity can be described as “the taken-for-granted and institutionalized dominance of heterosexuality” (Sykes, 2011, p. 424). It is the multiple daily ways beliefs and attitudes about heterosexuality are put into social interactions and practice that reinforce heterosexuality as normal. Additionally, these frames from queer theory can be used to position the body of background knowledge and conceptual understanding of the SOGIE and LGBTQ culture as necessary part of professional reflexivity, a concept introduced in the culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and sustaining pedagogy conceptual frameworks.

School culture embodies the status quo social discourse about SOGIE in our society. Queer theory posits heteronormativity as the everyday interactions that construct heterosexuality as the normal and natural way of being in relationships and constructing family units. Queer theory further argues that the pervasive existence of heteronormativity reinforces binary concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Through these heteronormative paradigms of SOGIE, non-heterosexual people are pathologized and devalued; and people who are, or are perceived as, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer are positioned as invisible, deviant, taboo, unacceptable, and abnormal (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2007; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Watson & Miller, 2012; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Additionally, queer theory explains that discourses of tolerance marginalize people (DePalma &

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Atkinson, 2009). Tolerance perpetuates the very stereotypes it purports to eliminate because tolerance of a group of people means accepting them as marginalized as well as accepting the societal practices that sustain their marginalized presence (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). In our schools and society, heterosexuality is so ingrained as the normal and healthy way of being that providing mere tolerance for non-heterosexual people does nothing to reconstruct and center LGBTQ people as part of what society defines as normative. Instead, they are maintained in the status of abhorrent, deviant, and/or inferior beings, labels which perpetuate harassment (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010).

In fact, as queer theory explains, heterosexism (the belief of heterosexuality as superior than any other sexual orientation) is such a powerful force that it produces homophobia (beliefs and acts of hatred of a sexuality other than heterosexuality) as a pervasive outcome with external and internal expressions. Externally, homophobia is expressed through hate-based behavior, and it is also internalized by LGBTQ people, who express and exemplify it as self-devaluation and negative self-beliefs (Sumara & Davis, 1999; Watson & Miller, 2012).

Using the concepts of heteronormativity and heterosexism to analyze school conditions highlights the need for accurate knowledge about SOGIE and LGBTQ people as a replacement for inaccurate, incomplete or harmful information about sexuality in curriculum. To address the concern that representing expansive models of SOGIE and centering LGBTQ people in curriculum places sexuality into curriculum, queer theory counters that all curriculum in school is de facto sexualized, since curriculum represents heteronormativity and sexuality as a matter of course (Sumara & Davis, 1999, Watson & Miller, 2012). Therefore, queer theory emphasizes the importance of developing teacher knowledge about the complex and binaried way knowledge of sexuality and gender expression are produced (Sumara & Davis, 1999; Watson & Miller, 2012;

Zacko-Smith and Smith, 2010). This knowledge base positions teachers to understand the context for the use of instruction that interrupts and reframes discourse of sexuality and gender identity/expression.

Queer theory also contextualizes instruction as a way to interrupt the processes that normalize and marginalize different groups of people (Sumara & Davis, 1999, Watson & Miller, 2012). Queer theory contributes the concept that teaching pedagogy is an important platform to instruct students about expansive models of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression and families, providing ways to interpret, normalize and contextualize perceived differences amongst people (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2007; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Researchers who draw on queer theory used a range of vocabulary to describe pedagogies that serve to interrupt heteronormativity, heterosexism, and the perpetuation of homophobic beliefs and behaviors (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). Yet, they share a common of purpose: to support a pedagogical shift that approaches all students in an assumptionless stance regarding SOGIE and to begin to re-create what is deemed normal (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). However, some of these researchers also challenge pedagogies that fail to explicitly and comprehensively address the entrenchment of heteronormativity.

Anti-homophobia and anti-heterosexist pedagogies, as exemplified by Robinson and Ferfolja (2008), seek to redress inequities imposed by homophobia and heterosexism. These authors asserted that anti-homophobia and anti-heterosexist instruction in school helps question the paradigm of heteronormativity and heterosexism. Further, DePalma & Atkinson (2009) assert that anti-homophobia and anti-heterosexist pedagogies are interventions designed to stop specific behaviors. However, they implore that that educators must go beyond anti-homophobia and anti-bullying as effective discourses of tolerance that ground the binary of us versus “those

LGBTQ people.” The component that must be added into instructional pedagogy is, they insist, counter-heteronormative work. Countering-heteronormative work aligns here to practices in culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Specifically, the attribute of instruction that expands critical metacognitive understanding of dominant social paradigms that construct student access and success in education. Counter-heteronormativity work expands the paradigm of SOGIE to be more inclusive and expansive than the binary of heteronormativity. It creates a positive conceptualization and space for expansive definitions of SOGIE and supports the presence of people who are LGBTQ in school settings. However, the reason for this DePalma & Atkinson (2009) study, and indeed the basis for my current study, is to further explore elementary pedagogy that enhances develops an effective ongoing means of challenging heteronormativity. DePalma and Atkinson (2009) revealed:

We do not however agree on how this should be done [challenging heteronormativity].

Whether tolerant silences and invisibilities can best be disrupted by highlighting lesbian and gay histories and attacking hetero-gender stereotypes or by troubling the binaries implicit in the very categories of lesbian/gay, boy/girl is a question that remains alive and unresolvable in our research (p. 839)

A comprehensive, counter-heteronormative foci embedded in curriculum and instruction can systematize practices that, as a matter of course, challenge perceptions of differences and interrupt the assumed discourses that create categories of people. Instead, counter-heteronormative practice facilitates an understanding of how differences come to be perceived and understood (Sumara and Davis, 1999; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Indeed, there is agreement in the research base of queer theorists reviewed in this study that an expansive definition of both sexuality and gender would position educators to address sexual orientation

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and gender identity/expression as concepts that are flexible and unfixed. In doing so, stigma associated with these personal identity categories could be removed. As Zacko-Smith and Smith summarized,

The true innovation that the use of queer theory provides educators is that it changes the focus from understanding LGBTQ students as ‘other,’ prompting a reexamination of what it means to view sexuality without the use of strict labels and ‘organizational terms’ that have become all too easy to associate with it, and which ultimately serve a mechanism for harassment, discrimination and ...violence. (p. 6)

The conceptual frames borrowed here from queer theory paint broad brushstrokes regarding the interruption of heteronormativity through how teacher language portrays SOGIE and the positionality of LGBTQ people in school and society. Pedagogy informed by queer theory—that is, teaching methods that critically deconstruct the meaning of words and concepts that reinforce what “normal” means regarding SOGIE—is a critical factor in creating school experiences supportive of LGBTQ youth (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2007; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Zacko Smith &, 2010).

### **Summary**

With some of the known elements of culturally relevant, responsive and sustaining pedagogies and queer theory outlined above, an LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy can be developed based upon the investigation of individual teachers who are leaders with the use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction. Key elements of culturally relevant, responsive and sustaining pedagogy of particular relevance to this study include using an asset-centered pedagogy, understanding the evaluative context of education and school experience, and developing reflexivity as a foundational practice for teachers. These frames support the need for



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a grounding in cultural competency of SOGIE and the LGBTQ community that parallels work about race and students/families of color. Such a practice, these frameworks informed, would begin with positioning teachers to see and understand the value of students connected to the LGBTQ community in any way, regardless of their own sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Additionally, culturally relevant, responsive and sustaining pedagogy can be used to center the integration of positive images, language, and themes of the LGBTQ cultural community into instruction and learning experience.

Queer theory contributes a deeper understanding of the discourse in educational settings that perpetuates the practice of access, privilege, and inclusion being inequitably distributed across binaried distinctions of gender and sexuality. For this study, the conceptual frame about heteronormativity and heterosexism accomplish this need. Queer theory frames the notion that instruction can be used as a tool to both interrupt and replace discourses reproduced in school settings that privilege some and marginalize others. The umbrella concept of counter-heteronormativity practices provides a strong basis for studying and identifying the needed knowledge base, skills set and other instructional attributes for an LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy. Thus, when synthesized, cultural relevant, responsive and sustaining pedagogy and queer theory inform a substantial basis for the research needed to develop an LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy that expands efforts to re-create what is deemed “normal” in school.

### **Literature Review**

For decades, LGBTQ students have been surveyed for research on their experiences in school. They have candidly reported about other students’ anti-LGBTQ behavior (Horn & Saewyc, 2010; Russell, Kosciw). Since the 1990s, LGBTQ students have provided descriptions of experiences that include overwhelming levels of anti-gay language, name-calling, bullying,

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relational aggression and exclusion from their peers. The 2007 GLSEN survey, for example, revealed that nearly all LGBTQ students surveyed heard homophobic remarks, and over 75% heard them “frequently or often” (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008), and more recent surveys have reported similar results (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). LGBTQ students have also described their experience of school staff failing to respond to homophobic behavior (Birkett & Espelage, 2009) and failing providing positive LGBTQ-inclusive instruction (Kosciw et al, 2014). Name-calling, harassment, lack of staff support, and the absence of positive images in curriculum and instruction all contribute to jeopardized safety and academic success for LGBTQ youth in schools.

Unsafe school conditions result in immediate and long-term consequences for LGBTQ youth. In the short run, LGBTQ students’ ability to fully participate in school is interrupted by higher rates of absenteeism due hostile school conditions. In the long run, research shows that LGBTQ students engage in high risk behavior such as drug use, and have emotional problems including depression, suicidality and other forms of emotional distress (Birkett et al, 2009; Russell et al, 2010). These factors are often associated with lower academic achievement and a lack of interest in post-secondary education in comparison to their non-LGBTQ peers.

A review of current research in this area shows that researchers who examine factors contributing to hostile LGBTQ school conditions are shifting their attention away from the role of individual anti-LGBTQ incidences and are focusing instead on the role cultural norms and school practices play in sustaining pernicious individual behaviors (Horn, Kosciw, Russell, 2009). For example, recent studies report that teachers claim a number of factors contribute to their inability to respond to LGBTQ-targeted bullying and harassment, and interfere with proactive instruction on topics of sexual orientation and gender identity expression (Millburn &

Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Additionally, curricular resources lack positive content about LGBTQ people, thereby reinforcing the messaging to all students that LGBTQ people are not valued or respected on a par with cisgender (someone whose gender corresponds to their assigned sex), and heterosexual peers. Ultimately, all of these—and likely additional under-researched factors—combine to prohibit LGBTQ youth from their rightful access to and participation in K-12 education. In this literature review, I will emphasize three emerging themes regarding the experience of LGBTQ students in schools. Specifically, I will discuss the impact current school conditions have on LGBTQ youth, the factors that contribute to the daily experience of our youth, and the need for LGBTQ-inclusive education. In response to this wide array of factors sustaining unsafe and unwelcoming school climates and the negative experience of LGBTQ youth, I argue that the development and implementation of an LGBTQ-inclusive culturally relevant pedagogy is imperative to produce safe, welcoming, and inclusive schools for all students.

### **The Damaging Experiences Endured by LGBTQ Youth in School**

Multiple surveys and studies (e.g., Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014; Russell, Kosciw, Horn & Saewyc, 2010; Russell, Seif & Troung, 2001; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016) have documented the experiences of LGBTQ students across the nation and, recently, across the globe. These works have primarily focused on secondary school students (one exception includes GLSEN's study, "Prejudice and The Playground: Elementary School Climate in the United States"; Harris Interactive, 2012). Over the last fifteen years, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has conducted a biannual national survey to develop a portrait of LGBTQ high school students' experience in schools. To assure the voices of a diverse group of LGBT youth were

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represented, GLSEN targeted outreach to national, regional and local organizations and social networking serving transgender youth, youth of color and urban/rural LGBTQ youth ages 13-21. Since 2009, the survey annual sample size ranged from 6000-8600 students, who were drawn from all 50 states.

The biannual surveys from GLSEN tracked patterns of factors contributing to unsafe school conditions that interfere with LGBTQ students' access to the educational services to which they are entitled. These factors include LGBTQ-biased language used by students and educators, bullying, harassment, assault and relational aggression (e.g., being subject to rumors, gossip and social exclusion by peers). For instance, the 2005 NSCS reported that nearly two-thirds (64.3%) of students surveyed reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and 40.7% felt unsafe due to hostile experiences related to gender expression. Additionally, over one out of three (37.8%) of students reported enduring physical assault based upon their sexual orientation, and a quarter (26.1%) based upon their gender expression (Kosciw and Diaz, 2006).

As a concrete example of the language LGBTQ students endure in bullying and harassment, 70-90% of students in the GLSEN NSCS surveyed report hearing "gay" used negatively as well as terms such as "faggot", and "dyke" (Kosciw et al, 2008). The 2011 survey revealed that the negative content in which the word 'gay' is used has a higher frequency of use than racist, sexist or gender-biased terms as reported by LGBTQ students (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer, 2012). In 2013, more evidence on the experience of gender non-conforming or transgender students was reported—in this iteration, language such as "tranny" and "mangirl" exemplified a prevalence of transgender-focused derogatory language (Kosciw et al, 2014).

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Often, derogatory language is used by students who are not aware or do not necessarily intend to be hurtful to LGBT youth, but these students nevertheless contribute to a negative or hostile school climate. As an example, consider the term “no homo,” which is used to signify that the speaker does not want to be identified as a gay person. While this comment may not be intentionally aimed at a gay individual, the language still contributes to a hostile climate when heard (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009). The term “that’s so gay” can also fit into this category when used by students who are genuinely unaware of its meaning and its impact, also noted by Kosciw and colleagues (2009). Saying “that’s so gay,” meaning “stupid” or “boring,” or any descriptor to demean someone or something, even when not directed to a specific person or group of people at school, nonetheless contributes to a hostile school culture. Additionally, students often rationalize that homophobic language is acceptable to use when they think no LGBTQ people are present to hear and be affected by it. This logic does not account for the fear children or friends of LGBTQ people when they hear homophobic epithets such as “that’s so gay.” An LGBTQ student in the 2013 GLSEN survey described this social dynamic, observing, “Students think there aren’t any LGBT students in the school, so if they say something is ‘so gay’ or they call their friend a faggot, they think no one would be offended” (Kosciw et al, 2014, p. 19).

Notably, in recent years, there have been some patterns of improvement in the experience of LGBTQ students in school. The 2013 GLSEN NSCS, highlighted some reduction of verbal harassment over time. For example, the 2013 survey demonstrated that students’ report of verbal harassment and assault peaked in 2007 followed by a 20% reduction in student reporting about the same experience in 2013. The positive aspect of this is a drop of 20% points in student reporting was the outcome of less reported verbal harassment. However, despite this one-fifth

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reduction for this indicator, the problem remains severe (60 percent of surveyed students still reported that they frequently experienced verbal harassment and assault). Unfortunately, physical assault rates did not follow the same reported decline of the decrease of verbal harassment—physical harassment decreased in this same study since a peak at 2007, but just barely (Kosciw et al, 2014).

More recently, electronic harassment (cyberbullying and the use of electronic devices), using texts, emails, instant messages, and/or posts on social network sites to threaten or harm others, has also become more recognized as a modality for bullying and harassment. In 2013, 49 percent of surveyed LGBTQ students indicated that they experienced electronic harassment and 14.8 percent reported electronic harassment as a common experience (Kosciw et al, 2014).

The Safe Place to Learn Report used two surveys, the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and the Prevent School Harassment (PSH) survey. CHKS is designed to be representative of all students statewide and is the largest California survey of student health risk and resiliency and includes a question about harassment targeting actual and perceived sexual orientation. The PSH survey was designed to get a more specific look at school safety based upon both actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity through the lens of LGBTQ youth (CSSC & 4-H, 2004).

The Safe Place to Learn Report revealed that 7.5 percent of the 230,000 student respondents (approximately 17,800 students surveyed) reported being harassed or bullied because they were perceived by others to be gay or lesbian (California Safe Schools Coalition & 4-H Center for Youth Development, 2004:CSSC& 4-H). Translated to California's total middle and high school enrollment, this means that over 200,000 students may be the targets of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation every year (CSSC & 4H, 2004). The Safe Place to

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Learn Report (CSSC & 4-H, 2004) also emphasized that students who are victims of harassment due to actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are more likely to experience repeated attacks (CSSC & 4-H, 2004). In the California report, the Safe Place to Learn Report, students reported that harassment created hostile school climates for gender non-conforming students (CSSC & 4-H, 2004). This report identified that over one quarter of surveyed students reported being harassed because they were “not masculine enough” or “not feminine enough” (CSSC & 4-H, p. 2). Additionally, over half of the student participants said their schools were unsafe for “guys who aren’t as masculine as other guys,” and 34% said their schools were unsafe for “girls who aren’t as feminine as other girls” (CSSC & 4-H, 2004, p. 2).

### **Staff Failure to Intervene**

Across the literature, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer students reported that teachers often fail to address the bullying and harassment they experience due to their sexual orientation and gender expression. For instance, the GLSEN 2013 NSCS survey reported that more than half of the LGBTQ students surveyed (56.7%) who were harassed or assaulted did not report it to staff because their prior experiences in school had created doubt in their minds that an effective intervention would occur—or because they believed that the intervention by adults on campus would make the situation worse. In addition, the same survey revealed that almost two thirds (61.6%) of LGBTQ students reported that school staff did not respond at all when students sought support. Describing this traumatic experience, in the 2013 GLSEN NSCS, a student stated, “I have been so hurt at that school. I have gotten beat up, almost killed, and no one there would do anything about it, except one teacher” (Kosciw et al, 2014, p. 24). Additionally, students get information from adults from unspoken messages, including the lack of advocacy and support when they need it, that lead them to believe that they are to blame for the harassment

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they experience. One 2013 GLSEN high school respondent illustrated this by stating, “Almost all of the time, I would end up being the one in trouble because it’s ‘my fault for drawing negative attention to myself’” (Kosciw et al, 2014).

The California CHKS and PHS (CSSC & 4-H, 2004) reveal students’ observation that teachers do not respond when negative comments and slurs occur about gender presentation. In these surveys only 40% of all students surveyed (and 39% of the LGBTQ students) reported they heard teachers stop other students. Slurs and negative comments are clearly associated with harassment about students’ sexual orientation (CSSC & 4-H, 2004). Over three quarters (81%) of LGBTQ students reported hearing negative comments about gender compared to 63% of students overall (CSSC & 4-H, 2004). While the CHKS and PHS surveyed seventh, ninth and eleventh grade students, the need for teachers to address this type of harassment is not confined to secondary school. Actually, there has been a gap in scholarly research centered that identify and address factors impacting the experience of LGBTQ families in elementary schools (Wimberley, 2015). In 2012 GLSEN published a school climate study about elementary school in the United States (Harris Interactive, 2012). Indeed, elementary school students and teachers also report hearing anti-gay language and gender-biased language (Harris Interactive, 2012).

Preservice and in-service educators have also reported being under-prepared to respond to LGBTQ-targeted biased behavior, bullying and harassment (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). A variety of research sources confirmed that many teachers can be unsupportive of LGBTQ students’ needs. In studying homophobic bullying and school climate negative effect on LGBT students, Birkett reviewed a variety of quantitative surveys of students in which student described their daily experience in public schools. For example, in 2005, found that more than half of students who participated in a survey of New York schools who were



harassed for gender identity and sexual orientation saw school personnel in the vicinity who observed the harassment but failed to assist them (Birkett et al, 2009). As Watson & Miller (2012) highlighted, when authority figures such as school staff neglect taking corrective action when anti-LGBT harassment and violence is directed from one student to another, it is equivalent to sanctioning dehumanizing treatment and reinforcing homophobic behavior as acceptable at school. They further warned that educators are complicit in their silence when they fail to act in such situations (Watson & Miller, 2012). In other work (e.g., Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Milburn & Palladino, 2012), teachers corroborated students' depiction of teachers as ignoring students' need for support when homophobic behavior occurs. Teachers who are aware of their responsibility to support LGBTQ students identified that they need specific skills to assure they are using effective strategies (Milburn & Palladino, 2012).

### **Invisibility in Instruction and Curriculum**

In addition to directly harmful language and physical behaviors, the lack of positive images, language, and themes of LGBTQ people in schools may harm students' sense of place in the community by reinforcing their invisibility on school campuses (Kosciw, et al. 2014; Zacko-Smith & Smith 2010). Several studies have pointed to the negative effect of the lack of positive images and language on the self-esteem and emotional health of LGBTQ students (Biegel, 2010; Birkett & Espelage, 2009; Russell et al, 2010; Russell, 2011; Sherriff, Hamilton, Wigmore & Giambrone, 2011; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Research has also showed that continued use of traditional curriculum throughout our nation's schools has consequences associated with bullying, harassment and violence because it fails to provide information about LGBTQ people and topics. In the GLSEN 2013 school survey (Kosciw, et al. 2014), more than three quarters of students reported never receiving instruction that includes positive representations of LGBTQ

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people, history or events in their schools. Another 14.8% of students reported that the instruction they received actually contained negative content about LGBT topics (Kosciw et al, 2014). Over half the students surveyed over the six-year period between 2007 and 2013 reported that their teachers also made biased comments about sexual orientation and gender (Kosciw et al, 2014).

Curriculum has been neglected in the research literature on the historical trends of addressing needs of LGBTQ youth in public education, in part due the focus on addressing the prevalence of harassment and intervention of other immediate individual LGBTQ student safety needs (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Yet researchers in this educational subfield have also explained that inclusive curriculum supports student well-being and contributes to positive school climate (Russell, 2011; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010; Kosciw et al, 2014; UNESCO, 2106). For example, multiple studies have documented the positive effects reported by LGBTQ students when teachers provide LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction (Russell, 2011; Russell et al, 2010; Kosciw et al 2014). This instruction not only promotes a sense of validation and well-being for LGBTQ students, but is also associated with reduction in harassment by non-LGBTQ peers (Russell, 2011, CSSC & 4H, 2004). Additionally, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum helps non-LGBTQ students build empathy, begin to identify and intervene as peer advocates, and develop increased interest in experience and needs of their LGBTQ peers (Athanasos & Larrabee, 2003; Wernick, Kulick & Iglehart, 2013). Therefore, the need to understand and address barriers to LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum implementation is a critical component to needed school reform.

### **Denial of the Right to an Education and Future Opportunities**

The research base regarding LGBTQ students' experience school demonstrates that unsafe school conditions continue to have immediate and long-term consequences for LGBTQ youth in schools. For instance, LGBTQ youth have higher rates of absenteeism and truancy,

lower academic achievement, and lower rates of participation in post-secondary education than their non-LGBTQ peers. Additionally, LGBTQ youth are vulnerable to experiencing substantial health consequences, such as drug use, feelings of depression, suicidality (Birkett et al, 2009; Russell et al, 2010). These are discussed below.

**Absenteeism.** Absenteeism is a result of enduring ongoing conditions that can reach untenable proportions for LGBTQ youth. When students feel unsafe or unwelcome on school campuses, they may avoid school at particular times of the day or skip school altogether. As the 2013 GLSEN National School Climate Survey showed, the most common locations in which LGBTQ students feel unsafe, and thus remove themselves from, are Physical Education (nearly one third of students), gym classes (approximately 32%), school athletic fields or facilities (approximately 21%), and the school cafeteria or lunchroom (20.3%) (Kosciw et al, 2014). The presence of supportive teachers for LGBTQ students impacted student attendance. Additionally, the 2013 GLSEN National School Climate Survey reported that LGBTQ students' truancy and absenteeism occurred at rates three to seven times greater than the national average. Almost half of the students (48.9%) who identify no supportive staff at school cut class or skip school. As the number of supportive staff identified by students increased, the percentage of those who were truant decreased significantly. For example, only 21.6%, or approximately one fifth, of students who can identify 6 or more supportive teachers were truant (Kosciw et al, 2014).

Providing further evidence about LGBTQ student truancy and absenteeism in California, the Safe Place to Learn Report revealed that students who were harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation were more than three times as likely as students who were not harassed to miss at least one day of school in the last 30 days because they felt unsafe (CSSC & 4-H, 2004). When students are anxious about their safety on school campus, they do not just lose

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the opportunity for content instruction, but they also miss out on participating in school-based social activities. To varying extents, over two thirds of LGBTQ students avoided social functions such as dances or assemblies, due to feeling either uncomfortable or unsafe. These students also typically avoided participating in clubs and other extra-curricular events (Kosciw et al, 2014).

**Academic achievement.** The frequency and intensity of harassment experienced by LGBTQ students is also associated with an overall lower grade point average. For example, students who are targeted with LGBTQ bullying and harassment have grade point averages that lag over one third grade point behind their peers who were harassed less often (Kosciw et al, 2012; Kosciw et al, 2014). The California Safe Schools Coalition's Safe Place to Learn Report explained almost one quarter (24%) of California students who are harassed due to sexual orientation reported that their usual grades are Cs or lower, versus 17% of students who were not harassed (CSSC & 4-H, 2004). Harassment also impacts LGBTQ student high school graduation rates. In total, approximately 3.5% of LGBTQ students who responded to the 2013 GLSEN NSCS indicated they are not planning on finishing high school. Thus, failing to academically achieve on a par with their non-LGBTQ peers jeopardizes high school completion and graduation, although in the two GLSEN surveys reported here, some students struggled with grades and others attributed absenteeism as a factor in lacking the academic credits they needed to graduate (Kosciw et al, 2012; Kosciw et al, 2014). As an illustration, one student explained that a school policy of losing credits due to two or more unexcused absences had resulted in lowered academic outcomes for (this anonymously quoted) student—and those absences stemmed from fear of physically endangerment on the school campus.

**Post-secondary aspirations and participation.** Studies have also indicated that LGBTQ students subjected to harassment in school were less likely to complete high school or to attend

college. Overall, the number of LGBTQ students reporting that they would not pursue a post-secondary education was double that of the general school population who did not plan to do so (Kosciw et al, 2009; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Russell et al 2010; Russell, 2011). High school dropout rates are also higher for LGBTQ students, who expressed a number of reasons for leaving school before graduation in the 2013 GLSEN National School Climate Survey. Primarily, these students found their schools to be hostile—almost six out of ten students who were planning not to graduate, or were unsure about whether they would finish high school, cited this reason. Specifically, they described abject frustration and dejection from having endured ongoing histories of being physically harassed (for example getting kicked or hit) or verbally harassed by peers they described as bigots or homophobic (Kosciw et al, 2014). LGBTQ students who left school prior to graduation often made what they believed were sound alternative decisions about pathways to achieving their high school diploma. Many planned to complete a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). However, analysis from the 2013 GLSEN survey cautions that the aspiration to take the GED might have been well intended but actually has potentially limiting consequences, since the high school equivalency diploma has not been associated with the same post-secondary educational attainment or financial earnings return as high school diplomas (Kosciw et al, 2014).

**Health consequences experienced by LGBTQ students.** Researchers have confirmed that the frequency of victimization based upon both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression has a negative impact on students' physical and psychological health (Birkett et al, 2009; Kosciw et al, 2009; Russell et al, 2010). These factors included experiences in social interactions such as homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism as well as discrimination, stigma and lack of support in schools (Sheriff et al, 2011). The National Longitudinal Study of

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Adolescent Health (“Add Health”) sought to identify the risk and protective factors that occur within family and school related to adolescent health. In the initial study, over twelve thousand secondary students and parents were interviewed. This early study is of relevance to LGBTQ youth because while focusing on risk factors to adolescent health, it included information about same-sex romantic attraction and school experience (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001; Bearman, Jones & Udry, 1997). The study showed that school relationships between teachers, peers, and social interaction throughout the school day for students who identified as sexual minority youth (defined in this study as those in same sex relationships, but not necessarily identifying as lesbian or gay) resulted in negative attitudes about school. For example, sexual minority youth who sought LGBTQ-supportive counseling did so to address depression, social isolation, and elevated suicide risk (Russell, Seif & Truong, 2001). In the same study, Russell and colleagues (2001) found that Lesbian and Gay youth in showed an increased likelihood of self-destructive behavior (Russell et al, 2001). The California Safe Place to Learn report echoed these results- over half (55%) of students reported feeling hopeless and sad to such a level that they stopped participating in preferred activities for at least two weeks throughout the past school year (CSSC & 4-H, 2004). Furthermore, California students harassed based upon sexual orientation are more than three times as likely as students who were not harassed to seriously consider suicide (CSSC & 4-H, 2004).

LGBTQ students experience increased social isolation and anxiety in schools where an absence of direct homophobic assault is reported but anti-gay language such as “faggot”, “dyke” or “queer” is described as pervasive (Birkett, 2009). Additionally, increased health risk factors such as psychological distress, substance use/abuse and sexual risk-taking when students were victimized based upon the LGBTQ status (Horn et al, 2009, Birkett et al, 2009). Depression is

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particularly high among LGBTQ youth. The national depression rate for students averaged 4%; however, for LGBT youth some rates are as high as 41% of surveyed males and 28% for females (Birkett et al, 2009). Further, substance abuse was reported at much higher rates for students harassed for their sexual orientation and their gender identity/expression (SOGIE) than students who were not harassed. These students reported smoking, drinking alcohol, binge drinking, marijuana use, amphetamine or methamphetamine use, and inhalant use. For example, LGBTQ students were more than twice as likely to use inhalants and nearly twice as likely to report binge drinking as students who were not harassed (CSSC & 4-H, 2004).

As these studies show, the fear associated with being targeted for harassment based upon sexual orientation and gender identity/expression results in additional high-risk behavior. For example, compared to their peers who were not harassed, students harassed based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation report being threatened or injured with a weapon. Additionally, the percentage of students who have been harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and then resorted to carrying a weapon to school for protection from assault during the past school year was almost four times greater (19%), than the 5% of students who were not harassed (CSSC & 4-H, 2004).

Students who are questioning their sexual orientation are particularly vulnerable to serious emotional distress that results in detrimental outcomes. For youth in a questioning process, the stress of recognizing and determining one's own sexual orientation, coupled with schools' environments of heterosexism and homophobia, may account for increased levels of suicidality, drug use and school problems than their peers (Birkett et al, 2009). As an illustration, Birkett used data collected via a quantitative survey given every 5 years to 7-12<sup>th</sup> grader school students to study how school features such as climate and homophobic victimization had a

negative influence on over seven thousand middle school students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning youth. Her report indicated that sexually questioning youth rated higher than their heterosexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual peers for depression and suicidal feelings, alcohol and drug use and truancy (Birkett et al, 2009).

### **Contributing Factors to LGBTQ Students' Experience in School**

A complex constellation of school-wide factors contributes to maintaining unsafe and marginalizing school cultures for LGBTQ youth in public schools. For one, a lack of background knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression and of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer students and families impedes teachers and site administrators from taking an active role in intervening when bullying occurs (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2013). Second, a dearth of LGBTQ-inclusive instructional resources hinders the development of a positive LGBTQ-inclusive school culture. Finally, a lack of both background knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identification curtail the quality of teacher, staff and student relationships with one another in school settings (Faunce, 2008; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2013; Sheriff et al, 2011; Sykes, 2011; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). I discuss each of these next.

**Lack of context/background knowledge.** A lack of background knowledge contributes to the perpetuation of LGBTQ-focused bullying and harassment (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Queer theory, as explained in the conceptual framework section, provides a conceptual framework of how sexual orientation and gender identification/expression are constructed as binaries and therefore perpetuate notions of difference, marginalization and invisibility. Educators who are knowledgeable about the relationship between heteronormativity, heterosexism, and contemporary definitions of sexual orientation and gender



identification/expression can shift away from reinforcing this status quo (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Sykes, 2011; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010).

**Curriculum without LGBTQ-inclusive content.** The absence of LGBTQ-inclusive instructional content and materials in school reinforces the message that LGBTQ students are not valued and respected. Conversely, the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instructional content and materials acknowledges and validates the presence of LGBTQ people and their experience (Kosciw et al, 2014; Russell, 2011; Russell et al, 2010). In addition to contributing to LGBTQ students feeling undervalued and disrespected, the impact of curriculum and instruction devoid of positive LGBTQ-content and discussion compounds the social isolation they experience. For example, when teachers neglect to use LGBT-inclusive curriculum, they lose the opportunity to counteract the association of LGBTQ people as abnormal and invalid. In stark contrast, heterosexual students see themselves in curriculum and are validated by it (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010) beginning at very young age in elementary school, as students internalize messages about socially acceptable behaviors about genders of male and female and about relationships between genders (Harris Interactive, 2012). Additionally, Zacko-Smith & Smith (2010) explained when curriculum neglected to include positive information about sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and family configuration, non-LGBTQ students respond negatively to LGBTQ peers because they perceived LGBTQ people as different from the expected norm of heterosexuality and male/female gender binary. Conversely, Athanases & Larrabee (2003) explain in their study that when provided with curriculum allowing students to understand sexual orientation and gender diversity they gained social emotional skills, supported and advocated for their LGBTQ peers more often.

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Educators historically teach from a heteronormative stance and doing otherwise is a departure from most teachers' instructional practice. This is one reason educators reported a lack of background knowledge about curricular resources and how to use them (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010), a need corroborated by the 2011 and 2013 GLSEN NSCSs. In these surveys, students were asked about the presence of LGBTQ content in their academic instruction. The surveys revealed that only a very small percentage of students received instructions with positive images, language and themes of LGBTQ people in history and events (16.8 % and 18.5% respectively). Students in this survey also explained that some content in classes was disparaging and negative regarding LGBT people (Kosciw et al, 2014).

In addition to the lack of positive content in teacher-provided instruction, half of the students reported school libraries were lacking information and resources about LGBTQ people and history and library computers blocked access to content about LGBTQ people (Birkett & Espelage, 2009; Kosciw et al, 2012; Kosciw et al, 2014; Russell et al, 2010). Over half (54.7%) of surveyed students were unable to conduct internet research on topics related to LGBTQ people due to blocked internet access (Kosciw et al, 2014). The paucity of LGBTQ-inclusive resource materials in libraries reinforces LGBTQ students' experience of being invisible and not being valued as school community members, something not experienced by their non-LGBTQ peers. This lack of access to LGBTQ-inclusive materials also impacts students' ability to create representation of themselves and present LGBT themes in reports and other academic projects.

**Lack of instructional implementation.** Teachers reported various reasons for their reticence to integrate sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as a topic in the classroom. Some of the beliefs they held included that LGBTQ students cause or are responsible for the treatment they receive (Russell, Day, Ioverno & Toomey; 2016) and that including

information about SOGIE will draw attention to sexuality and make the school and class conditions worse (Milburn & Palladino, 2012). Some teachers avoided participation in this aspect of instruction due to their own personal beliefs and values about LGBTQ people and sexuality (Millburn & Palladino, 2012). For example, religious beliefs have been used as a rationale for excluding positive images of LGBTQ-membered families from curriculum. Additionally, other teachers reported believing that interrupting homophobic or heterosexist behavior draws attention to difficult or controversial topics that should only be addressed on an individual basis (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). Even teachers who reported being willing and interested in LGBTQ-focused instruction and bullying prevention felt underprepared, specifically describing that they lacked the range of language to do so (Faunce, 2013; Milburn & Palladino 2012). At the elementary level, some teachers believed elementary-aged students need to be protected from information about sexual orientation (Letts & Spears, 1999), and also feared repercussions from disapproving parents (Sykes, 2011).

These barriers contribute to the lack of teacher commitment to effect change in hostile school cultures for LGBTQ people (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). This same research illustrates that “willing teachers” (i.e., teachers who want to respond and use instruction as a way to reduce LGBTQ bullying and harassment) have, in fact, asked for the resources to increase their skills and confidence (Milburn & Palladino 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). In addition to providing support for these willing educators, I argue that reticent or avoidant teachers also require knowledge and resources in order to develop ownership of their role to address the needs of LGBTQ students. The development of such an ownership stance will, in turn, support the activation of their commitment and professional skill set to effect change for both individual

students and their school's culture of inclusion (Anderson, 2010; Davies, 1990; Paris & Lung, 2008).

### **The Need for a Cohesive LGBTQ-inclusive Pedagogy**

Many teachers unwittingly participate in sustaining the discourse of heteronormativity with students until they, as teachers, understand the intended and unintended consequences of relaying heteronormative values through instruction (Biegel, 2010; Faunce, 2013; Letts & Sears, 2007; Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Professional development for pre-service and in-service teachers has not addressed, or has been insufficient in addressing, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, heteronormativity and heterosexism (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). Teachers require an understanding of the cultural paradigms of heteronormativity and heterosexism for two key reasons. One is so that they understand the influence those cultural paradigms have on the everyday experiences of LGBTQ students in school. The second is so teachers are positioned to respond effectively to cultural norms and work to interrupt them. Information highlighting a conceptual shift from notions of a rigid binary of heterosexual/LGBTQ and male/female to more inclusive frames of gender fluidity, and the range of sexual orientations, would fill a missing gap in content knowledge allowing teachers to discuss and respond to LGBTQ students' advocacy needs with their peers (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Furthermore, once provided with information, teachers require ongoing learning opportunities to learn how to put these ideas to work in their daily instruction. The necessity for an LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy for use by educators will likely only increase as LGBTQ youth self-identify and come out at younger ages and in greater numbers than before (Biegel, 2010; Russell et al, 2010; Russell et al, 2016; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010).

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An additional function of addressing this topic in professional development is to supply tools and language for interrupting homophobic behavior, and to position educators to integrate LGBTQ people, families and themes into instruction for all students (Biegel, 2010; Letts & Spears, 1999; Millburn and Palladino, 2012; Rodriguez and Pinar, 2007; Zacko-Smith & Smith 2010). An updated pedagogy that includes an expansive and inclusive notion of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression is needed to create a professional understanding of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction by teachers. An LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy enacted throughout a school would fill the void in current teacher support and provide a comprehensive framing of this content aligned with methodology and practice across content areas.

The development of an LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogy can be informed by the contemporary research on existing culturally relevant pedagogies explained in the conceptual review. The body of research for culturally relevant pedagogy generally defines culture as the range of ways people perceive, participate and evaluate the world around them. Brown-Jeffy & Cooper (2011) state that the purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy is to support teachers in teaching about diversity “in order to ameliorate the effects of cultural discontinuity” (p.66) that exists between school and home community. An LGBTQ-inclusive culturally relevant pedagogy can be an appropriate model for changing the hostile school conditions LGBTQ students and students affiliated with LGBTQ families. It is lacking in current research. The LGBTQ-focused interventions in the biannual 2013 GLSEN NSCS identified some but not significant or consistent changes in school culture. Related research recognizes the need to seek and provide culture-based versus individual incident based LGBTQ-inclusive approaches as a possible reform process yielding more significant results (Birkett et al, 2009; Russell et al, 2010; Russell et al, 2016).

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Attributes of culturally relevant, responsive and sustaining Pedagogies are a promising foundation to address needs of LGBTQ youth and creating authentic inclusion of LGBTQ community members in schools. The important main attributes addressed in the conceptual framework and this literature review are developing educator and student cultural competence, understanding the social norms that marginalize students and family culture based upon sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, building skills to navigate systems of power in school and society (Brown-Jeffy, 2011). As Ladson-Billings (1995) explained, a pedagogy “challenges the current status quo of the social order” (p. 160) and addresses the multiple ways oppression operates. Teachers must be committed to addressing collective issues as well as individual student experience and empowerment (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such a comprehensive LGBTQ-inclusive conceptual framework would affect school-wide culture and integrate the teachers’ request for the background knowledge to support ownership, agency, and practice that are currently illustrated in research (Biegel, 2010; Faunce, 2013; Letts & Sears, 2007; Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Sumara & Davis, Sykes, 2011; Watson & Miller, 2012; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this methods section I detail the methodological approach, the rationale for its use in this study, and research questions. Additionally, I will explain the methods employed to collect and analyze the data. Finally, I will address what might be considered limitations to the methodology used to accomplish this research study and explore potential challenges to the execution of this study. I drew on Participatory Action Research (PAR) to develop a collaborative research design for investigating factors supporting the ongoing use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction in an elementary school. In this study, PAR supported elementary teachers in creating collaborative professional development to implement change at their school site (Zeller-Berkman, 2014) and supported the collection of data about both the personal/professional experience of teachers and administrators on a successful trajectory of using LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction throughout their elementary school. Co/autoethnography was used as one data source in this PAR project to explore and expand the expertise voiced by teachers using LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction and their work to engage other teachers at the school in doing so. Co/autoethnography is a form of collaborative self-study using written and oral narrative processes to understand and develop our understanding of factors that enabled our LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practice (Coia & Taylor, 2009). I assert that within their expertise are important nuanced insider perspectives of what knowledge and support other teachers need to develop an ongoing LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practice.

#### **Participatory Action Research**

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Participatory Action Research (PAR) was well suited to this research focus for several reasons. Action research engaged collaborative inquiry from all participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). PAR, in particular, foregrounds research into social conditions with an explicit focus on social justice. Therefore, one purpose of this PAR research approach was to investigate collaboratively identified issues that impact the community in which the research is undertaken (Zeller-Berkman, 2014). As Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained, the process itself serves to engage participants in sustained change for the organization. In this case, the community is an urban public elementary school. PAR allowed our study to be “intentional about capitalizing on the point of contact between participants in the study and the researchers to conceptualize methods that use the process, not only the product of research, as a potentially transformative experience” (Zeller-Berkman, 2014, p. 528). Additionally, this qualitative methodology offered opportunity to reflect on and evolve our practice as part of our research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In designing methods for collecting data in this PAR study, I decided to integrate Co/autoethnography as a method to both gather data about factors that influence teacher’s ability to use LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction as well as support learning and change in the participants’ professional practice and school.

When I conducted a pilot study using Co/autoethnography with a staff member at this school, we both found that it not only produced a clarity for us about what influenced our LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practices, it also provided a professional support system for our social justice work. As PAR seeks to support collaboration and impact on the participant community, I selected Co/autoethnography as a process that offered a similar experience for the teachers participating in this study. Both PAR and Co/autoethnography supported empowerment of participant researchers. The PAR methodology emboldened our roles as researchers within the



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live context of an elementary school. It allowed myself, as the primary researcher, along with the study's participants to acknowledge and embody a duality or multiplicity of our roles as educators and researchers. From our initial conversations, it was apparent that we share an excitement about stretching this space to strategically examine needs, opportunities, and challenges to deepening social justice/equity work at the school. In preparing to be participants in this study, there was acknowledgement of the larger group of equally committed staff members whose voice in this process was welcome and important. The school uses a "cycles of inquiry" process, that for us, refers to a process of engaging in our research as educators in planning, implementing, assessing and reflecting on our personal and professional growth and on the evolution of academic and social environment of the school community. This provided a platform for the collaborative nature of this study.

While introducing PAR as a research design to the participants, I shared four commitments about the use of PAR as a methodology published by Torre (n.d.) on the Public Science Project (PSP) webpage to ground this study in procedural ethical considerations as one tool to center and ground our work together. The PSP is a project supporting PAR research in educational (and other) settings which aims to bring differently positioned people together to design and implement research that interrogates social equity in community institutions. My interest in introducing ethical considerations used by the PSP was to frontload values and practices for this project in a manner that centered and supported our trust building and collaboration, given the different identities and experiences represented in this research study's Equity Team. These also offered the group a starting place for creating norms in our own language. This approach was important for group cohesion as well. As the primary researcher, I wanted to be explicit about empowering participant voice and I could not merely assume that individual members would

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recognize my intention to support and empower their humanity, skills and voice. The four considerations of PAR we discussed included (1) using a variety of methods to enable interconnected analysis at the individual, social, cultural and institutional levels; (2) building relationships and negotiating collaboration; (3) thinking through consequences of research and actions; and (4) acknowledging delegitimized voice, lift various forms of knowledge and equal participation in research development and process (<http://publicscienceproject.org/principles-and-values/>).

### **Research Questions**

During the first staff meeting, in which I explained I was interested in conducting a PAR study with teachers about increasing LGBTQ-instruction throughout the school, teachers who were interested met with me. During our individual interviews together, we reviewed this purpose as expressed in the first research question defined below and each teacher discussed what they were individually interested in researching in this study together and these responses focused on their own LGBTQ-inclusive instructional skills development. I synthesized the second research questions from their answers. The third question represents research on my role in the team as PD facilitator. At our first PD day, I reviewed our plans for the study and we collectively came to an agreement about the purpose of this study and the questions I synthesized from our interviews to identify salient factors that contribute to an Equity Team's leadership to support the integration of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instructional practices throughout the school year and with an increasing number of teachers at the school. An assumption embedded in these questions was that the personal and professional experiences of educators, as well as district and site administrator support, both influenced the integration/implementation of

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the LGBTQ-inclusive instruction into an elementary school instructional scope and sequence.

This study's research questions are:

- How does one elementary school's Equity Team integrate the use of LGBTQ-inclusive K-6 curriculum and instruction throughout the school?"
- What knowledge, practices, and facilitation skills are necessary to build teacher implementation of elementary school LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction?
- What professional knowledge, practices and characteristics do I use to successfully support and facilitate teacher learning and implementation about SOGIE and LGBTQ+ curriculum and instruction?

During the initial interviews, Equity Team members and I discussed their initial personal research interests during this study. I explained I would compile them for use during the PD days. While there were a variety of initial interests, these questions held interest for discussion, lesson plan development and for the planning of activities to help increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at the site:

- What instructional strategies and activities can be used with an upper grade student ally club to increase students' skill set leading instructional read alouds with lower grade students?
- What do we need to understand about critical literacy to strengthen the impact of instructional read alouds with positive images and themes about the LGBTQ community through an intersectional approach to building school wide identities as allies?
- How can we build increased trust and rapport for all staff as we engage in an increased school wide use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction?

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- What are some ways we can continue to engage in community building with parents and increase their knowledge and understanding of the need for LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction?

### **Context and Participants**

The study took place at Cherryland Elementary School, which is located in a densely populated, unincorporated area of Alameda County in the Hayward Unified School District (HUSD). Although designed to serve 500 students, today the school serves approximately 750-800 students per year. In the 2016-2017 school year the school's served 775 students. Approximately 650 students are Latino/x. The school offers a Bilingual Alternative program for students in Transitional Kindergarten and two academic programs in grades Kindergarten to Sixth: Structured English Immersion (SEI) and Bilingual Alternative (BA). Six elementary certificated served as research participants in this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. I have a longstanding relationship with this school site in my role as Coordinator of the HUSD Safe and Inclusive Schools Program. As noted in chapter one, for over a decade, I have provided professional development, strategic planning support and coaching to administrators and staff on equity topics such as anti-racist educator leadership, a social justice focused model of ally building/bullying prevention/intervention and the use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction. This work included understanding state and federal mandates, and ongoing skills development.

As the primary researcher, I introduced this research proposal to several staff I have worked with consistently over the past 5 plus years, and who had expressed interest in being participant/researchers in this study. More recently, I presented information about this research study opportunity at the August 2017 staff meeting for this school year. A total of six staff from

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the school volunteered to participate as members of the Equity Team. These staff members include the staff from earlier conversations and new participants. The Equity Team for this study included an ELL specialist (a teacher on special assignment), a kindergarten teacher, one third grade bilingual class teacher, two fourth grade teachers, one sixth grade bilingual teacher and myself. The members of this Equity Team volunteered themselves, yet I was also mindful that having a diverse group of educators would deepen the narratives and nuance of the data reflecting both society as well as educational experience. The Equity Team was diverse, representing men/women/gender queer people, gay/lesbian/ straight people, novice to veteran teachers (likely a span of 2-27 years of experience), Latina/o/x and white people.

**Equity Team Professional Development Series.** Data was collected through professional development sessions and interviews. Ongoing professional development enabled teacher leaders to design, model, and instruct with LGBTQ-inclusive Curriculum. Thus, we met as an Equity Team for a seven-hour day, on two of the three planned occasions: once in October, and once November. During this time, we conducted co/autoethnography writing, reflection and discussion for approximately 3 hours each day. The remainder of the time we developed and implemented a plan for supporting ourselves' and other teachers' increased use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. The Equity Team reflected on the previous year's goals for their Equity Team action plan focused on schoolwide LGBTQ-inclusive instruction implementation at this site and updated those goals for the coming school year. This process built additional rapport within the group and helped the group co-design activities for curriculum implementation at their school. Topics for our PD days, which were co-generated with the group, included:

- Creating norms of our work together based for PAR research
- Creating Individual growth goals and Equity Team goals

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- Review and selection of activities and teaching strategies to use with the staff at school
- Analyzing student work samples and other instructional documentation
- Planning and implementing school-wide activities that use LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction

All of the members of the Equity Team not only were leaders at their school site, but also provided direct instruction to students during classroom instruction as well as through schoolwide events. We agreed to use this research study to for multiple purposes, which included (a) sharing and supporting use of LGBTQ-inclusive resources with other staff, (b) expanding our own instructional skill, (b) modeling language and instruction for other educators, (c) expanding and improving current school wide practices. We used time in the second professional development day to reflect on outcomes of strategies and instruction that took place. Due to illness, I was neither able to conduct or reschedule the third PD day that was planned for January 2018. To meet the data collection needs of this research project, I contacted the other Equity Team members and we were able to design the reflective prompt for the third and final co-autoethnography session. The team independently conducted the full co-autoethnography process and shared written process through google docs. Each pair audiotaped their final discussion. The final individual interviews with the Equity Team members in January occurred as planned.

### **Data Sources and Procedures**

Our PAR approach used qualitative methods to capture and impact factors identified by our Equity team at one elementary school on the journey to successfully integrate LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction the fabric of our K-6 instructional practice. Within this PAR approach, I conducted topical and dialogic interviews, which provided data about individual Equity Team members' backgrounds, interests and positionalities as we entered into this

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research. In addition, multiple data sources were generated through the professional development series for our Equity Team's planning, learning, and implementation of our action plan to increase use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction throughout the school, as noted above. Specifically, co/autoethnography was used as part of this 3-day PD process, each of us on the Equity Team created both written and audio-recorded/transcribed data sources from our perspective about our personal/professional influences on our ability to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and our gaze about the politics and factors doing so in their elementary school. This included individuals' narratives about the development of our pedagogy and factors that influenced, supported or suppressed our practices at the school. In between the planned professional development days, the Equity Team members at the school also conducted their own instruction with students and led differing forms of direct teacher support. We discussed these activities during our dedicated professional development days, shared artifacts, and reflected on the impact of our instructional and leadership practice. During these conversations, student work and written documentation was collected. Finally, a variety of artifacts produced from instruction and leadership contributed to the body of data.

**Interviews.** I conducted a series of two 45-minute interviews each with individual team participants. The first interview followed a topical approach, and the second a dialogic format (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first interview occurred between October 3-9, 2017 during which time the individual team members expressed their interests, questions about being a member of this Equity Team and their ideas about individual goals they want to pursue within this research study. This was also a forum to discuss their use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with their students. The second interview occurred as part of the reflection process in January 2018, towards the conclusion of the professional development series. This dialogic interview

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allowed for clarifying and checking data, as well as co-generated emerging themes from the participants' writing experience as we came to closure with our narrative (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

**Data from Professional Development Sessions.** During the professional development sessions, I collected artifacts and materials generated by the group, audio recordings of ourselves reflecting on and constructing meaning from our PD discussion sessions, our written co/autoethnographic narratives, and our interactive reflections on these. I explain each of these in detail below.

**Artifacts.** During activities and discussions, I recorded the group's ideas and decisions on wall charts, which I collected along with other planning documents and materials produced during the three PD days.

**Audio recordings.** I recorded audio of the reflective discussion portion of co/autoethnography process at each of the 3 PD sessions. This audio recording provided data of our questions, reflections, interpretation and synthesis of our own and our co-autoethnography partners narratives. The reflective conversation was also an opportunity to interpret and add to the written stories as factors influencing our teaching practice was more deeply understood as we reflected on past factors, current application and decisions process of our professional practice with teachers and students.

**Co/autoethnography Narratives and interactive reflections.** This past year, I conducted a pilot study using co/autoethnography (Coia & Taylor, 2009) with one research participant to investigate our experience as Gay and Lesbian teacher-leaders using LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction. I sought to use this process to engage our Equity in this narrative process to collect perspectives and expertise of a participant group that includes both LGBTQ



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and cis/heterosexual colleagues. I offered an initial study question to focus our writing through our multiple lenses of our identities (as teachers, teacher/leaders, learners; from our experiences through our sexual orientations and our individual cultures).

As Coia and Taylor (2009) note, “Stories are interpretations but they also need continual interpreting. In co/autoethnography, our stories become texts of experiences that are interpreted” (p. 7). co/autoethnography served as an effective PAR methodology because the process was designed to allow all participant/researchers to embody our full personal and professional identities. We did so as we engaged in the task of individual writing, responding to each other’s writing through written comments and discussion, and ultimately coding this data for common patterns, similarities and areas of uniqueness and further inquiry questions. As described by Coia and Taylor (2009), co/autoethnography is based upon the tenet that subjectivity (our personal selves, identity, our values, beliefs, perceptions and prior experiences) shapes our professional thinking and decision making on a daily basis. Additionally, the co/autoethnography process is based upon our individual lived experiences of ourselves in the school’s daily context. As such, the process supported examination of social and structural conditions effecting our process of bringing increased visibility of LGBTQ people through curriculum and instruction. The reflective dialogue supported both participant/researcher understanding and ultimately of our presentation of our evolving constructed knowledge.

The co/autoethnography process is recursive in nature: we created/collected data through the written process. We engaged in data analysis through written reflection of peer writing. Additionally, our Equity Team co-created prompts for further rounds of co/autoethnography based upon ideas that surface in reflection. Adaptations were organic to the process and do not alter the integrity of this process. For example, Equity team members decided to use either

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google docs or hand-written reflection on days two and three of the Co/autoethnography process. The final part of the co/autoethnography process was a reflective group discussion. Each group discussion was charted, audiotaped and transcribed and provided additional written data sources. A co/autoethnography session was held in the two Equity Team Professional Development Days in October 2017 and November 2017. The third co/autoethnography session, after the prompt was co-created with team members input, was conducted by the equity Team members independently in lieu of the third PD day, which was cancelled due to personal illness and could not be rescheduled.

As part of the co/autoethnography process, we generated personal written narratives followed by written reflection comments of our partner's writing. The final stage of co/autoethnography was a discussion between the writers in pairs to reflect on trends, questions, other self-reflections and responses to each other's writing. The following is a brief description of the data sources created in each phase of the co/autoethnography process.

*Individual narratives.* The data was collected via google documents or handwritten documents through which individuals crafted written personal narratives (stories of their experience and knowledge). A written response from a writing partner for that session was entered by google comments of hand written in the margin. This process and data generation occurred three times, once at each of the two PD days and once for our final reflection. The following questions were co-developed by the team to begin the first co/autoethnography session: "Our 'self': What influenced your/my ability/inclination/drive to use LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction as part of our teaching practice? What drives us? Trace your educational philosophy about the role of your LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practice."

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*Paired Written Narratives and Audiotaped Oral Discussion.* After each of the three co/autoethnography writing sessions, participants had time to re-read their writing and the written comments made by their writing partner. They then had a paired face-to-face discussion session in which they reviewed their responses, co-created ideas about similarities and differences they discover through their story-writing about experiences leading to the development of their LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practice. My role varied during this phase of the study. On day 1 was not a writing partner with anyone else in the group. I listened, observed, and responded to participants when they had questions. One day two, I was a partner in the writing process. From these activities, I collected co-autoethnographic narratives through googledocs and transcribed samples that were handwritten. In addition, the discussions were audio taped transcribed to create a written data source.

The data sources as a result of the co/autoethnographic process provided narratives of each individual participants evolving practice using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Specifically, participants responded to writing prompts that reflect on their personal/professional experience contributing to their teaching practice over time, their current practice, what they envision as they build and expand their practice. The written comments and audio taped/transcribed paired discussion was analyzed for trends and factors that supported implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction and was used for the team to design school wide activities and support for staff throughout the course of the study.

**Researcher Journal.** I maintained a research journal in which I recorded decisions about our process, ongoing commentary about my positionality as researcher and process adjustments and reflection. I also noted connections to research and thoughts about emerging themes. I organized archival materials, such as professional development agendas, photographs of school

events, meeting charts and minutes, student work samples, instructional plans and other related written or visual evidence and how they relate to the research question.

### **Data Analysis**

This Participatory Action Research study engaged participants as researchers both to create the goals and content for the professional development sessions, and to engage in a first phase of analysis. As such, the initial levels of data analysis are part of the cyclical process of research actions (research/action). For example, during the two PD days, the Equity Team completed initial coding--making sense of and identifying initial themes of factors influencing their LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practice, based on our conversations, artifacts from activities, and co/autoethnographic writing. We conducted this ongoing reflection on our “data-action process” as we planned for their implementation of their individual instruction and our leadership activities with the rest of the staff. In this way, our initial data analysis became part of the body of data.

Individually, I further analyzed the data using primary and secondary steps of grounded theory coding strategies (Charmaz, 2006). This process supported the construction of patterns and sense-making to generate insights about factors influencing our use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction in our teaching practice with students and staff. The initial data coding incorporated in vivo, process, and descriptive coding strategies (Saldana, 2015). In vivo coding captured specific language used by each participant to highlight language that might be experience or context specific, and might benefit from further analysis to capture nuance of meaning intended by the participants (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2015; Tracy, 2012). In Vivo coding was important because our written and oral conversations used language that had specific meaning in our context and was used to develop a base of academic language empowering the

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use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and curriculum. Process coding captured internal or external actions and experience contributing to our team's perceived understanding of factors influencing development of LGBTQ pedagogy throughout the school. Descriptive coding processes helped me to cluster topics of the data and transition to secondary axial coding (Saldana, 2015; Tracy, 2012).

Initial coding was analyzed using secondary axial coding. The function of the axial coding process is to create categories and sub-categories of data common and distinct between all participants' experience (Charmaz, 2016). The axial categorization process supported a sense-making process based upon the lived experience of participants. The generated categories and sub-categories contributed to an emerging conceptualization of the multilayered array of factors that support school wide integration of the LGBTQ people into the school community through the use LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction.

While the data generated in this study involve the stories of the participants and myself, the interpretation of these stories revealed patterns of experience that serve to inform and direct the process of teaching and learning. Regarding co/autoethnography process, Coia and Taylor (2009) summarize by saying, "One thing it is not, however, is self-indulgent. The focus while apparently on the teacher self, is always on the student and how to create a meaningful learning environment." (p. 15).

### **Limitations**

The methodologies used in this study espouse a reconceptualization of socio-cultural scholarly research. The PAR approach and related methods used in this study challenged historic prohibitions of "insider" research from "inside experience" (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 22). Insider research such as this PAR study embodies the process of constructing from personal

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experience within a social context. Personal experience provides direct information about complex social phenomena that cannot be discerned from outside observation. Examples of this are rich description of lived experience including values, evolution of sense-making, understanding of relationship, and ultimately transforming the context by acting in it. As Berry and Taylor (2016) explained, “An underpinning assumption of practitioner research is that a social practice such as teaching is best understood and researched by those directly involved in it” (p. 589).

While perceived by some schools of research as problematic, this design was purposefully selected to center the direct experience of teachers and staff in their person/professional experience. When examining the effect of instructional practices on school culture, it is important to engage voice and experience of those traditionally marginalized, to highlight their lived experience. This study occurred in the context of one school committed to creating an actively inclusive learning environment. Through this study, we took informed risks together and collaborated in sense making as we assess outcomes and effectiveness. We navigated interrupting assumed practices of social norms that have been exclusionary of community members due to their/our sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (SOGIE) and the intersections of multiple identities. This study’s methodologies intentionally seek to capture educators experience in action and connect patterns of their experience to the larger context of their school. Additionally, we have strengthened our research by triangulating multiple data sources to substantiate our personal experience. It is hoped that the experience continues to transform our individual professional practice, school practices and through this provide important insight for other educators and schools.

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PAR action research may be criticized for the evidence or proof of the research outcomes it develops (Zeller-Berkman, 2014). The methodologies selected in this PAR study intentionally included participants representing a range of marginalized voices. The expression of our voices, experience and perspective may be challenged for their subjectivity and positionality, as well as questioned for the diverse ways of knowing and expressing our constructed knowledge.

However, the purpose of this study is to lift these voices and knowledge, and offer inspiration and guidance to educators in meeting needs of all students through the work described in this study. Again, the methodology will offer a triangulation of data from which to ground our claims and share our experience.

Institutions of higher education vary in their knowledge of PAR. Zeller-Berkman (2014) reported some institutions might find PAR “too risky” to sanction (p. 528). There is a pressing need in the current political climate that make this risk worthy for the continued safety and well-being of our students. To address this limitation, the methods/rationale section described how this study incorporated commitments for PAR research offered by Torre (n.d.) to ground the study with due diligence to the ethical consideration needed when conducting research within a community setting that has impact on members of that community. To reiterate, examples of those commitments include but are not limited to, using a variety of methods to enable interconnected analysis at the individual, social, cultural and institutional levels; building relationships and negotiating collaboration; thinking through consequences of research and actions; acknowledging delegitimized voice; and valuing various forms of knowledge and equal participation in research development and process (<http://publicscienceproject.org/principles-and-values/>).

### **Positionality and Trustworthiness**

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This PAR research study was designed to maximize an ongoing responsiveness to the data we collected, by people both creating the data and using it to enact ongoing reform in their school community. Interviews, co/autoethnography, PD session artifacts and the action-oriented focus of this research project allowed participants to construct knowledge, apply their assumptions of what will successfully effect their instructional practices and teacher leadership with the school staff, and reflect on outcomes. Trustworthiness in the data was established by the engagement of participants as they informed, interpreted and applied the knowledge of the data. The Equity Team also calibrated our sense-making or interpretation of the data through our many perspectives of what factors enabled LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practice at the school. For the culminating research outcomes, trustworthiness was established by the triangulation of these varied data sources and by the researcher/participants' multiple perspectives represented in their formative interpretations of data throughout the study.

My positionality and the selection of the Equity Team members were an important factor in this study's research design. The importance of assuring multiple perspectives within the research team, came in part, from my lived experience and positionality. I am the daughter to parents who were highly engaged in social justice focused educational policy development and school reform. I was raised to understand systems of power, to question authority, to empower those marginalized and subjugated. I am the daughter of Jewish parents once removed from the Holocaust, and knowledge of that atrocity was the foundation for my three-decade professional career as a social justice educator and my work empowering educators as change agents. I have used my life as a Jewish, middle class, lesbian mother and gender-queer person as a source of knowledge about the power of my privilege to effect school equity reform and the first-hand knowledge of being subjugated by the power systems I seek to reform. This insider-knowledge



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has fueled my professional focus on the importance of engaging educators whose voice represents the critical wisdom of people who have insider knowledge of lens different from my own. Therefore, our Equity Team membership centers upon one commonly shared factor: participant self-identification as using, or aspiring to use, an LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practice. Beyond that, we on the Equity Team represent a) a range of novice to veteran teachers, b) participants who embody differences in racial, ethnic and linguistic, and religious identities, and c) a variety across the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. The perspectives of this group, through the lens of our complex constellation of identity and experience, offers trustworthiness to readers who are more likely to be reassured that our emerging outcomes are derived from group process developing a nuanced understanding of complex social justice issues in education. My assumption is that the trustworthiness of this PAR research study is centered on the voice and credibility of each of our lived experience. Therefore, the rigor of the data and findings depended on identifying interconnected and intersecting common needs, information and processes that successfully result in the use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction throughout an elementary school.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this participatory action research (PAR) study was to identify the constellation of factors and processes that assisted in the creation and maintenance of an ongoing use of LGBTQ-Inclusive curriculum and instruction with elementary school students. Working with the Equity Team of an elementary school (see chapter 3 for description), we identified individual and group research goals create and increase the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at their school, and co-created a professional development series to assist with those goals. The findings presented in this chapter were guided by the following overarching study questions, which I created and refined with the Equity Team:

- How does one elementary school’s Equity Team integrate the use of LGBTQ-inclusive K-6 curriculum and instruction throughout the school?
- What professional knowledge base, practices and characteristics are necessary to support and facilitate teacher learning and implementation of LGBTQ+ curriculum and instruction?
- What professional knowledge base and characteristics, do I, as a professional development facilitator use to successfully to support and facilitate teacher learning and implementation about SOGIE and LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction?

In addition to these questions, which guided the collection of data that would ultimately form the basis for my own dissertation, I worked collaboratively with the Equity Team to generate a list of questions (see chapter 3), which became the “content” for the professional development sessions.

The data I present in this chapter was collected throughout this study from initial interviews with each Equity Team member, artifacts produced from the two full professional

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development days, and two reflection activities that identified how Equity Team members described the factors needed to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instructional their school. As noted in chapter three, the participatory aspects of the study included the Equity Team’s input into the initial research design, choosing content for and co-constructing the professional development sessions, and initial analysis.

From the first round of collaborative analysis with the Equity Team, and my own subsequent phases of analysis, I constructed three major themes to present the findings. Each theme describes both the process of identifying strategies to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at the elementary school level, the design of instructional activities, and ultimately informs a nuanced description of what LGBTQ-inclusive instruction was at the school. I organized my analysis of the findings into these themes to capture the complexity and nuance of supporting a teacher leadership team as they investigated, implemented, and supported their colleagues’ use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout their elementary school. These themes address ongoing professional development, the work of a teacher leadership team to center LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as an important reform at their school, and the emergence of a complex understanding of what is meant by “LGBTQ-inclusive instruction” as a result of this study. Importantly, the findings presented are grounded in the assumption that narratives of our successful individual and schoolwide use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction provide a body of knowledge that will serve as a guide for other teachers and teacher educators as they endeavor to situate LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction in any school in our nation.

The first theme focuses on my professional development process as I supported the Equity Team’s emerging leadership practices, and corresponds to my second and third research questions, as noted above. This theme includes findings that illustrate the theoretical resources I

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offered in response to the team's interests, which were taken up by the team as we learned together about both our individual practices and the ways they could influence the conditions at their school. In the second theme, I describe the major processes we used to engage as a team to collaboratively plan and implement LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, and support the staff, and ultimately, the increase in LGBTQ-inclusive instruction over the course of this research study. The third theme describes the complex understandings of "LGBTQ-inclusive instruction" the team embodied, and we subsequently articulated together as a team, which I argue can serve as an expanded definition of what is meant by LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. This expanded definition includes not only academic content, but also socio-emotional and relational components specific to identity development and a dimension of community engagement.

### **The Role of Professional Development**

To support the Equity Team's expansion their skill set using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and to support of others at their site in doing so, we embarked on a collaboratively-planned professional development series over the course of three months. To discuss the role this professional learning played, I draw examples primarily from the initial interviews and the first PD day to emphasize the importance of start-up processes in creating a safe space for the team to work on social justice focused issues such as LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Other data sources will be referenced throughout the rest of this chapter. My role as professional development facilitator supporting the Equity team began immediately with activities to help the team develop cohesion and establish some learning procedures and routines. Although we co-constructed much of the content, I designed this set of initial activities to build trust, rapport and safety as a basis for our thinking out loud together about increasing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in elementary school. From there, we worked to investigate factors in our personal experience that influenced

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our development of LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practices; and learned about and decided how to incorporate conceptual frameworks about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, as well as basic principles of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, in our decision-making about lesson planning with LGBTQ-inclusive content and background knowledge. Ultimately, the findings about how my professional development facilitation supported the Equity Team's collaborative work to increase use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum at the elementary school level provided insight into both the content and processes needed for the teaching staff as well.

### **Developing Team Cohesion**

Each Equity Team member during their final interview reflected on valuable aspects of our work, and each expressed that building trust and cohesion within the team laid the foundation for critical reflection on developing and integrating LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in their own and school wide practices. Moreover, in the final co/autoethnography writing session, The Equity Team identified that ongoing PD to build trust and openness amongst staff would be needed to provide support to teachers to successfully investigate their personal histories and positionalities to understand both barriers and connections impacting use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. In this section I describe the process of working together with a new team to develop trusting work relationships and cohesion as a group, which is essential for engaging in these necessary activities.

The initial interviews began the relationship building process between me and the individual members of the Equity Team. In particular, during these initial conversations I was able to discuss each member's individual interests and their professional and learning style needs, which would be folded into the professional development planning. I also discussed with each team member elements of the conceptual frames described in chapter two, and we talked

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about each so I could assess team members' interest in the use of that material in connection with LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction, which also then informed the session planning. In the mutual sharing of these conversations, we built initial rapport and trust as well as generated information necessary to co-design the first PD day.

During their respective initial interviews, the Equity Team members prioritized the value of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction for all students. For example, they discussed the importance of setting norms of respect and inclusion for all students in their classes, such as starting the year with activities and discussions that support student self-awareness of their identities and their family culture. Four team members described countering heteronormativity by introducing their students to the use of pronouns to reflect authentic personal experience of gender. Others discussed plans to use books with a range of family configurations that were inclusive of families with LGBTQ members. In their interviews, many also brought up their beliefs about multiple identities, and stressed the importance of using an intersectional or interconnected approach to instruction to recognize and affirm students' multiple identities. To do so, team members described that they held discussions in which students shared their pride about their race, gender, and home culture. The purpose of these discussions was to teach students how to value themselves, appreciate others by how they behave, and develop the skills to talk about commonalities and differences in lived experiences, including explicit language about lesbian, gay and bisexual people and family members.

When the Equity Team met together as a group for our first professional development day (PD) in October, I reviewed the purpose of this research project, the team's co-constructed goals, and our intentional focus on developing LGBTQ content and instruction in their school as one part of the school's larger focus on social justice and asset-based anti-oppression

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instructional efforts. During an initial conversation, team members reflected on how and why they valued LGBTQ-inclusive instruction for their school. I explained the history of working to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in the district and the need for researching how to expand implementation in elementary school. During this conversation, the team members connected to the need for elementary LGBTQ-inclusive instruction by imagining the value it would have had for each of them when they were young students. Later in the day, results of a co/autoethnography writing session (described later in this section) also illustrated the conviction the team members had for providing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in elementary school. Specifically, this writing session revealed that homophobic experiences in team members' own schooling had resulted in their commitment to providing today's students with a safer and more respectful school experience. For instance, during this first co/autoethnography writing session, Rene, who identifies as a gay man, wrote and discussed the negative messages he had implicitly received about gay men when he was a child and the negative impact it had had on him. This re-imagining—“imagine what your life would have been like if you had discussed these types of issues since kindergarten?”—would be a continuing motivation for participants throughout the study.

Through the co/autoethnography writing session, we connected our commitment to social justice education and the use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum to formative experiences in our personal life experience. We found that, from our individual experiences about race, gender, sexual orientation and religion, whether positive or negative, we had developed empathy for others who also experience oppression. Through their writing, the Equity Team expressed that this empathy undergirds our commitment to value our students' identities as assets, to create experiences for students in which they feel safe to be who they are, to have pride in who they

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are, and to be part of a community that values both our similarities and our differences. For instance, Maris, a first-year bilingual teach on the Equity Team, illustrated that her empathy developed from reflecting upon her personal life experiences with oppression and its impact on professional practice:

As educators of color, I find that it is not only necessary to develop and implement LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum for the disruption of systemic forms of oppression but also to develop of place to reflect upon our own experience under these systems and heal... I can only imagine how empowering it would have been to have heard as a child and teenager that not only does gender exist on a spectrum, but that so does sexuality.

As a queer woman of color, I experienced many instances and degrees of policing and surveillance of my gender and sexuality depending on the spaces that I was in. Had I had a space to feel my complete self, to develop my identity in ways that were empowering and not harming, I may have had a whole different experience in school.

Rene also shared that he was motivated to become a dedicated, social justice-focused teacher, because of homophobic experiences he had growing up:

Being a gay man growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area... I have to wonder how my life would have been different if I would have been exposed to a more positive frame of LGBT people... I now firmly resolve to aid in the celebration of diversity, to protect the vulnerable, to shift our culture of intolerance, and to educate today's youth. I am on a journey toward supporting a common language for students, teachers, parents, and the community to use in regards to the LGBTQ community.

Another member of the Equity Team, Harper, a teacher with 12 years of experience, who self-identified as a female privileged educator and understood her privilege, its connection to her



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commitment to social justice education, and the role of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. She wrote during the first co/autoethnography session, and subsequently discussed her experience with the team, regarding developing empathy by confronting one's own subconscious biases and the ethical imperative for inclusive curriculum and instruction.

Positionality= White, hetero, female, middle class, privileged. I speak [English] the language of power and I have lived and been educated around people who share my same positionality. What has propelled me to understand and empathize with others who have experiences divergent from my own? Realizing that WE ALL HAVE SUBCONSCIOUS BIASES. How do we confront and evaluate ourselves and our way of thinking?... Our social political climate has not only inspired me to use inclusive curriculum but I have come to realize that it is our **responsibility** to make it the central theme in our teaching pedagogy. (Emphasis original)

In addition, during our first PD day, I encouraged our team to explicitly describe experiences of perceived similarities and distinctions amongst ourselves on the Equity team (including gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, nationality, ethnicity). We engaged in this exploration for three reasons. The first was to build upon the theme of understanding our individual positionalities that arose in our initial interviews and to help the team build connection among all of us. Discussing equity and diversity together provided practice for them, as I anticipated that they would likely engage in similar conversation with staff in the near future. Second, I hoped to surface the additional information we might need about sexual orientation, gender identity /expression (SOGIE) and the LGBTQ community to feel confident to discuss and scaffold LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with others at their school. The third reason was to facilitate intentional, ongoing processes of working together and creating an Equity Team space

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in which we could discuss our experience of both privilege and oppression. These discussions positioned us to view our individual positionalities as a strength in our ongoing reflection of how to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as part of social justice work at school, which, in turn, was a strategy for them to use in their future work with the teaching staff.

As the “lead” researcher, one of my goals was to attend to processes that were valuable to the team in their own learning, but would also serve as processes that could be valuable in our work supporting the teaching staff to implement LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. As an example, we drew on our personal/professional experiences from both our individual lives and career paths, as well as our collaborative experiences on the Equity team, to identify content knowledge and activities that would support teaching staff and instructional leaders at developing and enacting LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. For instance, Luz identifies as a Mexican Latina and a social justice educator with nine years of experience at their school. During our first interview together, Luz explained how important having the Equity Team was to her, indicating that factors such as collaboration and comradery might be important dynamics to build with the teaching staff as we seek to increase their use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. As she described, the collaboration and comradery of the team provided support in the work to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at their school during our first interview together:

...having an equity team is one way to support social justice-focused LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Educators need support from peers too deepen that conversation and share it with people. I am sure teachers mean well but maybe have never had the opportunity to consider stepping outside and really looking in at how value-laden teaching is.

Further discussions later in the first day of professional development provided evidence that the team was beginning to coalesce around our research purpose of increasing LGBTQ

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instruction throughout the school, with our outcomes of our first PD day reached through abundant brainstorming of interests and activities. These co-generated ideas illustrated our philosophies of teaching and communicated significant shared values. One area the team agreed on, for example, was that we need to actively counter the discourse that elementary school is too early for students to learn about and talk about gender identity and families with LGBTQ family members. Summarizing the team's sentiment on this issue, Ginez, who identifies as Xicanx and described herself as a "humanizing educator" in her first year of teaching, explained,

Many times, this work is labeled...inappropriate at the elementary school level. I believe this work is very important to begin addressing young. This is during the time where they are coming to understand themselves and their identities in relationship to those in their school community and family. If we can begin to open the doors and possibilities of all, they can be and express their intersectional identities, and have a community understanding of the complexity of identity, and this begins to be part of our understanding as a community and society at large.

Thus, in this significant area of team consensus, team members indicated that they understood that norms about gender and sexuality are instilled in children at a very young age, as well as understood that providing a positive and accepting instruction about gender and LGBTQ people in families validates individual students' sense of self and builds compassion for each other's sense of self and family.

### **Developing Team Collaborative Procedures and Routines**

On our first day of our PAR PD time, each professional development activity continued to develop team ownership of our research together. We planned to begin the session with opportunities for team members to share information about themselves, including what they

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needed to successfully participate on this team. Mindful that this newly assembled group represented older and younger people, novice and veteran teachers, and teachers of different religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, I varied the types of activities we used to get to know one another, to surface interests and begin to identify ways to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, as well as build connection in ways that allowed team member to control what they revealed in a way that would feel safe. Because not all members of the group knew each other, and they were being asked to discuss topics from very different positions of privilege and oppression, these initial activities ranged from personal foci to more external topics. This balance allowed for participants shift into and out of experiences of a deeply personal nature. For example, in the opening norm-building activity, we used art and simple phrases to name our individual needs and create a space for us to work together through a social justice lens. Each of us contributed ideas about what we needed to be our authentic selves in the group by decorating a single word that represented a need or want for working together.

For the remainder of our first PD day together day, the team worked through activities to identify their personal and mutual interests for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at the school, and I worked alongside them to informally assess each team members' knowledge and experience integrating LGBTQ-inclusive instruction into their own and others practices so that I could make adjustments or support them as needed over the course of our professional development. Four major activities were completed on PD Day 1. These served as collaborative learning strategies for the team, but were also strategies that could be adapted for use with students and teachers.

First, the team followed up the "creating norms" activity with a review of work the Equity team had conducted at their school in the past few years. The veteran team members shared school wide activities and new members shared instructional strategies and activities they

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wanted to try or activities that had tried with students in other schools or settings. During this share, the team demonstrated many critical reflection skills that both validated the successes of their previous work and also raised questions from the team regarding how to deepen school activities such as Ally Weeks.

This moved us into the second activity, an overview of the research design of this study, in which I offered to the group a range of content we might consider focusing on during our time together, based on a synthesis of my own conceptual frameworks and their collaboratively generated research questions. Third, I introduced the process of co/autoethnography, and we completed the first of three co-autoethnographic reflective writing sessions. Co/autoethnography (Coia & Taylor, 2009) is a self- study writing and reflection process that builds from an initial individual reflective writing activity, to written reflection with a partner, and into a direct conversation. I introduced this early in our study to both provide a process that offered team members an opportunity to reflect at any depth they wished about their LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practice, and also to have a protocol within which they interacted and shared ideas through writing and talking with one another. The process built further built relationships and trust while we began to co-construct knowledge about LGBTQ-inclusive instruction.

Closing out the day, the Equity Team identified personal LGBTQ-inclusive instruction goals and co-planned activities and content for our second day together. The first PD day activities that are described in detail above created processes we continued to use to build relationships, include everyone's voice, and co-construct an evolving understanding of how to integrate LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at an elementary school. These collaborative processes remained a center of our research together, and indeed, was the foundation of practices that ultimately led to what the team felt was the successful integration of LGBTQ-inclusive

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instruction in kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes throughout the course of the 2017/18 school year, which I will discuss in detail in later sections of this chapter.

**Making it the team's research.** In a PAR project, the researcher/participants take ownership of the process to make a positive impact on a key concern within their community. In doing so, they trouble the duality of expert/learners, leader/follower and researcher/studied subject that are so engrained in traditional research methodologies. To do this, I needed to shift my role and actively engage Equity Team members, as co-participants in our learning and decision-making within the context of this research project. Prior to beginning the professional development series, the Equity Team and I had met and generated a list of questions and topics of interests, which were further expanded on in the initial interviews. I drew on these, and added resources from both published research articles and from my decades of professional experience supporting the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in K-12 education to together an overview of possible PAR research study topics. I presented this plan to the team during our first PD together as a way to invite them to use this research design to create the social change the wish to see at their school. After presenting an overview of a range of opportunities I imagined this research project could offer to us as a team, we developed a discussion prompt for us to proceed with: "What are our impressions of the conceptual frameworks and the purpose of the research?" The team also created a comprehensive list of conceptual frames to guide our instructional thinking and decision-making, as well as drafted actionable items for the team to carry out that would impact the school community and support their individual instructional practice goals. To tackle these activities, the team first worked in pairs as a way to build interpersonal relationships while surfacing thoughts, trends and interests that would maximize the team wide discussion, which came next.

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As I prepared for our first PD day together, I reflected on the interests each of them had expressed in their initial interviews. Many Equity team members were interested in learning more about culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), including empowering youth culture and self-expression. They were also interested in the notion of understanding and interrupting the evaluative context of schooling specifically applied to the reinforcement of heteronormativity and heterosexism in instructional content. In the conversation where we formalized the plan for our research project, we collectively decided to focus on a few specific ideas, which we summarized on a wall chart to capture our group thinking. The groups identified that they were interested in exploring “Culturally sustaining pedagogy”, “the colonialization of gender: breaking of heteronormativity and heteronormative ways of thinking”, “leaving the human out of the classroom”, “LGBTQ-inclusive instruction/how to keep sustainable across over the grades”, and “creating token lessons vs. creating critical thinkers” as we teach students about being allies to LGBTQ people/community.

The team identified the above areas of interest and content they wanted and needed to learn about to implement LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and support others in doing so at their school site. For instance, the team wanted to know more about cultural sustaining pedagogy to build on what they already knew about culturally relevant pedagogy. In particular, they discussed the need for all teachers to share a common language for describing “the isms” with elementary students. They questioned what process they might use to accomplish both developing the common language and then getting all teachers to understand and use that language. Additionally, the team wanted to learn how to support sustain consistent use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout all the grades, including how to support elementary students whose teachers who did not have a social justice-focused practice. They were also interested in

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radicalizing and deepening content in site Ally Weeks, which are district wide activities in which site leadership teams create activities to focus attention on ways staff and students can be active members in creating safe, respectful and inclusive schools. All of these topics, which were raised in our “response to the research overview”, began to specify strategies in response to this studies research questions.

Having surfaced a wide range of important individual and team interests about conducting this research together--including the conceptual frames that could guide our thinking and our planning and implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction--our next activity returned to a personal and collaborative creation of personal narratives about factors that influenced our ability to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in the face of school practices that sustain the status quo of heteronormativity. We did this through a critical process of self-reflection, drawing on co/autoethnography (Taylor & Coia, 2009), which I discuss next.

**Processes of Critical Reflection.** I introduced the Equity Team to try co/autoethnography as a possible tool to investigate our personal and professional narratives related to the factors that led each of us to be able to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, and also invited them to reflect whether co/autoethnography had value to them as a process to inform both their professional practice and this research study. Following the first co/autoethnography session, the team agreed it was a meaningful process to use. Furthermore, in the final interview reflections, the Equity Team highlighted not only the value to themselves but the importance of determining how this could be used with the staff. This at once personal and professional writing practice strengthened our individual and group connections, as our Equity Team embraced the process of using personal writing to discern shared themes and co-create emergent ideas through the writing and reflection process.



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This reflective writing and discussion session, inspired by co/autoethnography, allowed for team members to enter into discussion about LGBTQ people and the arena of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (SOGIE) first privately/individually, then in pairs, and finally with the whole team. At each stage, we paused to collectively reflect on both the process and outcomes of their reflection to ensure that the team had in determining the activities and content that were valuable to the team, and also to continue to visible which collaborative experience might transfer to activities to engage the staff in LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, and how they might do so.

One of the first comments spoken after we completed our co/autoethnography process was the recognition that being a supportive group was key to sharing personal stories so easily with one another in the co/autoethnography process. As Luce, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year teacher on the Equity team who identifies as a Salvadorian woman of color and a social justice educator, noted, the protocol worked because they already had developed some rapport, and trust through their shared experience of being social justice teachers. Luce explained the following, which reflected the larger team's ideas about using co-autoethnography to investigate factors that influence their use and interest in LGBTQ content in elementary school:

I also felt comfortable in sharing was because I feel like in this group we are all into social justice in our practice, so I felt like if I share my experience I am not going to get this negative reaction. I think it matters to the space, because we identified and made this to be safe space in the morning activity... and all the discussions we had... so I felt comfortable sharing.

Together, we co-designed our first writing prompt, which addressed the intersections and reality of our inseparable personal/professional identities. We crafted the following, which would

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guide our writing: “What influenced my ability/inclination to use LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction as part of our teaching practice? What drives me?” I hoped that this critical reflection might result both in team relationship-building through sharing factors that influenced their commitment to LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, and might also inform how we might be able to engage the teaching staff in the same connection to the need for developing an LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practice.

During the first co/autoethnography discussion, we made connections between personal lived experience, the authority that comes from connecting those experiences to conceptual frameworks, and the positive impact of both on pedagogy. Ginez, for example, had learned from the pain of being marginalized within her family for seeing and challenging how different social constructs limited her as a young person. Ginez transferred this experience into her commitment as a teacher who validates and supports the questioning and challenge of dominant paradigms of cisgender/heteronormativity as part of creating an inclusive classroom experience for all students. Her discussion partner, Maris, reflected that Ginez’s perspective was important, and Maris was concerned about the impact on students when educators lack an understanding of how they judge impose inaccurate labels on students. Maris worried that this labelling prevented students from being able to be themselves in school. This co/autoethnography writing excerpt illustrated their written commentary about this:

Ginez: To understand the power dynamics of patriarchy machismo and heteronormativity, I was also the one standing alone in my family of disrupting how we understood and the expectations my family held based on gender. Later on, I began to ask many questions, first tied to religion and gender. I always felt like an outsider, and many

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times labeled or identified as something that I was not just for questioning and advocating for some of my family members.

Maris: Makes me think of the labels some educators place on children as well.

The co/autoethnography process provided me, as primary researcher and professional development facilitator, a first glimpse into each team member's ability to navigate across differences in colleagues' lived experience. Moreover, this process helped to develop collaborative comradery and feelings of support within the Equity Team, which is one factor that participants all described as sustaining them as they championed an LGBTQ-inclusive social justice pedagogy. This feeling of support from the team helped them feel more comfortable expressing themselves and leading social-justice focused work at their school site, which Luce illustrated with the following:

So, for me, I identify as a social justice educator and I think it's been hard for me to find a place where I feel like my ideas are being accepted ... To me, I am excited to be in that space where I feel like I am able to express my social justice identity more so than I was.

From this initial co/autoethnography writing process, team members learned about the different oppressions their fellow educators experience in their lives, and recognized that those differences can be the basis for creating common goals to address students' needs with the use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction. For example, Harper said, referring to her partner in the activity, Luz: "I feel like we were very similar in that understanding the parallels of oppression of different marginalized groups that drives us to use more LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. I feel like that's something we both share but I feel like our positionality is divergent."

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Additionally, the written paired reflection and group discussion allowed us to surface our collective knowledge base about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (SOGIE) and LGBTQ people, which we could continue to build on throughout the professional development series. As an example, the following conversation reflects important themes that drive LGBTQ-inclusive instruction that were able to be highlighted as a site of knowledge for the entire team. Luz began the conversation by providing her own rationale about the need to teach inclusion for all students—and not just because a teacher may be aware of a student in their class who is or has family members who are LGBTQ: “I do wonder about some of my kids [identifying as LGBTQ], I do wonder, but there's nothing you can do but wonder and continue to teach the inclusive curriculum and maybe they might reveal themselves.” Luz’s co-autoethnography partner Harper, illustrating an awareness of dominant paradigms and heteronormativity, then added, “And it's mind-boggling how early all this all this information about gender is shoved down their throats—the kids’ throats.” This continued discussion eventually led to a dialogue between Luz and Harper about how instruction can support a student who expressed their gender and broke binaried gender stereotypes while respecting their home culture (and in this case, a conflict predicated upon religious instruction in the family). Harper described, “I'm remembering there was a student we had in kindergarten and he would always draw himself in pictures wearing a dress or carrying a purse and he was ... expressing himself in a different way than the way the world sees him as.”

As the discussion continued, I used this as an entry point to help the team understand some additional ways to talk about gender fluidity and sexual orientation in ways that uplift both, rather than possibly pathologize gayness. This comment from a discussion during the first

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co/autoethnography discussion illustrated how subtle syntax can at once offer support to break a gender stereotype, yet at the same time, unintentionally, can denigrate being gay. Luz said:

“the piece about gender fluidity, I think it's important and I don't know where it falls but the whole thing about masculinity and femininity like whether it's always linked to sexuality or not...like telling kids it's okay if you're a boy and you want to do this it doesn't mean - you're gay. There are just people who are more fond of other activities.”

From this, we discussed that our messages need to validate gender on a continuum, without connecting it to a negative judgment regarding sexuality or gender expression.

In the second session, we continued to use co/autoethnography, zooming in to reflect on the structures in school that enabled LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, and then again as a final reflection in which we synthesized the two days of PAR Research PD learning by writing/discussing our vision of what an ideal LGBTQ-inclusive school would be like. I report on the ideas that emerged from these sessions later in this chapter.

**Planning school wide activities and identifying individual growth.** From our work in the morning, I facilitated a conversation with the Equity Team for them to make decisions about what they wanted to address for the afternoon of our first PD day. The team chose to create a list of LGBTQ-inclusive activities to provide for teachers and students, as well as do some initial thinking of regarding a personal LGBTQ-inclusive practice goal that they would work on between the first and second PD day. Finally, they wanted to do some initial planning for the upcoming winter Ally Week, a schoolwide event held throughout our school district in which an array of activities focusing attention on learning about diverse identities and how to support others as allies.

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School-wide instructional ideas the team generated included the importance of using explicit positive LGBTQ language with students throughout any activities, and to continue generating ideas for increasing staff capacity to do so. The team also identified the strategy of building student activism into instruction (discussed in the final section of this chapter). The discussion about supporting student activism grew out of our discussion about using peer education activities such as poster campaigns about community diversity and LGBTQ-inclusive read aloud centers in classes during Ally Week activities. Our Ally Week conversation also led to the Equity Team identifying an interest of working with the staff to develop a set of common definitions of what the team called “the -isms”. This was the first dialogue regarding an ongoing focus about the team’s conviction of the need to counter all forms of oppression through curriculum and instruction with positive and empowering images, language and themes of all forms of identity, including LGBTQ identity. Other emerging schoolwide actionable items included increasing student leadership in planning of Ally Week activities and supporting cross-age reading of LGBTQ-inclusive books.

To move their own teaching practices forward, Equity Team members identified their own next steps. The Kinder teacher, Harper, planned to use English Language Development time to teach about gender fluid pronouns, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, Luce, planned to use critical literacy questions about gender stereotypes. Luz, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade team member, planned reading circles with LGBTQ-inclusive books, while the ELL specialist, Rene, continued in the role of lead organizer of the upcoming school-wide Ally Week event.

Thus, from our initial interviews in September and through our first PD day in mid-October, a group of seven individual educators came together as a team as we built upon our initial one-on-one interviews; completed a norm-building activity that engaged each team

member's voice about team participation; built upon the research base and focus of this research study; and centered our research and data creation/collection on the school, students, staff needs, and the Equity Team's aspirations and goals about how to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at their elementary school.

### **Factors and Processes that Increased Implementation of LGBTQ-Inclusive Instruction**

I traced the Equity Team's processes and ideas from our initial interviews, first two professional development days, final interviews and last co/autoethnography session to identify the factors that guided the team's successes to support their own LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practices, as well as those of teachers at their site. These processes and factors included engaging in collaborative instructional leadership, disrupting the status quo of cisgender/heteronormativity through language, developing individual curriculum for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, using an intersectional approach for instructional and professional development, embedding LGBTQ inclusive content into schoolwide adopted instructional techniques, and providing staff support. Throughout our process, we worked from the premise that we build upon our own and other teachers' strengths to support their participation and integration of new LGBTQ-inclusive instructional strategies.

#### **Collaborative LGBTQ-Inclusive Instructional Leadership**

One of the key factors to support LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, as identified by the Equity Team, includes a collaborative instructional leadership structure, such as the Equity Team model followed by the team of participants. The team reported and demonstrated several reasons why developing collaborative, team-based LGBTQ-inclusive instructional leadership model was important. These included the strength of learning from each other's expertise and lived experience, as well as the positive support the team provided to each other as they each felt

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vulnerable in their leadership precisely because of their positionality amongst their staff and the vulnerability of challenging the status quo of instructional content. Last, as social justice focused educators, they valued the opportunity to forge instructional reform in a safe, supportive and healing space of peers, as a way to sustain their leadership.

Four team members in the initial interview described the importance of having structured opportunities and “space” to learn from each other’s areas of expertise as an Equity Team. For example, veteran Equity team member Harper stated in the initial interview,

“I’m excited to have amazing colleagues who have some experience, some have more experience than others, and some are just diving in and piloting this curriculum ... I’m excited to be working with you (Lynn) and I’m excited to be working with the equity team. I’m excited to have a lot of (LGBTQ-inclusive) literature on campus and excited to get the year going.”

Four additional members in the co/autoethnography discussed the healing our work together provided them, while two others expressed that a collaborative Equity Team offered mutual support for our professional growth, something that the team participants anticipated with excitement and relief. In addition, one team member called out the value of a team with a wide range of experience. The novice teachers on this team brought a stronger background in social justice education from their pre-service education, while the veteran members brought historical knowledge of the LGBTQ-inclusive instruction practices they have modeled and supported. Both groups brought open minds and an interest in blending their knowledge and experience to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at their school. Ginez, who had just recently joined the equity team, reported that she valued having colleagues to generate instructional ideas with and to provide a space to reflect and build her practice:



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I'm interested in that those of us who have decided to join you can come together and start thinking about how we bring it (LGBTQ-inclusive instruction) into the classroom. Many times, if I did it by myself, people might see ways that I might do it that might not work or ways I can make it better, so I do like collaborating that way.

The Equity Team, during final interviews and the third co/autoethnography, emphasized that a site leadership structure, such as the Equity Team, was the “space” and source for critical conversations about how to have a site implement ongoing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. They imagined that in the future they would collaborate with other committees throughout the school, and with parent and student leadership so that all stakeholders would learn about and become leaders for the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction.

Across our two in-person PD days, we selected professional development activities that built upon collaborative reflection, discussion and decision-making, which supported a strong collaborative leadership structure. For instance, the gallery walk activity that started our second PD day was structured for us to generate our personal thoughts, and record and post them on chart, while we all comingled at different posters. By design, we were able to share and co-develop ideas as a way to re-immense ourselves in our thinking from the first PD day, which was held a month earlier. We placed comments on post-its next to themes that stood out as priorities to the team as we moved forward with the objectives of this study.

One emerging interest was to increase the team’s understanding and use of the conceptual frame about the evaluative context of educational settings (Caraballo 2016) as we apply it to LGBTQ inclusion at school. This was illustrated by the number of comments recorded on the chart about our discussion of culturally sustaining pedagogy. The gallery walk discussion focused most notably on topics such as, “break heteronormativity and heteronormative ways of

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thinking”, “get more teachers on board” to deepen and radicalize the Ally Week, and “dismantle the evaluative context of education” with the side comment of “I wish... we need to humanize education.” All of these comments were connected to our need to work towards making LGBTQ-inclusive practices sustainable across all the grade levels. The Equity team then became excited to take these ideas and the knowledge they had gained together to start to construct their own plans not just for students, but also to be able to support other teachers at their site. This highlighted two layers of collaboration for the Equity Team as a leadership structure—one level included their collaboration with each other, and a second layer included the collaboration they would engage in with teachers at their school to increase LGBTQ instruction.

### **Using Language to Disrupt the Status Quo of Cisgender/Heteronormativity**

Another factor that strengthened the team’s capacity to enact LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum was developing a schoolwide common language about SOGIE, LGBTQ people and applying that language to disrupt the status quo of cis/heteronormativity. The importance of developing and normalizing a schoolwide common LGBTQ-inclusive language was reflected in comments during the third co/autoethnography session in which Equity Team members reflected on factors that sustain LGBGQ-inclusive instruction in their ideal vision of an elementary school. Rene’s comment captures the team’s perspective:

With teachers having that common vocabulary, not only with teachers but staff using it, and the principals, the administrators using it--we are on the same page which creates not only unity, but also a credibility to what it is that we are doing. There’s actually studies and research behind all the language, we are not just creating language and throwing it out. It’s a common language...with a purpose of normalizing all this language.

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Our team observed that the current absence of a common K-6 language to describe both LGBTQ people and an expansive model of gender identity/expression was one factor that prevented other teachers from using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. During our second PD day, some team members worried that as students moved from one grade/teacher to the next, they might be taught by a teacher with a strong inclusive LGBTQ-inclusive social justice practice one year, and a teacher without an LGBTQ-inclusive social justice focused practice in the next. The Equity Team members discussed their concerns about this inconsistency as the harshness of being in an environment of a healing and empowerment one year to more punitive and disempowering learning experience the next. The Equity Team was not sure how to address this experience, but believed that beginning to create, practice, and then share a common language for all teachers to use about SOGIE and LGBTQ people might be a longer-term goal to build a consistent healing and empowering environment through LGBTQ inclusive instruction. As one of many examples from the team, Maris described the importance of having a common, positive, empowering language at a school site. Maris described her pre-service experience studying instructional strategies that disrupt multiple forms of oppression, one of which was countering heterosexism and heteronormative practices through inclusive and critical curriculum. Maris aspired to acquire the academic vocabulary used with students at that school and intentionally practiced use of this academic language in her day-to-day work at the school site. Maris continued by describing her use of “critical curriculum”—that is, curriculum that counters narratives of dominant social paradigms, and provides a context in which students can also question oppressive social forces they experience. Maris explained,

As I began to build with other people more critical curriculum, I gained a lot of the skills and the vocabulary that was most presently out there, the truth is, we were

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currently at the point of creating a brand-new world and a reality for many students. We can create some new terms, break those practices that supported oppression, and build new practices that allows students to feel loved, heard and seen.

Harper expanded on the value of deepening instructional content about SOGIE and LGBTQ people by describing the benefit to Kindergarten students, as well as described the power of the language she uses with her students. In both an initial interview and during the first co-autoethnography discussion, Harper shared a similar excitement about language that validates all students and provides an environment in which students can practice different expressions of themselves without judgement: “It’s validating themselves, letting them explore themselves, giving them lots of lots of space and creating a safe place to figure out who they really are.... I’m excited to have a lot of literature on campus and excited to get the year going.”

During their co/autoethnography discussion, Rene and Luce reflected on the importance of teachers using positive language about of LGBTQ families as a way to counter or interrupt the assumption of cisgender /heteronormativity. Their conversation highlights the need for teachers to have both an understanding of how heteronormativity operates and having the language skills to counter it with positive images and themes that empower the normalizing LGBTQ people as part of the school community.

Rene: Family diversity is a topic that students must learn about... [they need to] understand to accept the differences and not just tolerate them.

Luce: I agree, I think that still most media just show heteronormative families.

Rene: My favorite book to read on day one of school was *My Best Colors*. This is a bilingual and intersectional book that includes a bi-racial, same-sex couple with a child that is just like any other young member of a family. The book conveys a realistic view

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of a same-sex family and how many of their qualities are the same as other families, but also different.

Luce: I've always considered myself an ally of the LGBTQ community so making sure that my students use inclusive language has been important to me...I agree that we have to change the image of what families look like. Everything is so heteronormative.

During the course of this study, the team discussed and sought resources to develop their emerging vision of what common LGBTQ-inclusive language as a tool to interrupt the status quo cisgender/heteronormative thinking and practices could be for their school. Creating a common language resource with and for staff remained as a goal for our future work together.

### **Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum and Practices**

Another factor that assisted in the integration of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction was the actual time we spent creating LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and learning about how to support individual instructional practices. In the first PD session, team members reported they wanted to initiate or expand their own use of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum at their school site with positive images of LGBTQ people through the use of Language Arts materials. During the second PAR PD day in November 2018, each team member selected LGBTQ-inclusive books and some used internet resources and designed LGBTQ-inclusive instructional activities to use in their own classrooms. Team members worked individually or with a partner to brainstorm ideas and strategies. Each team member revisited their lesson plan interests and goals, which we had identified in our first PD day in October 2018. These ideas included breaking heteronormative ways of thinking and presenting information about people through the inclusion of positive images, language and themes of LGBTQ people; the use of explicit vocabulary to describe LGBTQ people and explain concepts about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression

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(SOGIE); and the use critical thinking strategies for students to deepen their understanding about social diversity and, as appropriate, discuss how to counter oppression by how we behave and relate to one another in school.

As an illustration, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Maris, designed a character analysis lesson about *Antonio's Card*, a book which features an elementary student who felt unsafe having peers at school know that he had lesbian moms due to derogatory behavior from students he already experienced. Rene planned to collaborate with the principal about reading *I Am Jazz*, an autobiographical picture book coauthored by a Jazz, 13, a transgender adolescent who shares about her life with her supportive family. Rene planned to co-read this book during the Trimester awards assembly planned for Ally Week. Two upper grade team members each focused on teaching academic vocabulary about gender and breaking gender stereotypes using *Who are you?* a book with clear and direct language for talking the spectrum of gender. For each member of the Equity Team, this built upon and spiraled back to a focus on instruction about gender they began at the beginning of the school year.

Ginez, a sixth-grade teacher, used an article from our team's research article folder (a google docs folder in which we all posted key themes and ideas for each article we read). The article selected had critical literacy questions to use with popular elementary story books to help students understand how rigid identity categories marginalize LGBTQ families and to prompt thinking about interrupting binary categories of SOGIE (Ryan & Hermann-Willmarth, 2013). Maris, a fourth-grade teacher, planned to use instructional strategies currently in place at the school for critical literacy and language arts, which included visual teaching strategies and poetry writing practice, all with a focus on respect for others.

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While sharing the lesson planning work at the end of the session, each teacher explained their implementation timeline, and collectively decided to bring evidence of student work to the next session for two purposes. The first was to reflect on their teaching experience and on student outcomes, and the second was to consider how to share this work with other staff. We planned to reflect on our own teaching, on the context of schooling, and on outcomes of anti-oppressive instruction to drive our work with the teaching staff forward.

We also focused on developing practices needed for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. After the initial interviews and each professional development day, I reviewed all the transcripts and artifacts we created together and annotated our co-created agenda to analyze additional supports for the Equity Team's skills development of curriculum and instructional practices. For example, one of the team's goals was to become stronger in acknowledging gender fluidity during instruction to create space for students to discuss and enact gender across a spectrum of expression, rather than staying within the rigid binary of boy/girl. During our initial individual interviews, four team members had also identified that they wanted to strengthen their skills teaching students about gender identity and expression. Therefore, I picked up on this theme during the first PD day. During that time, Equity Team members acknowledged how deeply internalized binary gender stereotypes appeared as early as Kindergarten. We discussed strategies in which students had the opportunity to engage in activities that broke gender stereotypes. One strategy the group offered was to change the physical environment during kindergarten play centers. In kindergarten, there are usually a range of play centers that are traditionally used by girls and others used by boys. We discussed how typically gender-segregated play time might be interrupted if certain strategically selected centers were opened on different days--for example, if centers traditionally used by girls (e.g., dolls, cooking, homes)

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were offered exclusively on certain days and centers typically used by boys were opened on others. We also discussed how students might respond, discussions that could be held to stretch their young understanding of gender expectations, and ways to support creative play regardless of gender. Another strategy we discussed for all grades was the practice of having students of any gender read aloud a dialogue of characters of a different gender from themselves.

We continued this conversation during our second professional development day. Clearly, the connections between gender binaries reinforce and enable homophobic behavior when any individual strays from the binary gender norms. Thus, the Equity Team and I asked ourselves, “how do we create or manipulate the environment so children are able to break through stereotypes in their play and that they can enact gender as they experience it?” Several Equity Team members described their initial beginning-of-the-year efforts at introducing gender pronouns that match individual internal experience of gender. In addition, everyone on the Equity Team discussed new or renewed efforts to provide positive images and language and themes about trans and transgender children. During this conversation, I shared my own recent dialogues with young adult trans and transgender people, describing what I had learned regarding how language is evolving to describe gender. I explained their description of how these young people saw themselves, and the language they had shared that they felt best matched their gender identity and expression. With this sharing, I was intentionally modeling the concept from cultural sustaining pedagogy of engaging in open-ended learning from youth as their culture evolves (Paris & Alim, 2017).

In our district, including explicit instruction with positive images and accurate information about gender identification/expression is a more recent effort than using positive lesbian and gay images. Therefore, there was an increased focus by the Equity team to prioritize



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instruction that interrupts or counters the binary paradigm of male/female gender. During the initial interview, kindergarten Equity Team member Harper illustrated the reason for expanding instruction by adding books about gender identity/expression: “I feel that most of the books I used last year were all about family dynamics and [how] families are different... because I feel, never before have I given that space, or letting them almost choose their pronoun that they identify with.” As a second example, Maris explained that she is re-instilling her class’ use of literature circles as a reading analysis process and then introducing gender, referencing specific books she will use to do so:

I have started off with this year third grade class already with gender pronouns... [My Students] are really excited to be doing [literature circles] again. So... I think either this week or next week, I'm going to start coming in with books such as ... *I am Jazz*, *Who are You*, and I have *George*.

During both PD days, we discussed the importance of maintaining an intentional focus on providing positive images of gay and lesbian people and families while grappling with an instructional focus on gender identity and expression. Other team members selected books to use with positive images of lesbian and gay characters, including titles such as *King and King*, *Antonio’s Card* and *In My Mothers’ House*. Throughout this process, having the time, space, and resources to dedicate to developing this curriculum and instructional practice collaboratively was essential.

### **Intersectionality as an Instructional Approach and Professional Development Tool**

An additional enabling factor was our use of intersectionality as both an instructional approach and as a tool for supporting professional development with teachers at the school site. As an Equity Team, we used intersectionality in our own work to understand and explain the

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entangled nature of systems of oppression across all identity groups. We also used this understanding to increase the use of materials that counter oppression to create positive, healing, and empowering learning spaces for all students, as well as conceptualize similarities between how different oppression operate. Additionally, the concept of intersectionality helped the team identify how asset-based pedagogical practices can be applied across different marginalized groups.

The term intersectionality was introduced to describe how multiple forms of oppression impact women of color. Since then, research has described how the term intersectionality has been used and applied to all forms of identity oppression and in an ongoing and every widening field of study including education (Carabado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson, 2013). In this study, the concept of intersectionality was applied dually to both instructional design, and as a mentoring tool used in professional development. It is used as a criterion for instructional design to assure that lesson plans and the language used by teachers is part of the overall teaching practice of creating an LGBTQ-inclusive environment. It is a guiding concept to assure images languages and themes representing the multiple ways identity is categorized and experienced are presented and that both similarities and differences across identity categories create the basis for developing understanding, respect, empathy, and solidarity for one another. As a mentoring tool, intersectionality undergirds the importance of critical reflectivity for in a model of LGBTQ-inclusive instructional leadership and teaching. It is a heuristic tool used to focus critical reflection on the effect of socially constructed categories of identity on our (teachers) lived experience (Ibid). It is also used in professional development as an analytic tool to understand our positionality and agency as teachers to choose to interrupt the cis/het laden content of instruction.

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In the third and final co/autoethnography, Ginez described the importance of intersectionality as a conceptual frame as the basis for successful LGBTQ-inclusive instruction within the context of educational equity:

My ideal school requires a paradigm shift in what we consider schools to be. It isn't enough to simply introduce LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum if the school as a site still practices other forms of oppression. My ideal school is intersectional.

For instance, we discussed that centering the idea of intersectionality assured that we were selecting materials for instruction that serve as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” (Bishop, 2015). In other words, we needed instructional materials that reflected students' identities (e.g., mirrors), provided representation of those who were different from them (e.g., windows), and invited them to step into different cultures and experience them (e.g., sliding glass doors). During these conversations, Ginez reflected on how using intersectionality as a concept for selecting instructional materials that represented and explained different identities in instruction provided a space and context for using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. For Ginez, interrupting heteronormative ways of thinking fits easily into an intersectional design of instruction. The practice of using positive images, language and themes provides all students will see each other reflected and validated for multiple categories of identity (e.g. race, nationality, primary language(s) as well as families with LGBTQ people in them). Further, Ginez drew a connection to Caraballo's (2016) conceptual framework that we had discussed regarding the evaluative context of instruction that unexamined reinforces dominant social paradigms about gender, applying it to instruction. Ginez posited that by understanding the evaluative context of teaching, she and other teachers could work to eliminate practices that impose and expect student to conform to a binary model. Instead, using an expansive understanding of gender would help

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us reflect, withhold imposing our own expectations regarding how students should perform their identify in school, and educate students about a gender spectrum. Continuing this theme, during the third co/autoethnography session, Ginez stated, “it would be reimagining what it is to learn taking into account the intersectionality of identities and understanding that we cannot expect performances based on any one identity or group of identities.” The result of such an approach is that students, as Ginez put it, “are allies with one another and make connections with each other’s differences instead of disparaging one another for them”.

During our second PD day, another equity team member, Luz, continued the discussion about intersectionality and its role in selection of instructional materials. She described the factors that influence selecting these materials so that students see themselves mirrored in curriculum:

...having intentional space to be heard and affirmed as well. This didn’t just come from having instruction that was just focused on LGBTQ-inclusive instruction but making sure that it is not just coming from white voices and they were seeing and hearing stories from people that looked and sounded like them.

Intersectionality and self-reflection also served as a professional development tools. On a parallel track to thinking about work with students, the team reflected on the need for professional development with the whole staff regarding LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and practices. Using the strategies, the team participated in during our PD days together, we recorded both topics and ways to operationalize that work, including engaging in gallery walks, using quotes from research as discussion prompts, and providing protocols for reflective writing. The team posited that to educate about cultural and family diversity, and support student expression of their identities-in practice (Caraballo, 2016), educators must understand their own identities,

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as well as be able to distinguish how their students' identities may differ from theirs and/or the predominantly white, middle class, colonialized culture in schools. Explaining this point, one Equity team member asserted that teachers must “understand the importance of identity and what is included in an identity and why LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as part of that... I think those are the first steps for all teachers (and students) to start with.”

The second co/autoethnography session focused on structures needed at school to support LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. From their writing and dialogues, the Equity Team agreed that one major necessary structure was ongoing professional development for teachers regarding intersectionality. They shared that teachers require PD about the diversity of identities present in our community so they can begin to understand how the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction is important for all students. On our first PD day, the team talked about using instruction that emphasized “alternative ways of thinking (duality)” in the context of “deepen/radicalize Ally Week,” phrases which they recorded on our discussion wall charts. The team used an intersectional approach so that staff and students of different identities could use experiences of their own oppressive experiences to extend empathy and understanding for the needs to assure all types of identities were represented positively. The team also called out the need to address the idea that LGBTQ-inclusive instruction was only warranted when a teacher “knew” someone in the class is known by the teacher as being LGBTQ, or possibly as having, LGBTQ family members. Luz discussed first with a team partner, and then with the whole group:

...if you are a teacher with a student ... then you are going to say, “what am I going to do”, for this ongoing thing the student needs. But if it is in front of you and you don't see it [a teacher might argue], ‘well- it's not that bad if she is not part of my class.’ It's not seen as part of making or helping our kids become good people. Period...the things that I

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do, or talk about or that matter with the kids, we are the role model and the facilitator and everything.

Collectively, the Equity Team believed that staff professional development that provided personal self-reflection was sorely lacking within the district, and that teachers have not had the opportunity, nor appropriate structured protocols, to reflect on expanding the instructional materials that they use with students. In the quote below, for example, Luz compared the process of building an LGBTQ-inclusive practice to other instructional initiatives the staff has focused on, and emphasized the need for teachers to begin with some self-reflection on what prevents them from using inclusive curriculum:

For me, just like any other issue that's difficult for teachers--call it any of the isms--they need support and information to do a close examination of their biases...there has to be a willingness to do that because... we use [language]... in a derogatory way or in a way that marginalizes others and we all have it to some extent or another. I first think that there has to be a creative way for people to examine their own biases.

Additionally, the team recognized that teachers do not have enough opportunities to collaborate with their peers in that reflection. The isolation of teachers was an idea the team repeatedly discussed during both the first and second PD day, and they believed that this isolation has decayed the trust and rapport the staff needs to build LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practices that are ongoing and reach across all grade levels.

For the Equity Team, writing, sharing and reflecting on their own stories illustrated that teachers who occupy diverse positions relative to social privilege and oppression can engage in thoughtful conversation and develop a common motivation to use LGBTQ-inclusive teaching practice. They felt that the first co/autoethnography session, which focused on factors that

influenced their own identity development as social justice focused educators with an LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practice, helped them do this. As we debriefed our first co-autoethnography session in the afternoon of our first PD day, we discussed whether the co/autoethnography process could be used the staff at the school. The team wanted the staff to have a similar experience as ours--to have the opportunity to build trust and rapport with one another, and to have the writing and reflection about influences from their life that influenced development of their teaching practice.

### **Embedding LGBTQ-Inclusive Content into School-wide Instructional Strategies**

The Equity Team designed LGBTQ-inclusive lessons and activities using the school's current focus on three instructional techniques--critical literacy questions, visual teaching strategies, and arts integration--on which their entire teaching staff had previously received professional training and were currently using. The team thought that embedding LGBTQ content within strategies that the teachers were already comfortable using would prevent their possible reaction that LGBTQ-inclusive instruction was an additional responsibility. As an example, Ginez developed language arts lessons exemplify using the school's instructional strategies and LGBTQ-inclusive content. Ginez chose to integrate all three strategies with LGBTQ content into lesson designs. One way Ginez did so was by working with several team members to modify questions provided by Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth (2013) to lead discussions with students about LGBTQ people in readily available story books that do not have explicit themes and images of LGBTQ people. At the time of this study, students in Ginez's class were already familiar with a number of writing and video analysis strategies used in their language arts instruction. During our second PD day, Ginez began to develop lessons using critical literacy skills to help students hone their critical thinking using LGBTQ-inclusive

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content. Her aim was to use critical literacy to help students dissect assumptions about gender categories:

I'm going to use... "the gender book, *Who Are You*, to introduce vocabulary because it's really scaffolded and simply put... In the article I found really good questions- How do you describe or label yourself- boy girl brother sister son daughter? What do these labels mean to you? What are some characteristics that you believe come with that label? Are those characteristics true for everyone with that label? What happens if they're not? Who gets to decide what those labels mean? What happens if you decide not to have a characteristic which most people think belongs our label? Is that more acceptable in some places than others? Where do you fit in most? Why? How do those places make you feel? How do you feel when you can't be in them? (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2006)

### **Supporting Staff through Ongoing Professional Development**

A final factor the team recognized as essential for integrating LGBTQ-Inclusive curriculum was ongoing professional development and other supports for staff at their school site. To this end, the Equity Team identified opportunities and limitations in leading the staff through PD that provided information, skill-building, and supported practice with those skills, with LGBTQ-inclusive materials. While the team recognized staff professional development as a long-term goal that extends beyond the scope of this research study, we nonetheless compiled content and explored strategies that could be used with staff during and beyond this research study. As part of this planning, team members who were newer to teaching helped brainstorm possible ideas, but also wanted to focused on developing their own instructional and student-focused practices rather than on leading staff PD. The more veteran Equity Team members took



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the lead with PD activities with staff on using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. This section illustrates some challenges the team experienced working to increase the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with staff, some responses to those challenges, and PD content we created to help encourage teachers to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction.

Collaboration with the staff presented a few challenges during the course of this study. For one, the Equity Team expressed some fear of being ostracized by teachers who do not understand the reason for and/or approve of, LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Maris described the fear as, “the feeling that you will push too far, that you will get push back from parents or staff.” This conflict was raised by team members in initial interviews and when reflecting on co/autoethnography during our first PD day. In initial interviews, one way the Equity Team experienced pushback due to religious objections to LGBTQ instruction. During our first PD day, four team members discussed their anxiety, tension, fear and avoidance of discussion about religious objections to LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with teachers or parents. Addressing religious opposition to the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction is one example of why working together was so important. In response to the team’s conversation about religious opposition, I introduced several conversation themes to focus on, including validating home culture and explaining the different role school plays in creating a safe, respectful, learning environments across all the ways families do have different values.

The Equity Team often required discussion during our PD days to bolster individual resiliency to address opposition to using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction that gets expressed by some of the teachers. In these situations, I encouraged the team to reflect on the positive impact they are making and to recall the number of teachers at the site who value social justice focused instruction. We also shared in our sessions that staff at the school expressed explicitly that

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LGBTQ-inclusive instruction was appreciated and needed. The team framed that teachers who oppose LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in part do so because they do not know how to respond when students or family members have negative reactions to countering heteronormativity with positive images of LGBTQ people in school.

The Equity Team also provided peer support when emotionally challenging experiences arise from championing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with oppositional teachers or parents. One spontaneous conversation initiated by team members in response to talking about the challenge of religious opposition was a passionate conversation about why the team is committed to LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. The team described in detail the presence of positive images, language themes of diversity, and empowering students' authentic self-expression. One Equity Team member reflected that we used LGBTQ-inclusive instruction because we understand from our personal experience of oppression based upon our identity, or as allies to others. During both our PD days together, we continued to analyze the staff's needs and talked about wanting all teachers to feel a similar connection to LGBTQ-inclusive instruction from their own experience. The team identified that, as a team, we all seemed to be motivated to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction because we know the negative effect education has on all students every day if it is missing, since we have experienced it personally. Two team members had the following exchange during our conversation as a way to bolster support for one another:

Maris: Knowing that implementing this work can feel like you are going against the waves, but knowing that's what makes this work important.

Ginez: Not only like you're going against the waves, but also unlearning all the internalized oppression and reflecting on how that influences our bodies, our rhetoric, and our interactions.

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During our second PD day, the Equity Team embraced the concept that instruction needed to “go against the waves” in order to achieve goals of increasing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. During the gallery walk activity, they reflected on the need for teachers to update their teaching practice to address social equity, including the responsibility of all teachers to include positive images of the LGBTQ community.

The Equity Team also discussed the need to provide staff with ongoing PD about the diversity present in our community, and in particular, about the need for increasing cultural knowledge about the LGBTQ community. As noted earlier, the team discussed that often, teachers believe such content is only necessary when they “know” there are LGBTQ students in the class. Luz represented the team’s response to this by saying,

...if you are a teacher with a student ... that you are going to say, “what am I going to do”, for this ongoing thing [like gender expression, or race]. But if it is in front of you and you don’t see it- (a teacher might argue) ‘well- it’s not that bad if she is not part of my class.’...That’s how I see it a lot of times, the things that I do, or talk about or that matter with the kids, we are the role model and the facilitator and everything.”

Further, the Equity Team identified that PD would provide opportunities for the staff to support one another and work as a group to develop common language with LGBTQ-inclusive instruction that extends school wide and across the year.

The Equity Team also believed all teachers should understand and adhere to state legislation and district policy directing schools and teachers’ responsibility to address trans/homophobic bullying and harassment through multiple measures including LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Some teachers, team members expressed, adhere to instructional practices that focus only on academic content and ignore addressing social factors that create inequitable

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social learning environments. During our initial interview, Luce explained that all teachers should understand that laws and associated school policies are not optional suggestions, they are a requirement of teaching. As she suggests, teachers should learn about laws addressing inclusion of the LGBTQ community through instruction and adapt teaching practices to meet these laws: “If teachers understood the laws like the Fair Act, they would understand that it’s actually their job to do, not just ‘I have to read this book to students’, you should already be doing this with students because that’s the law...because people see it is optional.” The topic of knowing and adhering to legislation arose again during our second PD day. Harper explained the challenge as follows:

I think there’s this lingering of old-school belief system teaching that we teach read and write and content and stop there...we need to do more and we need to teach students to be, you know (sigh) we need to do more especially because we have such diversity and this is how we create change.

The Equity Team identified that one thing they could do to support the teaching staff was to provide teachers with accurate information and the written documents explaining the teaching requirements required by law and district policy. At that point, I took the opportunity to share an update about the most recent California legislation on meeting needs of transgender students in school. Rene followed up with the idea that written evidence of laws and policy would assure teachers that using LGBTQ content is directed by law and will be supported by the school district if objections to its use arose from parents or other community members: “I think teachers need to be reminded of federal, state, local laws and district policies. We have to empower them to take on this work without fear...They need to see things in writing to back up what they’re teaching in their classroom.”

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The two days of our meeting as an Equity Team for our PAR professional development process yielded a nuanced profile of the factors that fostered the Equity Team's collaborative ability to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at their elementary school. The team drew support and collaborative efficacy from working as a team of leaders, and highlighted the importance of supporting development of common language and practices countering the status the default assumptions of cisgender/heteronormative practices. They learned about instructional strategies that could be used with both their own students and colleagues (such as gallery walks, co/autoethnography, and collaborative lesson planning/critical literacy skills) and created their own curriculum to carry those out. They identified the importance of embedding LGBTQ content into ongoing schoolwide instructional strategies and of using an intersectional approach for both teaching and professional development. Finally, at the conclusion of two days of PD together, the Equity Team navigated some challenges to implementing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction themselves as well as brainstormed information and professional development ideas to support teachers in building their LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practice as well as addressing concerns of more resistant teachers.

As primary researcher in the study, I also began to discern from our interviews, co/autoethnography, lesson planning/implementation, strategic planning for supporting staff and the strategy of creating and leading school wide events, that "LGBTQ-inclusive instruction" is a practice that goes beyond academic standards-based instruction in the classroom. Through the analysis of the data generated in this study, I recognized that the Equity Team and I were creating a clearer, more complex, and more nuanced definition of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and instruction.

### **Expanding the Definition of LGBTQ-inclusive Instruction**

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Analyzing phase one data (the initial interviews, artifacts from our two PD days, and the initial collaborative analysis of the team) and triangulating that data with phase 2 data (reflection interviews and our third co-autoethnography reflective writing) produced a range of ways the Equity Team teachers practiced LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. This, in turn, provided data to create an explicit and broader operational definition of what is meant by the general term “LGBTQ-inclusive instruction”. Initially we assumed “instruction” to encompass academic standard-based instruction led by teachers using LGBTQ-inclusive instructional resources. However, the data revealed that a significant portion of instruction focused on knowledge of how we (staff and students) interact and treat each other. This included the range of ways we (staff and students) self-identify, the social-emotional skills we use to treat one another respectfully, and the ways we collaborate with one another in academic, recreational and social interactions throughout the school. The Equity Team also planned and implemented a third type of instruction called “schoolwide activity” that engaged both staff, students and the larger community in a variety of activities with structured discussion using positive LGBTQ-inclusive images, language and themes. These activities have become traditional rituals that are interwoven twice a year at this elementary school. What follows is a detailed description of an expanded definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction that emerged over the course of this study, which includes the following components: engaging in academic instruction, teaching students about identity development, and sustaining schoolwide activities.

### **Academic Instruction**

LGBTQ-inclusive academic instruction is centered upon current elementary academic content standards of language arts, social studies and history. Our discussions continually reiterated that safety, respect and inclusion of LGBTQ people is normalized through use positive

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images, language and themes about diversity of families including LGBTQ people within content area instruction. LGBTQ-inclusive instruction presents students with the opportunity to develop a factual and cultural knowledge of LGBTQ people, and through discussion and familiarity, to develop comfort with people they perceive are different from them. Furthermore, students will be able to use respectful language in social and academic conversation as well as their writing. LGBTQ-inclusive academic instruction like this also provides an opportunity to teach and reinforce social emotional skills such as empathy and developing cultural knowledge of social diversity including the LGBTQ community.

When envisioning the ideal implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive academic instruction in elementary school, the team identified several practices that would be part of the fabric of ongoing instruction. These included teachers and students engaged in critical thought about the experiences of LGBTQ characters in texts and books, the use of intersectional resources with which student's study about common struggles and empowerment with a focus on commonalities across all forms of cultural and personal difference. For instance, in the final co/autoethnography writing, Luz described that students "relate themselves to characters in LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. Students reference these books and apply lessons learned from them."

During the PAR PD series, we developed academic lesson plans for teachers to use in the classroom and schoolwide activities to deepen schoolwide practices of countering binary systems of oppression through use of books, discussion, and art as mediums for instruction. Our lesson plan design process on our second PD day illustrated how creating curriculum was also an opportunity for teachers to deepen their understanding of conceptual frameworks about SOGIE and countering heteronormativity. Even with the Equity Team's strong basic knowledge about SOGIE and using instruction to counter heteronormative thinking and practices, they still

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required the time and space to think, discuss and rehearse LGBTQ-inclusive instructional language and procedures. Taking advantage of these educational moments increased the depth of knowledge the Equity Team wanted to reach in their lesson plans. As an example, one team member engaged in a lengthy conversation about what the idea of “binary” actually meant. One part of the discussion telescoped out broadly to social paradigms that use a binary to privilege some and marginalize others--such as how white supremacy operates and heterosexual privilege is expressed. We then re-focused on understanding the binary construction of gender identity/expression. Ultimately, to understand the social construction of binary thinking is helpful for understanding how powerful evaluative context of most curriculum materials and social procedures are in school. As a result of the discussion, Rene was able to make decision about how to talk to students about breaking gender stereotypes as a way to counter a binaried notion of gender. The lesson design activity emphasized the critical need for supported practice of LGBTQ-inclusive academic instruction.

During our second co/autoethnography session, during which we wrote about structures at school that are needed to support increased LGBTQ-inclusive academic instruction, we discussed and identified that staff needed the same access to professional development time we had to deepen their understanding of conceptual frameworks about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community, to discuss the purposes and outcomes of instruction, to participate in the selection of the LGBTQ-inclusive materials for content-area instruction, and to develop LGBTQ-inclusive academic instructional plans. We also recognized a number of successful LGBTQ-inclusive academic strategies the Equity Team was using, such as literary circles, cross-age reading, ally marches, and ally weeks, served multiple needs for this school. Specifically, these activities allowed participants to ask questions; practice appropriate language related to SOGIE and the



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LGBTQ community; and to understand and teach the interconnectivity of self-awareness, self-pride, and self-expression to empathy, respect and understanding of those people who students (and teachers) see as different from themselves.

**Student activism as academic instruction.** One goal from our Equity Team work was to support students in using their agency to impact their school and local community. Through our work together, the Equity Team identified several strategies to increase student activism within academic instruction. This was relevant to the Equity Team's work to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction because they saw student activism at school and/or in the community as way to engage student voice about SOGIE, and to position students as experts and models of addressing a social issue their teachers were in the process of also learning how to do. For instance, in our initial interview Harper described a possible activity for kindergarten level student activism. She wanted to have her students tour school and community spaces to identify how binary categories of gender were reinforced in those spaces. She imagined students could share what they learn with others at school. In addition, she illustrated ways student activism could also be used as an instructional strategy when data is brought back into the classroom from analyzing stores, stating, "We...want to do a student-led research project where they go to the toy store and look at the aisles games and clothes.... but it's also like just having the kids acknowledge, 'oh wow, this is how the world in a store makes a girl look and a boy look.'"

As another illustration, Luz planned to continue to support sixth graders with activism through academic activities at their school as well. Luz aimed to reestablish her support of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade Ally club. The previous year, they had begun cross-grade reading buddies, using LGBTQ-inclusive storybooks. The sixth-grade students were looking forward to continuing this practice and learning how to discuss family diversity and SOGIE with younger students. Cross-age

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reading builds understanding, communication skills, and reinforces the agency of both the sixth-grade students and their younger partners. Luz described,

When the sixth graders did the read-alouds to the school and they had some practice time with me and they were able to... give the younger kids the author's message or what they took away from the books. For the kids to hear it from those six graders and I have to repeat it with these six graders as well. I think it's a powerful way to get the message out to their peers, we call them big brothers and sisters and I hope to make it more impactful this year.

Maris added to this conversation during our first PD day. Her comment below illustrated that academic activities can be built upon and developed into intentional strategies to engage more students in activism and impact on their school environment:

Can we talk about Ally book club...having literature circles or literature clubs? Because then they can do their own read-alouds and practice before they go into other classrooms-- literature circles /reading circles and maybe even start with transitional kindergarten. Certain students would be working on certain books. Books would rotate, and focus specifically on LGBTQ topics and integrate them with the mentor texts that the whole class reads together (lots or agreement).

### **Teaching Students about Identity Development**

A second dimension of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction that surfaced from our PD was teaching students about identity development. This theme arose in the initial interview as the team members expressed awareness of the need to counter rigid binary notions of gender identity/expression. Every Equity Team member specifically stated that it was important to create a safe space for all students to talk about and express their identity and the configurations

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of family in which they lived. Three team members, in particular, described creating classrooms where students could use preferred pronouns and express any form of non-binary experience of themselves. Their interest in this explicit aspect of teaching speaks to the need for developing accurate background knowledge and language fluency about SOGIE.

The data generated by our work together through our professional development activities, our final interviews and the third co-autoethnography session surfaced in Equity Team instructional practices regarding teaching students positive and affirmative information about LGBTQ identity development. The analysis also called out the need for a more frequent presence of instruction that counters heteronormative behavioral practices and interrupts operational procedures in classroom and in other physical spaces throughout the school as an effort to normalize the representation and presence of LGBTQ people and families in the school community. The group expressed that this creates safe space for the embodiment and enactment of relationships and identities beyond and outside of cisgender heterosexuality. For instance, during our first co/autoethnography writing and discussion, Ginez's comment demonstrated an understanding that children begin to explore the nature of their identity, including gender identity/expression, as one aspect of multi-layered and intersectional identities. Students, Ginez understood, will build their understanding of themselves, in part, from the information they get in school. Ginez highlighted that teachers have the power to relay status quo paradigms of how students will define themselves, or alternately, help explore who they are at school. She recognized that teachers can "open the door" and share information that interrupts status quo notions of identity, and in the case of this study, about SOGIE. Ginez explained:

I believe this work is very important to begin addressing young. This is during the time where they are coming to understand themselves and their identities in relationship to

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those in their school community... If we can begin to open the doors and possibilities of all they can be and express their intersectional identities and have a community understanding of the complexity of identity and this begin to be part of our understanding as a community and society at large.

During our first PD day, Equity Team members described teaching self-love, self-acceptance and the awareness and respect of others as a key relationship-building tool between adults and students. Our team initially began our work together by describing various ways they were beginning the school year by talking about self-identity and including information about gender identity/expression in their teaching. In particular, all team members have begun introducing information to students about gender as fluid and as existing on a spectrum between the heteronormative notions of male and female. They also highlighted teacher-student conversations empowering self-awareness and self-pride of personal identity, framing a classroom space of normalizing awareness, acceptance and respect for all forms of gender expression regardless of the physical body any individual is born into. For instance, Luce illustrated an awareness of the limitation of binary paradigms of gender on inclusive language and the messages students internalize when LGBTQ-exclusionary language is used, stating, “I really try to be inclusive of all the kids. For example, ‘let’s not say guys, that’s not inclusive of everybody, not everybody identifies as a male’.... oh, they will get it. So, with me I try to do like, language.” As a second example, Luce described interactions with students and parents in which gender stereotypes were intentionally interrupted by switching up the colors of folders distributed to students and the instructional discussions that accompany that procedure:

I would even do different colors and I even had one mom talk to me, like, “oh, the homework folder was, like, purple!” and I was Like, “yeah, yup.” And she would say,

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“Yeah, he was excited about it but his aunt was like, “that was not a boy color”. I said, “in my class, there is no such thing as boy colors or girls’ colors.”

Luce capitalized on this disruption of gender stereotype color associations to engage students in socially reconstructing an understanding of gender as expressed through color preferences.

Likewise, this presented an opportunity for parent conversation about how binary gender categories are messaged outside and inside school. Summing up her goal of teaching about all forms of self-identity development, in her first co-autoethnography discussion with Harper, Luz commented: “At the end of the day, we want you to be happy in your skin and that it matters who you are.”

We continued to expand the ways in which students feel safe in classrooms and throughout the school to practice their identities-in-development and to talk about their family when they have LGBTQ family members. During the final co/autoethnography writing and discussion, team members anticipated that their school, in an ideal form, would have more staff readily sharing currently marginalized aspects of their identity with students to create a space in which students, as Luz said, “also take risks and share their identities”. Toward that goal, during the end of the second day of PD, the Equity Team discussed that the academic focus of lessons can include an investigation of how social paradigms about SOGIE and LGBTQ community operate, how cisgender/ heteronormativity effects the identity development of adult and students alike, and how students and staff alike can develop the skills and practice the habits of supporting one another in positive ways. Afterward, team members identified content for discussion embedded in language arts and social studies--for example, as social awareness; learning and using social-emotional skills such as empathy and respect; and discussing and

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understanding how to act and create social change. Luz illustrated this during a discussion while the team was lesson planning, referencing a character in the book she would be using:

Definitely do it as a read-aloud, do some character analysis with Antonio, about internal conflicts and why he's feeling uncomfortable, leading about how school is not safe for him and because of that, he's feeling this way. With my class in particular, kind of tying it back to the so many conversations we've had about put-downs and ...about certain things are saying to each other.

### **Sustaining Schoolwide Activities**

A third area of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction the Equity Team identified included schoolwide activities. While not a content area of instruction, as are the academic instructional activities described earlier, or as the teaching of identity development to students might be seen, sustaining school-wide activities is a strategy to increase both staff and student engagement with LGBTQ-inclusive instruction through the school for multiple purposes. Schoolwide activities center academic and social skills instruction throughout the school, both beyond and including instruction in the classroom. The strategic thinking for schoolwide activities is that these are an opportunity for all students to receive common messaging about and interaction with content that breaks binary forms of thought about SOGIE and LGBTQ people, as well as other identities. The Equity Team described that they provided instructional leadership using preplanned activities and materials they had created, and all teachers at their school site participated in the activities participation described below. In addition, the Equity Team was able to present one short PD module to teachers prior to the Fall Ally week, during a staff meeting. Last, school wide academic instructional strategies such as critical literacy questions, integrated arts strategies, and visual teaching strategies were incorporated throughout the school wide activities.

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**Ally Weeks, Marches and a Community Read-In.** The Equity Team planned and conducted this year's Fall school-wide Ally week to set the tone of LGBTQ inclusion at the beginning of the school year. The team prepared a week of activities, which placed a low demand on teachers' preparation and implementation time. From our work together in our PAR research project, the Equity Team had expressed their renewed commitment to deepening the instructional content through the use of common language across the grades and explicit positive and accurate language that counters binary paradigms of SOGIE and normalizes the presence of LGBTQ people in content and in the school community. In order to achieve this, during the second PD day, we engaged in a critical reflection process to assess the strengths and challenges of past Ally week components and used these to inform the planning of this year's activities.

We built on past successes of Ally Weeks in multiple ways. One, teachers led students in discussion about LGBTQ people and about gender identity/expression in a station activity, with stations addressing racial and religious diversity, differences in physical and cognitive ability, and immigration status. In these stations, we used a set of storybooks that has been curated and covers topics including positive images, language, and themes addressing the aforementioned social justice issues. Two, the focus on the use of these books for classroom door decorating contests was stronger and resulted in many more doors providing evidence that books had been read with students by their teachers. Three, there was successful participation in the home-school pledge card, which contained short statements about what it means to be an ally and that provide action steps for being one. Four, student writing and family art decorated the school's hallways and some provided representation about being an Ally to LGBTQ people.

Some areas of concern and improvement from past years were easily addressed, and some required lengthier reflection. The team approached items perceived as "easier" with

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pragmatic delegation among the team. As a result, they produced clearer, more explicit directions and resources for door decorating, family pledge cards, and Ally March stations with increased intersectional themes. All of these supported more focused teacher-student conversations about LGBTQ people and SOGIE, along with other social-justice focused topics. Some initial PD at staff meetings was begun, and will continue, as they steadily address the need to increase staff's understanding of concepts about SOGIE and to apply that to teacher-student discussion.

Extensive thought and discussion went into the team's planning about deepening the content instruction during this ally week. During the first PD session in this study the team discussed that some teachers' instruction about what it means to be an ally for LGBTQ people and interrupting homo/transphobia was actually being "watered down". Through discussion, we understood this to mean that there is a power of status quo practices to assimilate "ally" language at a surface level without accompanying explicit instruction with inclusion of LGBTQ themes. For example, some teachers discuss allies solely as "good friends," rather than providing the definition that allies take action to support LGBTQ people and interrupt anti-gay or gender biased behavior. The "allies as friends" version, the team realized, did not create any disruption to the dominant paradigm. Therefore, we paid additional attention to structuring activities with more explicit language and discussion prompts. The following activities described demonstrate this effort.

One new event that demonstrated the team's effort to increase schoolwide collaboration around LGBTQ-inclusive instruction was the Community Read-In. For this event, twenty district and community members each read one of twelve books with positive LGBTQ themes in twenty transitional kinder to sixth grade classes, sharing common language and content to normalize the presence of LGBTQ people in the school and greater community. The school's librarian also



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read *And Tango Makes Three* to K-2 classes, *Henry Holston Takes the Ice* to 3-4 grade classes, and *In My Mothers' House* to 5-6<sup>th</sup> graders. Ally Week activities such as the Community Read-In illustrated the intersectional approach to social justice-focused education used by the Equity Team. In this way, the Equity Team affirmed the importance of teaching and modeling LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in an intersectional context that acknowledges all facets of identity, as well as recognizes anti-oppression pedagogy as necessary to support and meet needs of all students.

The Equity Team also utilized schoolwide events as a venue to deepen teacher learning about instructional content, particularly regarding providing examples of specific language teachers can use with students. The team developed a specific theme related to different identity groups and the academic language necessary to discuss the form of oppression that targeted that group. This information was coupled with the illustrations and photos at each station, as well as on teaching guides (which the Equity Team called “cheat sheets”) that were provided to each teacher as they led their students through each station. Gay dads, Lesbian moms, transgender children, interracial/gay marriage, children breaking gender stereotypes, countering gender oppression, and diverse family configurations were depicted at stations, along with other types of diversity such as religious, racial and social economic class. All were represented at the different stations throughout the campus during the Ally March.

The same intersectional approach to countering oppression was illustrated in the school-home connection pledge card activity, in which parents/families were guided through a template allowing them to view and select words to complete a cloze sentence for choices in a word bank. The Spanish and English directions guided parents to have a conversation with their family and to discuss the vocabulary in a word bank including language that might be new and possibly uncomfortable. The Ally sentence is structured in the following way: “When we (insert verb)

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(insert an oppression you stand against), we will protect (insert identity group) because we are allies!” Sample sentences that were on the Ally pledge instructions included: “When we encounter transphobia, we will protect transgender people because we are Allies!” “When we notice racism, we will stand up for people of color because we are Allies!”

The creation of this more explicit pledge card required a PD module at a staff meeting to explain its purpose and to suggest ways to use it. This year, the team had edited the pledge to provide more clear and explicit information about how parents could discuss the meaning of being an ally, what actions their family might want to take as allies, and what identity group they valued being allies for. The words “LGBT people” and “transgender people” were included on the ally card just as they had been for the past 4 years. However, this year, the team used “LGBTQ people” as an example in the modelling of how to use the ally card during the staff meeting. In this instance, Equity Team members presented the option of using an upcoming parent-teacher conference to share information about the ally pledge activity. Teachers had many reactions to this: many appreciated the explicit focus on a social justice issues, but some teachers reacted adversely to using parent-teacher conference time to explain the activity. The Equity Team assured the teachers that they were not required to introduce the ally card to parents during parent conferences, but rather, teachers could do so if they were interested. Despite this explanation, one teacher became agitated, and told the team in an angry tone that that she did not want to be made to feel uncomfortable and that she would feel rushed if she used the Ally cards during parent conferences. While she did not state that her negative response was specifically about her discomfort with LGBTQ people, there was a tension in the elevated anxiety she expressed. The Equity Team was startled and a bit taken aback at her response, but, as they discussed later in their reflections, they felt they performed well as facilitators by staying calm

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despite not having all the answers they would have wanted to provide. After this confrontation, three teachers balanced the focus in the room when they spoke up in support and appreciation of actually having what they called a “social justice focused conversation”. In the debrief of this session with the Equity Team, I reminded them that this exact language about LGBTQ people has been present on the cards in the past three years of Ally Week events. As we discussed this development, we collectively recognized that the range of teacher reactions to materials like Ally Cards can become a site for learning, and can help us develop clear rationales for responding to those who may be resistant.

All the data generated from this study contributed to the development of an operational definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as described in the paragraphs above. Although presented as separate, each subset of the themes described in this section were interwoven and overlapped in the day-to-day instruction and relationship between teachers on the Equity Team and their students. Deconstructing the different aspects of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction can play a role in helping teachers understand the depth and breadth of this work as they make decisions about LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, a topic I take up in chapter five.

### **Conclusion**

The Equity Team PAR research process yielded detailed data illustrating both processes and instructional content that supported the increased use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout an elementary school. The work of the Equity Team demonstrated one form of site leadership that kept a schoolwide focus on LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Our work as a team produced evidence for successful ongoing professional learning about how to teach and discuss LGBTQ people at an elementary school level. We identified conceptual frameworks that supported ongoing teacher learning, implemented lessons using LGBTQ-inclusive books and

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content from kindergarten to sixth grade, and led and participated in schoolwide events in which all teachers and students engaged in activities with positive LGBTQ-inclusive content.

Furthermore, as an equity team, we reflected on the effectiveness of a range of content and strategies that we used in our co-learning about increasing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout an elementary school and how this co-learning was transformed into an increase and a deepening of the LGBTQ-inclusive instruction occurred thus far at the school site. Lastly, the team reflected on our research as a work-in-progress, understanding that our work together continues forward together now and in the coming year.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, I worked together with a team of instructional leaders to investigate the constellation of factors that result in the successful use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in an elementary school, as well as examine the processes of professional learning and facilitation that foster these factors. The findings discussed in the previous chapter provide multiple implications that contribute to research regarding the well-documented need for implementing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in our nations K-12 schools (Biegel, 2010; California Safe Schools Coalition & 4-H Center for Youth Development, 2004; Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Harris Interactive, 2012; Wimberly, 2015). In this chapter, I will synthesize my findings to introduce a potential model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching, drawing on conceptual frames from culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies, as well as insights from queer theory. This pedagogical framework can be used across K-12 educational settings to address the well-documented instructional void of instruction reflecting LGBTQ students, family and community, as well as potentially help mediate the negative and harmful conditions LGBTQ students and families experience in K-12 school settings nationally and internationally (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; UNESCO, 2016). As such, this framework can help to address gaps in initial teacher preparation programs and district professional development for teachers, as well as assist in creating school cultures in which expression of self-identity, in all its rich complexity, is recognized and welcomed as an asset in all aspects of school experience.

In the sections that follow, I begin with a brief discussion of research indicating that teachers are often under-prepared to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. I then describe elements

of a potential model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching, derived from this study's findings and drawing from culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies and queer theory. Last, I provide implementation recommendations to the educational community, including school districts and pre-service institutions, and review further research questions that emerged through this study.

### **Increasing LGBTQ-Inclusive Instruction in Elementary Schools**

Research has reported that many teachers know they lack the skills and readiness to provide instruction with LGBTQ content (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). In these studies, the data showed a range of differences in teacher intention and readiness to address this task. Many teachers are willing, but others teachers resist or object to using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Both groups of teachers have needs for development that will position them as able to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and content with their students (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010), including the need for teacher support that builds their understanding of LGBTQ students and families, and use of LGBTQ inclusive materials which would, in turn, create the confidence they need to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with students (Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). However, despite a growing body of scholarly literature that describes instructional strategies and an array of curricular materials (Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2016; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2013; Flores, 2012), other studies continue to indicate that the number of teachers integrating LGBTQ-inclusive materials continues to be negligible (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; UNESCO, 2016). To address this gap, I worked with an Equity Team at one elementary school to co-create and implement professional development to

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bridge the gap between teacher interest and ability to use LGBT-inclusive instruction, and to expand the participation of other teachers at their school.

Below I discuss three major insights from this study. First, I discuss the impact of co-constructed professional development for the Equity Team. Second, I discuss the Equity Team's leadership resulting in successfully implemented LGBTQ-inclusive instruction at Cherryland Elementary School. Lastly, I discuss the pragmatics and benefits of PAR as a research methodology centering the use of research/action in to increase LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching in elementary school.

This study centered on the practice of collaborative leadership to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Our professional development/research design resulted in our collaborative increased knowledge about effective LGBTQ-inclusive instructional practices. We engaged in co-constructed professional development that allowed the team develop individual ongoing instruction practices with students, as well as develop specific leadership strategies to support the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout the school. This multi-layered approach first surfaced their own lived experiences, particularly regarding multiple intersectional oppressions. We then validated those experiences together through the activities we participated in during our PD sessions together. In particular, critically reflective practices, such as co/autoethnography, allowed us to identify how socio-cultural consciousness (such as the team's understanding of our own privilege and oppression) was a driving factor in our desire to prioritize LGBTQ-inclusive instruction for the benefit of all students.

Additionally, a key part of our professional development was reading and discussing a variety of theoretical frameworks, such as culturally sustaining pedagogy (e.g., Paris & Alim, 2017) and queer theory (e.g., Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013). The ideas we distilled from

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these frameworks continued to validate the team's lived authority about the need for instruction to counter dominant paradigms of cisgender/heteronormative thinking and practice. In addition to formalizing their implicit knowledge from their lived experiences, using theory also supported our emerging development of common language to communicate about LGBTQ-inclusive instruction.

These points of learning were instrumental as the Equity Team translated their knowledge and practices into their school settings, thereby increasing the use of LGBTQ instruction at Cherryland and supporting their teaching colleagues in doing the same. They first applied to their own practice, carrying out the goals that they had identified in the professional development, as well as putting to work the theoretical principles we had discussed and the content and materials about SOGIE we had co-created, across grade levels. After experiencing initial success in their own practice, they expanded their work to the whole school, through, for example, leading school-wide ally events as well as planned and began to facilitate site-based professional development with their own teachers about understanding and implementing LGBTQ inclusive instruction.

Beyond the learning of the Equity Team, and the increase of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction and support for teachers carrying out this work at Cherryland, this study also makes a methodological contribution by offering a concrete example of participatory action research conducted by a practitioner embedded in a district setting/school site. As simultaneously the lead researcher on this project, a district employee, and a participant, I had to navigate and negotiate multiple roles and competing responsibilities, which made the process messy. Some of these roles and responsibilities were constraining, while others were enabling. For example, in my official district capacity as a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA), I was not in a position



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where I was required to evaluate the members of the Equity Team, and we had developed a relationship as peer colleagues. Therefore, collaboration was already a familiar act, as we had been working together at Cherryland for some time.

However, I was also the coordinator of the Safe and Inclusive Schools Program (SISP), a role that I have occupied for nearly two decades, which positioned me as an authority figure in terms of LGBTQ Inclusive instruction and other equity issues, as well as came with power implications. This power required that I focus on democratizing our team process and decision-making, deliberately centering the participants' authority. Conversely, my position also was an enabling factor in that the district provided the funding for our PAR PD sessions, which, from a practical standpoint, gave us more than fourteen hours of dedicated time to work together. Finally, my role as coordinator also required me to attend to and support other equity issues at the site beyond LGBTQ-inclusive instruction; I needed to balance the focus on LGBTQ issues for the necessity of this project as well as find opportunities to address intersecting equity issues with the team. All of these negotiations were happening in real time, and demonstrate the complexity of carrying out a research project while galvanizing all the resources available in strategic ways to support the work of the Equity Team. However, it also speaks to the power of teacher leaders to be able to effect critically important initiatives that push forward crucial social justice work.

### **A Framework of LGBTQ-inclusive Leadership and Teaching**

The Equity Team/participants, including myself, identified as life-long learners about our LGBTQ-inclusive teaching craft within a larger context of social justice focused education. We brought with us into this study a significant critical reflectivity through which we identified our positionalities as assets in building relationships with students and teachers, achieving our

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professional goals, and supporting implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in school.

The analysis of data created in this study revealed that the importance of professional development and support of teachers at schools is three-pronged. These dimensions, as described in the findings, include the leadership role of the Equity Team, an expanded definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, and the strategy of using schoolwide events to embed LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in activities that engage the students and teachers of all grade levels in activities centering the presence of SOGIE and the LGBTQ community at school.

I used these three dimensions to develop a conceptual framework to increase LGBTQ-inclusive teacher leadership and practice as part of the model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching to explain successful processes to support the development of instructional skill sets and information to implement LGBTQ instruction. For instance, the Equity team and I determined that a key part of pedagogical practice is using an accurate knowledge base to guide the selection and design of instruction with include positive images, language and themes of the LGBTQ community to use with students. Accordingly, the body of data from this research illustrated that teachers need to have foundational understandings about sexual orientation and gender identification/expression (SOGIE) to discuss the experience of LGBTQ people with students. To accomplish this, the Equity team and I explored elements of queer theory, as applied to educational settings, as the foundation for the use of a fluid, non-binary model of SOGIE, and related academic vocabulary, to use with all students about the LGBTQ community and everyone's development of SOGIE.

Another key dimension of knowledge for this work encompasses assets-based instructional perspectives. There is the additional need to contextualize this type of instruction as an asset-based and transformational model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching that

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validates and supports the expression of students' personal identity and cultural practices at school. In our work together, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies provided a context and language for the Equity Team to describe inequitable systems of power and the impact these have on students, as well as explore the many affirming ways to support students as they navigate systems at school that privilege some and oppress others. In this project, both of these knowledge bases--foundational understandings about sexual orientation and gender identification/expression (SOGIE) and assets-based perspectives drawn from culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies--were necessary for the team to counter dominant paradigms of cisgender/heterosexism (cis/het) and cis/het thinking and practices inherent in the context of school curriculum and instruction, and to work to increase the use of LGBTQ instruction in other teachers' practices at their school.

Therefore, this study, which describes a co-constructed professional development effort to increase the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in elementary school while utilizing attributes of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies and insights from queer theory, allowed me to construct an emerging model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching that I argue can be translated for use across K-12 schools and for preservice/initial teacher preparation programs. In K-12 settings, LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching can provide the basis for a model of school and district professional development to deepen educational equity work. Further, this model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching could be potentially utilized in pre-service/initial teacher preparation programs to position new teaching candidates with the information and skills they will need to help create safe, inclusive school spaces which provide students with learning environments that embrace and sustain authentic expression of identity, family configuration, and cultural practices.

### **Developing a Framework for LGBTQ-Inclusive Teacher Leadership and Practice**

In this section, I offer an emerging model for LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching. To do so, I synthesized principle attributes of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995, Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Villegas & Luca, 2002; Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2014 & 2017), as described in chapter 2. Into this synthesis, I incorporated a range of information about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community, drawing on the contributions of queer theory, including insights regarding the limitation of binary constructs of gender, the reconceptualization of gender and sexuality as fluid, and the applications of these ideas to instruction in elementary school settings (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010).

The findings from the co-constructed professional development sessions in this study further inform this framework. As the Equity team noted, the conceptual frames of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies and the body of information about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community helped them develop the knowledge and skills to expand the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in their own practices. These knowledge and skills enabled team members to design and implement LGBTQ-inclusive instructional leadership with staff and students throughout their school. Using these key findings, I constructed the LGBTQ-inclusive framework that follows, using four key design elements from cultural relevant and sustaining pedagogies, integrated with components of queer theory, and illustrated with examples from my work with the Equity Team throughout this study. These include 1) viewing social cultural identity of SOGIE and the LGBTQ community as assets in education, 2) practicing critical reflectivity to 3) develop and maintain social consciousness about the LGBTQ community in school and instruction, 4) understanding and interrupting cisgender/heteronormative evaluative

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contexts, and 5) using an expansive definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction to guide instructional practice. Figure 1 and Figure 2 summarize the key elements of this framework and illustrate the skills and knowledge base the framework constructs.

<b>What teachers need to know</b>	<b>SOGIE/ LGBTQ community as assets</b>	<b>Critical reflectivity practice</b>	<b>SOGIE/ LGBTQ Socio- cultural consciousness</b>	<b>Interruption of Cis/Het norms in education</b>	<b>Definition of LGBTQ- inclusive instruction</b>
<b>The Role of the Teacher</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of teacher language/actions in reinforcing or disrupting the status quo of SOGIE.</li> <li>• How to interrupt practices that reinforce binary status quo of SOGIE.</li> <li>• Our own positionality is one part of a social context that interacts with students.</li> <li>• Our identities position each of us differently in terms of our social access and privilege.</li> </ul>		<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Socializing and Disciplining Function of Schools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ways school environments represent and privilege values of the dominant culture/society.</li> <li>• How heterosexism/heteronormativity sustains the devaluation of LGBTQ+ students in schools</li> </ul>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>		
<b>Student Identity &amp; Expression</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The value of students expressing their authentic identity/culture in schools,</li> <li>• The importance of identity and identity expression as part of an intersectional, asset-based pedagogy.</li> </ul>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Key SOGIE Understandings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing that cis/het thinking/practices function as the dominant socializing forces shaping SOGIE.</li> <li>• Understanding SOGIE as a continuum/spectrum versus binary.</li> <li>• Understanding of multiple family configurations.</li> <li>• Intersectional understanding of oppression.</li> </ul>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>

## It Takes a Team: A Framework for LGBTQ-inclusive Leadership and Teaching

Figure 1: A framework for LGBTQ-inclusive Leadership and Teaching: Knowledge

What teachers Need to Do	SOGIE/ LGBTQ community as social/cultural assets	Critical reflectivity practice	SOGIE/ LGBTQ socio-cultural consciousness	Interruption of Cis/Het norms in education	Definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction
<b>Reflect on Positionality:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify as change agents.</li> <li>• Be self-accountable for asset based practice</li> <li>• Use positive social values and message with all students about SOGIE/LGBTQ people</li> </ul>	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Use social-emotional intelligences for instructional decision making and relationship building:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model understanding, empathy, compassion, respect, and solidarity for students different than yourself</li> <li>• Use practices that support expression of relationships and identities beyond cisgender heterosexuality</li> </ul>	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Use conceptual frameworks to guide instruction:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOGIE as a “continuum beyond” cis/het family/identity</li> <li>• Intersectionality: multiple ways identity is categorized and experienced</li> <li>• Countering cis/het practices and thinking</li> </ul>	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Instructional Practice throughout the year:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive images, language and themes of LGBTQ people</li> <li>• Counter cis/het norms</li> <li>• Support students’ discovery of multiple aspects of their identities</li> <li>• Teach students about inclusive Identity Development</li> <li>• normalize the representation and presence of LGBTQ people and families in the school community</li> </ul>	x	x	x	x	x

Figure 2: A Framework for LGBTQ-inclusive Leadership and Teaching: Practices

The following sections describe each of these five key elements of a possible model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching.

**Viewing the LGBTQ community as social/cultural assets.** One goal of this conceptual framework for LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching is to prepare teachers to implement instructional practices that center and create space for students to authentically express the

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multiple facets of their identity (including gender expression, free from constraints associated with one's physiology) and to uphold the value of LGBTQ family configurations by countering ongoing invisibility, isolation and exclusion of heteronormative biases and practices. Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy delineates that teachers need to see and teach the whole child, have affirming views of students, and enact a student-centered model of identity development (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). All of us on the Equity Team identify as practitioners, which, as Ladson-Billings (1995) described, are self-motivated and strongly self-accountable that their instructional practice reflects their positive values and beliefs about students and their educational rights--such as access to instruction that reflects their identity and culture. For example, as the Equity Team in this study demonstrated, teachers who are prepared with a knowledge base about gender identity and expression and LGBTQ people are able to implement academic instruction and education about student identity development from an assets-based perspective. The aim of these practices is to create spaces where children are affirmed for any spectrum of gender identity they express and explore in school, and see that gender identity reflected in instructional materials. Such instruction can help students develop pride and talk freely about family members or themselves as LGBTQ people.

Included in this dimension of the LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching framework is the understanding borrowed from culturally sustaining pedagogy that schooling, and the content of most curriculum and instruction within it, reflects white, middle class culture, and thus lacks positive images, language, and themes reflecting LGBTQ people, and especially LGBTQ people with multiple, complex identities (Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). For instance, in our work together in this project, the Equity Team and I focused on the need to value and affirm our students' multiple identities through our focus on developing instruction at the intersection of

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race, religion, immigrant rights and SOGIE. The goal was to tap into our socio-cultural consciousness about the value and importance of all students' identities and culture value and use this knowledge to inform our practices. We prepared instructional materials knowing that, for some students, this information was a reflective mirror, and for others, it would be a window into a world of identity that was new to them. Regarding the latter, the team agreed during conversations in our professional development sessions that it is strategically important that, as part of developing teachers' awareness about SOGIE and LGBTQ people, they understand that using LGBTQ content supports the emergent social consciousness of elementary school students. LGBTQ-inclusive educators need to understand that educational systems play a socializing function in society and, as such, leverage their LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as a way to interrupt dominant and oppressive paradigms of identity (Paris 2012, Paris & Alim, 2017).

In our co-negotiated learning sessions together, the Equity Team and I examined professional development content and pathways to provide information to help the staff view social cultural identity of SOGIE as assets and see the LGBTQ community as valued members in the school. The Equity Team used the content we studied in our learning together to begin to plan professional development activities for their staff. The content of this staff professional development focused on introducing the idea of school culture as a "figured world" (Caraballo, 2016), which traditionally embodies and sustains the status quo social discourse about SOGIE as a fixed, unchangeable binary in our society. The Equity Team identified that it was important to teach the rest of the staff about the paradigm of heteronormativity and how this paradigm supports those who are heterosexual, while policing or controlling those who express their gender and sexuality outside of the confines of cis-gender/heterosexuality. As the Equity Team demonstrated in our work throughout this study, reading scholarly research, learning about key



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principals of queer theory that related to viewing the spectrum of SOGIE through as asset-based lens, being prepared to discuss SOGIE with students, and having an accurate understanding of these concepts was important for lesson design and implementing instruction.

In extending these ideas into school settings, one way to begin to support teachers in understanding identity through a lens of SOGIE as an expansive and flexible continuum, while valuing their LGBTQ students in assets-based ways, is to provide pre-service and in-service teachers with the opportunity learn about and practice effective common language about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community. Acquiring this type of language fluency will help them develop the skills to have conversations with colleagues and students that model value and respect for identity and family diversity. Toward that end, during our sessions, the Equity Team explored resources to help design a common vocabulary or language to use as an element of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching at their own school site. Scholarly articles articulating the principles of queer theory (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Watson & Miller, 2014; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010) provided a core of what we called “academic language” for teachers to use in discussion with each other, as the Equity Team did, to deepen their understanding of heterosexism and heteronormativity, and ultimately, begin to translate that understanding into student-friendly language.

From reading this scholarly literature, two concepts central to our learning were heterosexism and heteronormativity, which we defined in the following ways. Heterosexism is the belief set that heterosexuals are superior to any other sexual identity (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008); and heteronormativity is a social construct that describes the complex ways heterosexual culture is the norm against which other identities of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression devalued (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). Discussions regarding these two concepts

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were critical in helping the Equity Team apply their understanding of ways to counter the impact of heterosexism and heteronormative thinking and practices as they designed and selected instructional materials that guided student to use a critical eye about the “taken-for-granted and institutionalized dominance” (Sykes, 2011, p. 424) of heterosexuality and binary gender roles. For example, one activity the team created included having students critically analyze the spaces and actions of students/adults in their school that reinforced cisgender/heteronormativity, and to propose more inclusive, positive messaging about SOGIE that could disrupt these discourses.

In addition, part of our discussions in the professional development sessions addressed that, for teachers to value student identities as assets in school, they must understand how multiple ways families are configured and how these configurations might be similar or different from the teachers’ own families. To help develop these understandings, professional development about LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching can provide information to teachers so they acquire an understanding that gender identity and development and sexual orientation that is not fixed in a male/female binary, but rather, lies on a continuum, and all points on the continuum are natural and healthy. This information can be used to help teachers understand how the use of language, materials and discussion, as part of their instruction, can be used to create equitable and socially inclusive learning environments to validate students’ personal identity to enhance their social and academic place in schools.

As part of our work together, the Equity team investigated and applied instructional practices to reflect and express their asset-based view of SOGIE as a component of students’ identity. At the same time, we worked towards our goal to use their experience and apply it to support other teachers’ use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction within all grades and throughout an elementary school. We created activities to replicate the Equity Team’s investigation of SOGIE

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concepts, and incorporated the practice of using grade-level appropriate and accessible, academic LGBTQ-inclusive language. This is a process that takes time—for example, I found that, in our group, even teachers who participated in preservice course work focusing on social justice still requested additional professional development about what a spectrum of gender means, how it can be expressed by students, and how they can validate and empower the spectrum of gender expression through the language of instruction.

**Critical reflectivity practice.** Another dimension of an emerging LGBTQ-Inclusive framework for teaching and leadership includes critical reflectivity practice. Grounding this, insights from queer theory can be used to position the body of background knowledge and conceptual understanding of the SOGIE and LGBTQ culture as necessary part of professional reflection. In particular, and as noted above, the concepts of heteronormativity and heterosexism are a crucial lens for focusing reflection about teaching practice within the context of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching.

In our sessions during this study, the importance of critical reflectivity as a dimension of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching became apparent as the Equity Team began their critical co/autoethnographic process to identify the important factors in their lives that positioned them as teachers committed to LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. As they compared and discussed their personal stories, they realized how important it would be for all teachers to reflect on and consider their own lived experiences and positionalities in relationship to the privilege or subjugation imposed by virtue of person's gender identity/expression, sexual orientation and family configuration. From their own experiences with the co/autoethnographic process, the team posited that using critical reflectivity would help teachers develop empathy and compassion for students different from themselves. Moreover, the Equity Team believed that engaging in

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both individual and group critical reflectivity about SOGIE and LGBTQ people would motivate additional teachers to stretch their teaching practice with LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. By developing critical reflectivity as a central practice of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching, the team concluded, teachers can work together to understand their own cultural positionalities including their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as one part of a social context that exists in tandem with the social cultural capital students bring to school.

In addition, for most teachers, and in particular—but not exclusive to—cis/het teachers, understanding how their teaching practice is infused with and conveys cis/heteronormative values is often a new lens. Thus, as the Equity Team reflected on their own relative privilege and oppression from this lens, we explored ideas about how to effectively work with other teachers to reflect on their life experience to identify sources of strengths and biases that get re-enacted in their teaching practices. Thus, our use of co/autoethnography as an aspect of our PAR research served as a powerful critical reflectivity tool, both for ourselves, but also in terms of thinking forward about the work we would do with others at the school site.

I draw the notion of critical reflectivity for LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching from research on cultural sustaining pedagogies, which defines it as the ongoing practice of examining one's own culture and identity to generate awareness of the assumptions that underlie that culture/identity, while also increasing one's ability to be attuned with the cultures and identities of the students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Paris & Alim 2014). As part of our work as an Equity Team in this study, we utilized practices of critical reflectivity to understand how our identities positioned each of us differently in terms of our social access and privilege. This work enabled us to co-construct ideas for using our collective social consciousness to leverage our different privileges to interrupt the invisibility of the

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LGBTQ people and to counter the notion of rigid gender binaries in schools. As a component of a framework for LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching, critical reflectivity, through the lens of SOGIE and the LGBTQ community, can help teachers understand how they are reinforcing or disrupting cis/het ways of thinking and practices within the context of elementary school.

In particular, the Equity Team demonstrated that co/autoethnography (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Coia & Taylor 2013) was one effective tool to investigate the connection between personal experience and the development of professional teaching identities as LGBTQ-inclusive practitioners. As part of our co/autoethnographic process, we discussed how our different positionalities and lived knowledge about SOGIE resulted in different strengths and challenges in our teaching practice. All team members were able to identify either experiences of oppression or privilege as contributing to their identities as social justice-focused educators. Our ongoing reflection about our experience using LGBTQ-inclusive instruction anchored our teaching to a positive presupposition of our students' ability to understand multiple layers of their identity, and that students observe and respond to how schooling imparts values about identity that can be empowering or oppressive. Furthermore, we understood the importance of teachers as change agents who use instruction to countering oppressive practices and provide students with messages that build positive self-awareness and self-value. Additionally, through our critical reflection, we came to understand that our positionalities varied in terms of the way privilege and oppression affected our ability to influence change with the teaching staff. For example, Maris experienced that staff undervalued her expertise due to her younger age, while Harper understood that her white heterosexual privilege could be used to have discussions with SOGIE without the suspect judgment a LGBTQ colleague might experience when discussing the need for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction.

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The Equity Team discussions stemming from our co/autoethnographic writing reflected Durden and Truscott's (2013) position that critical reflectivity engages the lenses of politics, power, and social contexts of schooling to situate teacher's thinking, beliefs and values within the daily context of teaching. The Equity Team discussed this in the context of being able to respond effectively to either positive or negative expression of sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression by any student. This fluency regarding the ability to understand individual positionality and make informed, inclusive decisions about the social values we message to students enables us as practitioners to anticipate how and when we will expand our practice to counter or interrupt—or maintain and reinforce--status quo practices of cisgender/heteronormativity.

### **Developing socio-cultural consciousness about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community.**

I argue that, as part of ongoing site-based professional development, critical reflective practices like those the Equity Team and I engaged in can support teachers to participate in ongoing conversations to develop and expand their socio-cultural consciousness about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community. While this construct could be referred to as “queered consciousness,” I purposefully use the term “socio-cultural consciousness about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community” to recognize that there is a developmental component regarding acquiring the understandings and skills to implement LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Teachers have to reframe their understanding of SOGIE from a fixed binary to a continuum of gender identity/expression, and disrupt traditional notions of the “nuclear” cis/het family. These processes of unlearning and reframing take time, and will not necessarily be able to begin from a “queered” standpoint. The notion of sociocultural consciousness about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community not only can be

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inclusive of educators at a range of developmental levels, but also can help to normalize a vaster range of diversity in our community.

The notion of developing socio-cultural consciousness about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community draws on and expands work about race and students/families of color in culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson Billings, 1995; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Caraballo, 2016). The purpose of developing a social cultural consciousness is to position teachers to see and understand the range of ways students' may express their gender identity and sexual orientation. Additionally, this emerging model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching emphasizes the need for teachers to learn about and appreciate culture, including LGBTQ culture, from the students' perspective, regardless of the teachers' own sexual orientation and gender identity/expression and cultural background. Teachers must challenge the concepts of knowledge that they hold (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and develop the skill set to recognize and understand how students' emerging identities and lived cultural experiences impact their engagement in academic and social learning (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Caraballo, 2016; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995, Paris 2012, Paris & Alim, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Further, this dimension of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching builds upon Paris' (2012) the notion that culturally relevant teachers are responsible for, and capable of, bringing educational change that makes schools responsive to all students. Expanding on this idea, LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching highlights that teachers should actively build their sociocultural consciousness about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community. As Paris and Alim (2017) have noted, because culture is not a static phenomenon, but rather is fluid and evolving, teachers must be open-minded and active in learning about contemporary culture as expressed

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and enacted by their students (and I extend this notion of culture to also include LGBTQ culture). However, teachers also need to understand the need of all students to be provided with information in elementary school about gender identity development that counters the pervasiveness of cisgender heteronormativity that renders non-binary expression of gender and the presence of LGBTQ people invisible and unthinkable. The Equity Team illustrated that, while it required some tenacity to maintain a social change-agent stance in the face of some non-participation of other teachers, they were able to increase their own LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with students, create schoolwide activities that engaged the whole school in re-conceptualizing gender as a spectrum (which normalizes the presence of transgender and gender fluid people on our community), and continue to provide positive images of and discussions about LGBTQ people in our community.

**Interrupting Cis/Het evaluative contexts in education.** Coming to see LGBTQ community members as assets in school community through the use of critical reflectivity and the development of an LGBTQ-inclusive social consciousness strengthens teachers' ability to recognize and understand cis/het thinking and practices as the dominant socializing forces shaping SOGIE in our schools. This framework seeks to help teachers integrate LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout the grades and throughout the year through an understanding of how school environments implicitly represent values of the dominant culture and society of which they are a part. Caraballo calls this understanding the evaluative context of the "figured world" in educational settings (2016, p. 3) This emerging framework of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching, like culturally sustaining pedagogy, calls for teachers to resist representing only dominant paradigms of white, middle class, straight monoculture by



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integrating all cultures and identities into instruction (Caraballo, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017).

LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching supports students' engagement in the discovery of multiple aspects of their identities. As an example, the Equity Team developed LGBTQ-inclusive instruction that contributed to building their classroom and larger school environments as safe spaces for students to enact what Caraballo (2016) called their "identities in practice" in a classroom environment that cultivates multiple identities and literacies "that students already possess" (p. 50). The data in this research study revealed that through including LGBTQ content within academic instruction, and teaching students about identity development, teachers began to create interruptions to the de facto cis/het evaluative context student experience at school. For example, the Equity team, understanding this evaluative context of schools, developed lessons and classroom procedures that allowed students to think critically about gender-expansive identities, the limits of gender stereotypes, the presence and experience of trans and transgender children, the evolution of marriage rights for people of color and gay people, and other content that explicitly expanded students' understanding of the rich variety of SOGIE and the LGBTQ community. In this way, the instruction introduced and used by the Equity Team in classrooms and in school-wide events began to de-center heteronormative thinking and assumptions for teachers and students alike.

**Using an expanded definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction.** Thus far, this emerging LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching framework has built upon and integrated viewing the social/cultural identity of SOGIE and the LGBTQ community as assets in education, through the process of using critical reflectivity, to develop a social cultural consciousness of teachers to position them to interrupt the evaluative content of education at their school. The

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findings of this research study have further demonstrated that culturally relevant/sustaining teachers actualize this practice through implementing a variety of LGBTQ-inclusive instructional strategies. This final section on this model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching offers an expanded notion of LGBTQ-Inclusive instruction that emerged from the collaborative work with the Equity Team. This expanded definition reiterates and synthesizes multiple ways LGBTQ-inclusive instruction can be increased throughout a school and used to expand the number of teachers who use it with their students

Processes of daily instruction with students are complex and entangled (Strom, 2015). While these processes of instruction can be deconstructed into discrete parts for the purpose of nuanced explanation, the three aspects of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction described in detail in Chapter 4 often overlap and intersect in the daily routines of teaching and learning with students. However, the final dimension of this emerging LGBTQ-inclusive framework can assist teachers to embed LGBTQ content into standards-based academic instruction for students to learn about community diversity, to break the silence and invisibility around LGBTQ people, and to disrupt hurtful and hate-based behavior as a practice in school culture and replace with one that centers positive authentic self-expression of gender and sexuality.

An expanded definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction includes both classroom practices, such as explicitly teaching about identity, integrating LGBTQ content into academics, purposefully using academic LGBTQ-inclusive language, as well as school-wide activities. Use of LGBTQ content and language is important in elementary school academic instruction because it may be the only time in which a student has written and spoken language that explains how some students may be feeling on the inside and yet never have the language to understand it as normal and healthy. LGBTQ-inclusive language and content for students who might develop an

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identity as gender-expansive, or gender-fluid, and/or as gay or lesbian might never have had words to name this for themselves or validate their identity for them. Likewise, LGBTQ-inclusive language presented by teachers, provides a respectful language for students to understand students they perceive as different from them. As discussed throughout this chapter, a critical aspect of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction is teaching about identity development to students through teacher-initiated interruption of the enactment of binaried gender norms in everyday classroom procedures and routines. Moreover, both academic instruction and the teaching of SOGIE and identity development serve to interrupt cisgender/heteronormativity through the language teachers use in academic and social interactions with students.

This framework for LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching acknowledges the steep learning curve all of us are engaged in to begin and continue to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in elementary schools and beyond. For this reason, a central feature of this LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching framework involves teacher leadership teams leveraging the use of school-wide events to increase teacher and student engagement with LGBTQ-inclusive instructional content. For instance, the Equity Team capitalized on bi-annual Ally Week activities to deepen both the teaching and the learning about contemporary social justice issues, including content, accurate academic language for talking about transgender youth, LGBTQ people of color and immigration rights, the evolution of marriage rights, and many other themes about identity and social justice.

These activities normalized positive language and respectful discussion about all identities, provided opportunities to increase student activism on campus and in the community, and offered “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” for students and teachers alike. Rudine Sims Bishop (2015), who coined the phrase “mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors” as a

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metaphor that LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching embodies, reminds us that mirrors are needed to reflect everyone's identity and culture in schools; that windows offer a view into identities and cultures different from our own; and that sliding glass doors invite us into the experience of identity and culture we have not experienced, discovered or practiced before. Importantly, using this metaphor centers the stance that LGBTQ-inclusive instruction benefits all students. This metaphor reminds us that we all need mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to help us learn self-pride and to navigate our cultural diversity humanely. Bishop also calls out that students of privilege get an inflated sense of their importance when all they see is themselves reflected in the world of books and schooling. By seeing a broader view, they learn about diversity, develop their own social/cultural conscious, and as early as elementary school, can be engaged in understanding an expansive world that is inclusive of the LGBTQ community.

### **Implications**

The following sections describe strategies to systemically support implementation of this emerging LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching model. First, I discuss the value of site teacher teams as a consistent source of leadership for integrating LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout the school. Next, I recommend the use of enumerated board policies to position systemize school based practices such as LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in the context of positive school climate, equity and anti-harassment policy. Then I provide a rationale for embedding LGBTQ-inclusive instruction into instructional practices that are currently used throughout school districts. Finally, I address the role district administrative leadership can expand the understanding of a range of LGBTQ-inclusive structural and systems practices that positions LGBTQ-inclusive instruction for success at school sites.

### **Site Equity Team Leadership**

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As illustrated in this study, a site-based leadership team that is focused on learning about LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, and implements it in their own individual practices, is promising for offering support to site staff in increasing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout their school. This school's Equity Team integrated LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with an intersectional approach to help their staff understand both the interconnectedness of oppressions across marginalized groups and the ways those can be countered and interrupted through asset-based and culturally-sustaining pedagogies informed by concepts from queer theory. I suggest that districts can develop models of site teacher leadership focused on educational equity, and to support site teams with the needed professional development support to increase LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as part of proactive, asset-based, positive school climate development. While there are many ways to begin convening site-based equity teams, the findings of this study suggest that such a team should be volunteer-based and share a common interest in issues of social justice and educational equity.

Developing site leadership and expertise through a leadership team model benefits school sites in several ways. First, working collaboratively to design LGBTQ-inclusive instruction positions teams to assess and build upon the strengths of their individual school, which was illustrated by the Equity Team in this research study when they integrated LGBTQ-inclusive instruction into existing school wide events (Ally Weeks), and when they designed lessons implementing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction using instruction strategies already in use at their site (e.g., critical thinking, visual teaching strategies). Second, teachers and other staff who champion equity initiatives, such as LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, "keep the conversation on the table," as teachers in this study put it. By doing so, they draw attention to the importance of this work for students in the school.

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However, providing leadership that stretches the professional skill set of some teachers also can make Equity Team teacher leaders vulnerable to different types of isolation. The Equity team in this study described this as “pushback.” While the majority of teachers participated in LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout their school, the Equity Team recognized that their efforts went against the grain of traditional instruction, and understood that feeling vulnerable to criticism from colleagues and parents was to be expected as a result of that. In response to challenging staff dynamics, the Equity Team leveraged the support they had from each other, discussing these challenging situations together and collaboratively developing thoughtful and productive responses to these challenges so they could keep LGBTQ-inclusive instruction moving forward at the school.

In addition, districts that implement LGBTQ-inclusive approaches should be aware that the policies and administrative regulations they create about supporting the safety, inclusion and right to educational services for LGBTQ students and families create a system on which site administrators and teachers can rely in several ways. For example, administrators use policies like these to include staff PD to develop ongoing teacher learning about LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Additionally, information in these policies can be used proactively through parent education to contextualize the need for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as one component in creating safe and equitable school experience for all students.

Another advantage of site leadership teams, such as the Equity Team in this study, is that they are able to share the workload of site support across the team, taking advantage of different areas of expertise, interest and creativity possessed by team members. For example, the Equity Team was able to increase their individual LGBTQ-inclusive practice through co-designing lesson plans and instructional activities for themselves and staff use, drawing on the different

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knowledges each brought, which increased the richness of these materials. Because they brought different perspectives from their varied backgrounds and professional positions, they were also able to holistically identify staff needs and PD opportunities to increase staff knowledge and LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. As another advantage, the site Equity Team model is supportive for the leadership team members, as it offers comradery and solidarity in navigating emotionally draining challenges that might include micro-aggressions that they encounter or challenges to the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction from teachers, students, families, or community members.

District support of site leadership teams as a structure to establish LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout schools offers the potential for impact beyond individual schools. For example, if this model was used districtwide, the staff responsible for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as part of equity initiatives in the district could bring teams together in a larger district network of teacher leaders. This would offer an opportunity to develop a pool of teachers who could acquire a common knowledge base about SOGIE and the LGBTQ community, collaboratively engage in review and practice of lesson plans and LGBTQ-inclusive instructional skills, and have the time and space to discuss and reflect upon both opportunities and barriers to effectively implement LGBTQ-inclusive instruction embedded in current instructional practices.

### **Developing Common LGBTQ-Inclusive Policy Language**

Beyond using site-based Equity Teams, school district leadership can address other organizational structures and practices to enhance the success of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout district schools. For example, in this study, the Equity Team highlighted their need for a common, accurate, and affirming language and vocabulary to use when discussing any of the “isms” including a common language for SOGIE and LGBTQ families. Likewise, enumerated and explicit language about SOGIE and LGBTQ students and families is needed in

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district policy (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Students report a drop in negative remarks about gender expression and sexual orientation when policies direct and support measures such as interventions for student safety and positive LGBTQ-inclusive instruction LGBTQ (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Moreover, other studies have demonstrated that equity policies enumerating protected classes of students, including LGBTQ students, are more effective than non-enumerated policies (Russell, 2011; Russell, Day, Ioverno & Toomey, 2016; Russell, Kosciw, Horn & Saewyc, 2010). Based upon this research, and the identified need for common language described by the Equity Team in this study, I recommend that districts develop anti-harassment, equity and instructional policy that specifically enumerate the need for the use of positive LGBTQ-inclusive instruction that interrupts invisibility, counters negative messaging and behavior related to SOGIE and the LGBTQ community, and describes the educational and reparative interventions for when trans/homophobic behavior occurs from any schoolwide stakeholder.

However, for these policies to be effective, district must also provide PD support for the use of accurate asset-based language describing the continuum of SOGIE by all stakeholders in the school district. There are many resources for glossaries of language in published LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum describing SOGIE, LGBTQ people, conceptual/theoretical frameworks describing dominant paradigms of social forces that sustain the privileging and marginalizing of groups (Kim & Logan, 2004; Logan, Chasnoff & Cohen, 2002, UNESCO, 2016; Hill & Mays, 2013). There are also definitions in research that define pedagogical practices that counter, interrupt, oppressive social forces in schools (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013). These are helpful resources, but they do not, in and of themselves, create a common language and ensure its use. Therefore, when districts provide



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leadership in the form of using explicit language about meeting needs of the LGBTQ community in policy, the next step in assuring follow through is by designing administrative regulations that delineate district and school based practices. Therefore, administrative regulations could support follow through at sites by using the model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching and a system to monitor strategic action plans to ensure systemic use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in schools.

### **Embedding LGBTQ-Inclusive Instruction into Current Instructional Practices**

Rather than an “add-on” or a separate initiative, districts could consider integrating LGBTQ-Inclusive leadership and teaching into existing educational initiatives, as these are opportunities to embed and represent LGBTQ-inclusive instruction as part of all teaching. Incorporating LGBTQ-inclusive instructional goals as a district priority within instructional initiatives will mean that materials like mentor texts, lesson plans, and other instructional resources have positive representation of, and address contemporary social issues related to, the LGBTQ community. District staff can use the features of the LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching model described in this research as they work with each other and/or external consultants who can lead, supervise, and coach existing instructional initiatives. Site leadership teams, such as the Equity Team in this research, would be able to capitalize on district PD and provide the needed site support to lead follow through an implementation at each site. As an example, many districts are already using models of professional learning communities, cycles of inquiry, or school reforms related to equity and equitable outcomes for all students—all of these could be modified to include LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching.

To adequately effectively embed a model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching into existing initiatives requires districts to consider and plan for investment in the planning,

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funding and implementation of PD for coaches, mentor teachers, administrators and site leadership teams. Investment in resources reinforce the common understanding about the need for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, for the use of common language and modeling of LGBTQ-inclusive lessons, and for providing scaffolded support to teachers resulting in the embedded use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction across grade levels. As another level of investment, districts and schools can inventory their mentor texts for materials with positive images and themes about multiple identities and other marginalized groups such as people of color, nationalities, and if they are lacking, add them. The integration of these materials across content areas is critical to increase the way our students see themselves and others reflected in curriculum and in interpersonal relationship.

When leaders at the district level support the integration of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching into other standing educational equity and instructional initiatives, professional development time for teaching staff on instructional skills development can be calendared and provided by professional development leaders and site principals. As illustrated in chapter 4, the district in this study supported my work as an in-district teacher to develop the skill set to work closely with schools to support teaching staff and site leadership teams. This investment has provided sites with ongoing support and coaching for successful increase in the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. For example, with the ability to make decisions at the site level, the Equity team prioritized the need for teachers at their site to be engaged in more planning time to learn, and to practice use of instruction that supports staff development of social/cultural consciousness while expanding instructional practices designed to increase academic outcomes for all students. Through support for increased professional learning, teachers can gain the preparation that the research base (e.g., Millburn & Palladino, 2012; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010; Robinson and

Ferfolja, 2008) reports is necessary to counter the heteronormative thinking and practices that dominate school culture and result in the invisibility or underrepresentation of students who are, or have family members who are, part of the LGBTQ community.

### **Recommendations for District Administrative Leadership**

District Administrative leaders play a huge role in the success of equity initiatives, and therefore it is crucial that they learn about the topics discussed throughout this study. For instance, school boards rely on guidance from district administrative leadership to understand the changing complexity of the demographics they serve, the particular needs of the diversity in our community, and related state and federal legislation protecting the civil, human and educational rights of all school constituents. Like teachers, school board members will vary in their familiarity with the LGBTQ community and the educational research that investigates and recommends support of all students as they live and learn together in schools and communities. However, district leadership can pave the way for their school boards to understand the needs of all students and families about SOGIE and LGBTQ people as valued and visible members of communities. In the same way that creating a model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching incorporates an intersectional lens for instruction about countering-oppression in schools, it is important for boards to recognize the complex, multilayered and sometimes fluid nature of diversity and resist monolithic categorizations of people that serve to isolate our community into discrete constituent groups. For example, it is important for all stakeholders, including board members, to acknowledge the variety of family configurations, including families with LGBTQ members, that exist across all racial, ethnic, religious groups that make up our student demographics. One way to help boards understand the impact of integrating an LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching model for supporting all students with asset-based

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pedagogy about identity is to invite site leadership teams to share their expertise and show examples of students' work demonstrating academic outcomes demonstrating critical thinking and application of how they are active in creating cultures of inclusion and self-expression that enable all students to be more fully themselves and fully present in their academic endeavors.

District leaders can also play a role in recruiting and retaining diverse staff. Providing positive role models and representation of all our diversity is an important aspect of creating schools in which all students see themselves, their families and their friends reflected in the learning community they are part of. The Equity Team in this study explained that having staff who are able to share their identities and life experiences, and speak to how they see themselves in the larger community, helps students establish trust and respect for their teachers. A diverse teaching staff across all aspects of culture not only represents the diversity of students, but also creates an expertise about different lived experiences, including SOGIE, to share with other staff. This expertise, in turn, can help to build the staff capacity to be empathetically responsive advocates for all our students and families who are part of the LGBTQ community.

Another area of needed district advocacy includes resources. Textbooks adopted by districts often lag in the positive images, language and themes of marginalized groups. Investment in supplemental curriculum materials that provide positive images and voice of marginalized groups, including LGBTQ and non-binary people, address a need illustrated by the Equity Team. In their discussions, they stated that teachers need easy access to LGBTQ-inclusive books, DVDs, and Internet sources in their classrooms. Like other resources, availability of these materials allows time-efficient access during lesson planning and for formal and spontaneous instruction. The equity team also reported that students need easy and equitable access to books and other resources with positive images and language of marginalized groups to

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use in school projects. Moreover, an often-overlooked aspect of access to resources in schools includes appropriate internet sites. Therefore, the use of academic resources online should include a range of websites that provide inclusive representation of LGBTQ people. District administration should work with both their technology departments and with librarians to create access to the range of LGBTQ-inclusive educational focused websites and Internet resources.

Finally, districts can deepen support of site administrators as LGBTQ-inclusive instructional leaders. Even without site leadership team models such as the Equity Team in place, schools can still make progress using an LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching with effective site administrative support. District leadership can support site administrators by providing a cohesive action plan for use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, as teachers rely on site administrators for supporting their LGBTQ-instructional practices. Principals will be most effective if they understand, and can then represent, the rationale and importance of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction with staff, family, and community members. Further, principals and other site-based administrators benefit from access to ongoing professional development regarding current research—as the Equity Team illustrated, grounding LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching in the context of national scholarly research supports academic, social, and mental health benefits (Russell, 2011; Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010; Russell, Day, Ioverno, & Toomey, 2016).

Administrators can also support staff use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction when they embody practices of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching in their work throughout their schools. When staff and students observe their principal using LGBTQ-inclusive language in public schoolwide routines and practices, they receive the message that respect and inclusion across the diversity of SOGIE is part of their school culture and is a behavioral expectation. It

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also models effective language for teachers to use with students. Examples of the context in which principals can use gender-inclusive, gender-expansive language include social, instructional and positive disciplinary exchanges with student and families, and daily announcements, assemblies, newsletters, and parent education sessions also provide specific opportunities to do so. Administrators can also facilitate discussions integrating LGBTQ-inclusive examples within other instructional initiatives (such as examples in this study of visual teaching strategies and critical thinking skills development). Administrators can encourage staff to develop annual professional growth goals that include use of an LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching. Finally, administrators can create support for LGBTQ-inclusive instruction by assuring that art and imagery throughout the school models a range of multiple gender identities, family configurations, community figures, and other popular positive role models. Staff can be encouraged to display of student work samples, and students can create educational posters, skits, and poetry that have LGBTQ-inclusive themes.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research study has provided insights into the complex constellation of factors that fostered learning about and implementing LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching throughout an elementary school. Working as a team of teachers who were members of an elementary school Equity Team, we employed a variety of collaborative strategies to increase LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching in our individual practices. Through a participatory action research project, we sought to address each of our identified interests in expanding the use of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction throughout their elementary school. I facilitated PD sessions that were co-constructed with participants, sharing the knowledge I have acquired over the last two decades in addressing the needs of LGBTQ students and developing safe respectful schools in

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which students can express their authentic identity and cultural practice related to LGBTQ people and families. Together, the team and I used scholarly research on conceptual frames of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, queer theory, and queering curriculum to distill key aspects of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. We used these ideas to design instruction that team members used individually, as well as activities designed for the entire staff to use in school wide events and in supporting the teaching staff at their school. The findings demonstrated the creative and effective ways a site leadership team such as the Equity Team can successfully impact the expanding use of LGBTQ instruction throughout the school. Additionally, our work together revealed the multi-dimensionality of instruction assumed under the umbrella term of “LGBTQ-inclusive instruction”. An analysis of the different strategies used by the Equity Team and the school demonstrated that LGBTQ-inclusive instruction has components that include academic instruction, teaching about identity development and the limitations of binary gender stereotypes, using LGBTQ-inclusive language, and implementing school-wide activities throughout the year to engage all staff and students in LGBTQ-inclusive content with intersectional contexts to normalize discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression( SOGIE) and the LGBTQ community throughout the school.

As a result of this study, I introduced an emerging model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching that can apply to the elementary school level but can also be used throughout K-12 schools. In addition, this model can be used to inform content and experience necessary in pre-service/initial teacher credentialing program to position candidates entering the teaching field prepared to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Moreover, the framework synthesized and built upon key attributes of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies and queer theory, including 1) the viewing of social-cultural identity of SOGIE and the LGBTQ community as assets in

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education, 2) using critical reflectivity, 3) developing and maintaining sociocultural consciousness about the LGBTQ community in school and instruction, 4) understanding and interrupting cisgender/heteronormative evaluative contexts and practices, and 5) using an expansive definition of LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. Importantly, I describe this as an “emerging” model, as it is based upon the findings of a study involving an Equity Team at one school, and requires future research to continue to provide evidence for the framework.

There is an urgent imperative for this work in school districts and teacher preparation programs across the nation. While there is evidence of increase in tolerance of LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ family members, such a stance does not eradicate the negative stereotypes and beliefs that plague our LGBTQ students and result in both short and long-term consequences to their full access to their education and to their physical, mental and psychological health (Birkett & Espelage, 2009; Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). My study advocates that to substantially change the experience of all students including LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ families, LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching, starting as early as elementary school, moves beyond a model of tolerance of LGBTQ people in schools. Rather, this study centers the need for an asset-based LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching framework that acknowledges LGBTQ people as assets in our school and works to challenge the cisgender/heteronormative thinking and practices that normalizes a binaried expression of gender and of heterosexuality. This emerging model centers a positive understanding and expression of gender and sexuality along a continuum and a model for increasing LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and instruction.

The research base described several reasons for the reticence of teachers to use LGBTQ-inclusive instruction. For example, there are discourses of heteronormativity, and of innocence



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children (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). Both these discourses reinforce socially constructed beliefs that elementary school-aged children are asexual and do not have context for understanding the way gender and sexual orientation, as represented to them in curriculum and instruction, matches or contradicts their personal experience. Yet, as the Equity Team shared, when positive asset-based instruction is used with kindergarten to sixth grade students, students can not only understand the content, they can also engage in critical thinking about how this informs their relationships with those they perceive as different from themselves.

This study offers a window into not only the need to begin LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in elementary school, but also the feasibility to do so. The field of initial teacher credentialing programs and in-service PD can offer teachers the preparation they need to build asset-based teaching practices. To do so, we need expansive and inclusive conceptual frameworks regarding sexual orientation and gender identity/expression for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students alike, such as the one offered in this chapter. This model of LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching, a model for increasing LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, enacted throughout a school culture, offers the promise of supporting pro-social behavior of all students in K-12 schools. Additionally, while a continued focus on LGBTQ youth in schools must be maintained, this model of an LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching can also address needs of other student groups that are likely vulnerable to LGBTQ-targeted bullying, harassment, and invisibility. These include children of LGBTQ parents and guardians and non-LGBTQ youth targeted in bullying behavior for being perceived as LGBTQ. Given the comprehensive reporting of LGBTQ students' experience in K-12 schools and the growing body of research pointing to the need to understand how school culture can either sustain or interrupt social forces that create unsafe school conditions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, the use of

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frameworks, such as LGBTQ-inclusive leadership and teaching model offered here, may help empower our teaching force to engage in effective practices that transform the daily experience of all students in K-12 schools.

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