

Seeing queerly:
Exploring recently-graduated teachers' knowledge, beliefs,
and experiences of supporting LGBTQ+ students

By

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B.A., University of Winnipeg, 2013
B.Ed., University of Winnipeg, 2013

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the question “*What do teachers who have recently graduated from teacher education programs know, believe, and experience about supporting LGBTQ+ students?*” This research was conducted using narrative inquiry and métissage, with a group of six volunteer participants who had completed their teacher education programs since May of 2012. The participants wrote narrative responses to written prompts, and the researcher wove those narratives together with his own experiences to highlight points of affinity and tension. This research articulates a number of ways in which teacher education programs can better prepare teachers to support LGBTQ+ students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was growing up in Ontario, students at my elementary school believed that any student who said the word “gay” would be sent to speak to the principal.

Interestingly, this only seemed to apply to students who asked questions about homosexuality, or mentioned a gay family member, and not to students who used homonegative insults such as “that’s so gay.” This type of insult was usually either ignored, or responded to with the statement, “Don’t say bad words.” On one occasion, a student asked a teacher “what if your son were gay?” and the teacher attempted to make that student publicly apologize for insulting her (see Appendix A for a glossary of terms relevant to this study). Incidents such as these sent a clear message to me that this school was not a safe space to discuss or explore ideas about my own sexuality.

I attended high school in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and throughout those years, none of my teachers discussed LGBTQ+ issues in our classes, and I never witnessed a teacher speaking out against instances of sexuality/gender-based insults/bullying. By the time I started my Education degree, I was curious about where LGBTQ+ issues were included in the Manitoba curriculum, and how teachers were taught to address this content. However, throughout my 5-year degree program, I received no formal instruction on how to support LGBTQ+ students. Furthermore, I recall that any examples in textbooks that mentioned LGBTQ+ students consistently did so only in reference to homophobic bullying, with no discussion of positive schooling experiences that an LGBTQ+ student might have. This was not due to a lack of interest in inclusivity, as many of my courses featured entire units devoted to other aspects of inclusive education; in addition to discussions about interpersonal and systemic racism, almost every education course I

took included assignments and activities designed to celebrate multiculturalism and bring multicultural content into our classrooms. Many of these courses also addressed how to offer support to students with special needs, although these discussions routinely involved a negative discourse rather than a celebratory one. Inclusivity appeared to be a philosophy that my instructors valued, but inclusivity based on gender or sexuality was not discussed in our classes.

Since becoming a teacher I have had students come out in the middle of class, pull me aside to talk about their same-gender crushes, and instigate full-class discussions about acts of homophobic violence, such as the recent shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Through this research on supporting LGBTQ+ students, I hoped to learn how recently graduated teachers believe they would act—and what they believe would be best practices—in these same or similar situations they may or may not have experienced.

Statement of the Problem

While considerable research has been done regarding whether or not K-12 teachers are willing to discuss LGBTQ+ content with their students (Taylor *et al.*, 2015; Thein, 2013; Rayside, 2014), there is insufficient data addressing exactly how those teachers would offer support to their LGBTQ+ students. Across Canada, many teachers report they feel that their teacher education programs did not adequately prepare them to address issues of sexual and gender diversity (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). This is owing to a variety of factors, including personal beliefs, university instructor confidence in ability to address LGBTQ+ content, time constraints, and whether or not LGBTQ+ content is mandated by that institution (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). LGBTQ+ students have unique experiences and needs, and are more likely than many of their peers to report

experiencing depression and having suicidal thoughts (Mustanski *et al.*, 2010). Research by Heck *et al.* (2009) and Kosciw *et al.* (2012) support the claim that LGBTQ+ students are less likely to experience depression and psychological distress in situations where they feel their needs are supported. For this study, I will define “supporting” as recognizing and addressing the needs of an individual. Therefore, it is essential that new teachers have both an awareness of these needs, and strategies to support students in meeting these needs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of a participant group of teachers who had recently graduated from Canadian teacher education programs, regarding support for LGBTQ+ students. The investigation would illuminate what preservice teachers have been taught about this topic and the experiences they have had. By learning about the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of recently graduated teachers, we can identify and articulate specific issues that could be addressed in teacher education programs to better prepare teachers to support LGBTQ+ students. Given that much of the opposition towards addressing LGBTQ+ content in schools is influenced by discussions of morality (Pierce, 2016; Taylor *et al.*, 2015; Thein, 2013), it is necessary to look at the attitudes and beliefs of the participants, in addition to their knowledge and experiences, as any moral opinion they hold regarding LGBTQ+ identities might influence how they engage with discussions of these topics in teacher education courses or how they engage with their own students. This research was based on my desire to see school environments that are inclusive for LGBTQ+ students, where LGBTQ+ identities are normalized and destigmatized, and where educators feel

confident in their abilities to recognize and address the needs of LGBTQ+ students.

Research Questions

The primary question for this research was “What do teachers who have recently graduated from teacher education programs know, believe, and experience about supporting the needs of LGBTQ+ students?” In this context, “recently” was defined as having graduated within five years prior to May of this year.

For this research, the act of “supporting” was defined as recognizing and addressing the needs of an individual. These needs might include a need for safety, a need for affirmation, a need for celebration, or many others.

This question was investigated through narrative inquiry. Participants explored their own knowledge, beliefs, and experiences relating to support for LGBTQ+ students through written narratives that developed from a series of prompts. This provided insight into what attitudes and information recently graduated teachers have about this topic.

Significance of the Research

If a teacher wishes to support an LGBTQ+ student, it is essential that they have an awareness of the unique needs of that student and are able to employ strategies to address those needs. This research provides a sample narrative of what teachers who have recently graduated from teacher education programs currently know about supporting LGBTQ+ students. Results of this inquiry provide insight into the type of training that some teachers receive on this topic, and highlight specific gaps in current teacher education curricula and programming regarding support for LGBTQ+ students. The goal of this research is not to identify large gaps in teacher education programs—as a broad-scale study by Taylor *et al.* (2015) has already done this—but rather to explore teachers’

experiences with those gaps and to identify specific strategies that can be used to attend to them. This research provides examples of situations that have arisen for teachers, and strategies that the teachers used to support their students in those situations. This information can be used to inform teachers of needs that might be alive for their students and provide potential strategies or approaches that could be used to meet those needs. Furthermore, the process of engaging in the narrative inquiry itself allowed participants to critically reflect on their own experiences and beliefs around LGBTQ+ issues. The collective work that is presented in Chapter Four models one approach that preservice teachers and teachers could take to similarly reflect on their own experiences and beliefs. By exploring gaps in current teacher education curricula, providing examples of strategies to meet student needs, and modeling an approach to self-reflection, results of this research suggest actions that could improve training for preservice teachers so they can better support their students.

Parameters of the Study

This study involved six participants from British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario, all of whom had completed a Canadian teacher education program within the past five years (during or after May 2012). The participants were individuals who volunteered to take part in a study about supporting LGBTQ+ students. Results from this research do not represent all teachers across the country. Instead, this research provides a sampling of what some teachers in this particular context believe, know, and have experienced about supporting LGBTQ+ students. The goal of this research was not to state objective facts about the current state of teacher education programs, but to explore and relay the lived experiences, knowledge, and beliefs of individual participants.

The stated goal and narrow focus of the research meant that six participants was a sufficient sample size to explore the topic in depth. The aim of this research was to gain a deep understanding of specific situations, rather than a broad understanding of how common these situations are. While discussing interview-based research, Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argue “since such a research project scrutinizes the dynamic qualities of a situation (rather than elucidating the proportionate relationships among its constituents), the issue of sample size – as well as representativeness – has little bearing on the project’s basic logic” (p. 483). While my research uses narrative inquiry in place of a traditional interview, it shares the same focus on depth over proportional representation that Crouch and McKenzie discuss. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2015) also discuss the merits of sample sizes, and propose the concept “information power” for determining whether a sample size is appropriate for an interview-based study. To the authors, information power is determined by six criteria:

Aim: Narrow or Broad – A study with a broader aim will require a larger sample size than one with a narrow aim.

Specificity: Dense or Sparse – Fewer members of a group with specific characteristics related to the study aim are required for sufficient information power than a group with sparse specificity.

Theory: Applied or None – The greater the theoretical background for a study, the fewer participants are needed for sufficient information power.

Dialogue: Strong or Weak – Fewer participants are needed if there is strong communication between the participants and the researcher.

Analysis: Case or Cross-case – In-depth analysis of narratives requires fewer participants

than a comparative exploration of themes.

My research has a narrow aim and focuses on a sample with relatively dense specificity, as all participants have graduated from university teacher education programs that involved practicum work in Canadian schools. This study is also supported by a strong theoretical background, which is outlined in the following sections. As Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora devised these criteria specifically in relation to interview research, the dialogue criteria does not apply in quite the same way to my research, however, my study involved clear communication and forthcoming information from the participants. On the last criteria, my research falls somewhere in between individual case and cross-case analysis, as it involves in-depth analysis of individual narratives, as well as thematic analysis of similarities and differences between the narratives. Given these criteria, I determined that six participants were sufficient to conduct my research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by inclusive education, queer theory, intersectionality, and narrative inquiry. If one wishes to create a learning environment that is inclusive for LGBTQ+ students, it is necessary to restructure the heteronormative and cisnormative aspects of that environment that make it difficult for LGBTQ+ students to meet certain needs. This idea of queering—dismantling and restructuring the heteronormative and cisnormative aspects of—schooling lends itself to exploration through narrative research (Sumara & Davis, 2013).

Inclusive education involves working to create a learning environment where the needs of all students can be met, and where students are not impeded in meeting these needs on account of their gender, sexuality, nationality, culture, skin colour, religion,

disability, socioeconomic situation, or spiritual identity (Dei, 2014; Flores, 2012).

Critically, this does not mean simply incorporating content from marginalized groups into established environments or attending to bullying, but rather identifying and dismantling established power structures in order to create a new environment where all students can feel welcome (Dei, 2014; Sumara & Davis, 2013).

Queer theory is not a single theory, but encompasses a broad range of theories and approaches for deconstructing societal norms relating to sex and gender (Morland & Willox, 2005). The word queer is used in a variety of ways, including as a noun—reclaimed from its initial use as a homophobic insult—to cover a broad range of LGBTQ+ identities, as an adjective to describe an action or a way living that challenges traditional norms around sex or gender, and as a verb to describe the act of deconstructing and challenging those established societal norms (Davis, 2016; Morland & Willox, 2005; Sumara & Davis, 2013). Queer theory aims to challenge and problematize the idea of “normal” as it relates to gender and sexuality. This includes challenging the idea that identities that differ from norms should be viewed negatively, as well as challenging the idea that any genders or sexualities should be viewed as normal at all (Wilson 2016).

Throughout this work I occasionally make reference to a desire to normalize LGBTQ+ identities. When I use the phrase “normalize” in this work I am specifically referring to a situation where individual LGBTQ+ identities are recognized and celebrated for their uniqueness as defined in relation to the whole myriad of human identities, instead of in relation to “normal” heterosexual and cisgender identities.

Both inclusive education and queer theory involve identifying and dismantling existing power structures and norms. Together, they can be used to look at the ways in

which heteronormative and cisnormative power structures exist in educational contexts, and how these structures can be challenged and replaced. They can be used to create a space that is not simply tolerant of LGBTQ+ identities, but where LGBTQ+ students are celebrated for who they are.

Intersectionality is the idea that various aspects of society interact with a person's identity, and that in order to understand a person's identity, one must acknowledge and address all of these intersecting systems. The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to explore and articulate the multidimensionality of black women's experiences with oppression (1989). Crenshaw argues that, when looking at systems of oppression from a single perspective, the most marginalized members of that group are often underrepresented. She states that "in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women" (p. 140). Intersectionality is a vital tool in queer studies for understanding the way that people navigate fluid, closeted, and marginalized identities that challenge a variety of social norms (Few-Demo *et al.*, 2016; Fotopoulou, 2012).

Narrative inquiry is built on the assumption that people create meaning from their experiences through the construction of stories. These stories are more than just a descriptive account of events, as they include the emotions and opinions of the person telling the story (Rahatzad, 2016). Narrative inquiry involves looking at the ways in which these stories are told, as well as the emotions conveyed through the stories, while recognizing that the researcher is not an objective observer, but an active participant in the storytelling process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Clandinin *et al.* (2007), further

specify that a narrative inquiry should involve a “simultaneous exploration” of three concepts—temporality, sociality, and place (p. 23). Temporality is the idea that events and people are not static but always in transition, sociality includes the personal and social conditions of the participant, as well as the dynamic between the participant and the researcher, and place refers to the physical spaces in which the inquiry and events being studied take place. These three concepts, put together, provide a framework for constructing a narrative inquiry.

The point of narrative inquiry is not to categorize or generalize participants’ stories, but to develop understanding of the lived experiences of the people telling the stories (Rahatzad, 2016). As such, it is not enough to tell stories once; in order to properly inquire into and gain an understanding of the stories themselves, one must retell and relive those stories, looking at the ways in which the stories are told as much as their content (Clandinin *et al.*, 2007).

Telling and retelling these stories can be a healing experience for the storyteller, and can also provide an opportunity and method to challenge oppression (Salter, 2017). Drawing comparisons to narrative therapy, Salter (2017) writes about the power in witnessing when people tell their stories—specifying that “witnessing is not a passive act of observation, but a dynamic act of hearing, reflecting, and reshaping stories, co-creating a relational space where new and evolving stories can emerge” (369). Salter further states that telling and constructing new stories can be viewed as an act of resistance, “actively resisting the deafening discourse of silence” (369), and that hearing these stories can emotionally influence people to take action.

Narrative inquiry is especially useful for empowering and learning about the

experiences of marginalized identities. Stone-Mediatore (2003) writes “when we treat experience-based narratives as mere ideological artifacts, we reinforce the disempowerment of people who have been excluded from official knowledge production, for we deny epistemic value from a central means by which such people can take control over their representation” (p. 2). In this sense, narrative inquiry gives voice to and honours the lived experiences of people, giving them the freedom to reflect on, articulate, and share their own experiences of identity.

I used the process of *métissage* to work with the narrative data obtained through this study, as it is particularly well-suited to exploring the narratives of people whose identities challenge ideas of societal norms. *Métissage* describes both the process and product of collecting narrative data from participants and braiding it together to highlight points of affinity as well as points of tension. It involves weaving together many different voices in such a way that recognizes and emphasizes the uniqueness of each voice, while creating something new at the same time (Chambers *et al.*, 2008). Mark Zuss (1997) describes *métissage* as “a way of describing the braided weave of multiple and composite identities that may be intentionally drawn from experience in acts of self-authorization” (p. 3). It is a concept and research approach that rejects the essentialist focus on categorization, and instead affirms the nuances and ambiguity of personal identity (Lionnet, 1989). Essentialism considers many aspects of human identity—including sexuality and gender—to be fixed categories, while queer theorists, along with many postmodern theorists, argue that much of what constitutes identity is socially constructed, and therefore fluid (Ball, 2010). *Métissage* highlights moments of tension, contradiction, and ambiguity in personal narratives, but rather than attempt to resolve or categorize

those feelings, it instead invites the reader and author to tend to and acknowledge them.

By tending to this ambiguity instead of attempting to resolve it, métissage not only allows for, but fosters an understanding of identity that is fluid and complex.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Much research has been done surrounding negative experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, specifically relating to bullying and mental health (Almeida *et al.*, 2009; Mustanski *et al.*, 2010; Taylor *et al.*, 2015). Likewise, research has also been conducted on the effectiveness of different therapies, and the benefits of having Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) in schools (Heck *et al.*, 2011; Mayberry, 2012). There have also been two large-scale surveys that investigate teacher willingness to address LGBTQ+ content and offer support to students (Taylor *et al.* 2016; Ontario College of Teachers, 2010). I attempted to find academic studies that explore how teachers intend to offer support to LGBTQ+ students, but was unable to find significant research on this topic. In this chapter I summarize some of the pertinent findings from related studies and demonstrate why my research is necessary in order to move from recognizing the need to support LGBTQ+ students to determining how best to do that.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards LGBTQ+ Content

In 2015, the Every Teacher Project published the results of a survey investigating the question “What are Canadian educators’ experiences and perspectives on LGBTQ-inclusive education?” This survey of teachers, conducted over the 2012-2013 school year, collected data from 3319 participants across Canada and defined LGBTQ-inclusive education as “curriculum, policies, and practices that include positive, accurate information about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two Spirit, queer, and questioning people as well as issues related to gender and sexual diversity” (Taylor *et al.*, 2015, p. 3). 85% of the participants reported they were in favour of LGBTQ-inclusive education, but 20% of participants also reported hearing homonegative comments such as “that’s so

gay” from other teachers, and 34% reported hearing teachers use homophobic words like “dyke” and “faggot.” While 99% of participants agreed “it is important for students to have someone to talk to,” only 73% stated they would be comfortable discussing LGBTQ+ issues with a student. When teachers were asked what factors might prevent them from addressing LGBTQ+ issues with students, the reasons included: perceived lack of training/resources (33% of participants), perceptions about students, such as students being too young for the material (31%), perceptions about external negative reactions, such as parent opposition (23%), and perceptions about internal negative reactions, such as opposition from administration (14%).

Taylor *et al.*'s survey provides valuable information about gaps and general trends in LGBTQ+ education in Canadian teacher education programs, which highlights the need for curricular reform in these programs. Given that this was a broad survey, data are presented as the percentage of participants who selected a particular pre-written response. As such, the survey does not discuss specific interactions between a particular teacher and students, or explore the emotions and experiences of individual participants in depth. Building off of the need for improved teacher education programs outlined in Taylor *et al.*'s survey, my research explores the lived experiences of individual participants, highlighting particular strategies used by teachers to support their students, and how those strategies were or were not effective.

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Training.

The idea of perceived lack of training is particularly relevant to my research. In Taylor *et al.*'s survey (2015), of the participants who had graduated in the last five years, 59% stated that they did not feel their teacher education program had adequately prepared

them to address issues of sexual diversity, and only 7% felt their teacher education program had left them “very well prepared.” Furthermore, 64% stated they did not feel their program had prepared them to address issues of gender diversity, and only 4% stated that they had been “very well prepared.”

The participants were also asked about the number of teacher education courses they had taken that included LGBTQ+ content. The areas of content they were asked about were: homophobia in schools, transphobia in schools, LGBTQ student issues, LGBTQ teacher issues, LGBTQ-parented children, inclusive language/examples, using LGBTQ content, LGB identity development, transgender identity development, and theories of gender diversity. More than 60% of the participants reported that most of these topics were not included in any of their courses. There were two exceptions to this; one was the topic of homophobia in schools, for which 38% stated it was discussed in none of their classes, while 40% stated it was in one of their classes, and 22% reported that it was in more than one of their classes. The other exception was LGBTQ student issues, for which 45% stated that it was included in none of their classes, 38% stated that it was included in one of their classes, and 17% stated that it was discussed in more than one of their classes (Taylor *et al.*, 2015).

A Needs-Based Approach to Support

Tay and Diener (2011) analyzed an international survey to the correlation between fulfillment of needs and a person’s subjective well-being. Building off of work by Maslow (1954), Ryff and Keyes (1995), Ryan and Deci (2000), and Csikszentmihalyu (1988), the authors examined a number of Gallup polls (2009) that were representative of 66% of the world’s population and that included data on need fulfillment and subjective

well-being. The results of their research suggest that, not only are some needs shared by people across the world, such as such as needs for personal safety, community, and feelings of self-worth, the fulfillment of these needs is consistently associated with a person's subjective well-being. Tay and Diener place these needs into the following categories: "basic needs for food and shelter, safety and security, social support and love, feeling respected and pride in activities, mastery, and self-direction and autonomy" (p. 355). All of these can be further separated into either basic needs, security needs, or psychosocial needs. Tay and Diener's research suggests that fulfillment of needs is associated with having positive feelings, and that having unfulfilled needs is associated with having negative feelings, although the authors specified that the association between needs and feelings did not necessarily imply causation one way or the other. Similar research was conducted by Howell and Howell (2008), who analyzed a number of studies that discussed the correlation between income and subjective well-being, and found that income primarily influenced a person's subjective well-being when it was associated with basic need fulfillment.

Throughout this study, I make reference to needs for both celebration of diverse identities and normalization of LGBTQ+ identities (Tay & Diener 2011; Bloomfield & Fisher 2016). These needs do not contradict one another. Normalization refers to the process by which something becomes perceived as natural or normal. Normalization of LGBTQ+ identities would involve a person's sexuality and gender identity being treated as natural, with no taboos associated with it, regardless of how they identified. Celebration of diversity acknowledges differences in identity and demonstrates an appreciation for the myriad aspects that contribute to personal identity. In practice, this

might look like a classroom where a student announces that they are bisexual, and their peers respond by asking that student about what attracts them to people. This response would meet both a need for normalization and celebration, as it treats bisexuality as natural, and encourages the student who came out to talk more in depth about the topic if they wish. I have specifically chosen to use the word “celebration” in place of the word “tolerance,” as the latter term implies that one is putting up with something negative, while “celebration” implies an appreciation of something. I will not be using “acceptance,” as this term could fall anywhere on a continuum between the other two, depending on the modifier; there is a large difference between begrudging acceptance and enthusiastic acceptance.

Due to the challenges outlined in the following discussion, many basic universal needs are difficult for an LGBTQ+ student to meet in a heteronormative and cisnormative school environment.

Institutional Challenges Faced by LGBTQ+ Students

Across Canada, LGBTQ+ students face a variety of challenges from the policies, infrastructure, and discourse of schooling. These challenges range from overtly transphobic policies, such as insisting that trans students use bathrooms that relate to the gender they were assigned at birth (Chan, 2014), to attempts by school boards to prevent same-gender couples from attending dances together (“Gay teen wins fight over Catholic prom,” 2002), to well-meant but problematic discourse that emphasizes the negative experiences of LGBTQ+ students over positive experiences. It is important to note that Canadian educational policies originate from provincial boards of education as well as from local districts, but must comply with federally mandated human rights laws.

In one school division in Manitoba (<http://hsd.ca/2016/04/20/board-of-trustees-official-statement/>), discussions of sexual orientation are considered “sensitive content,” and teachers are prohibited from discussing sexual orientation until high school.

Furthermore, if an elementary or middle school-aged student in that same school division asks a question about sexual orientation, the teacher has been instructed to “answer factually,” but only by using one of the following three options:

1. “This is not a part of our lesson today, but if you have questions that you would like me to respond to, please see me after class.”
2. “If you need to talk to someone about the feelings you are having related to sexual orientation, is there someone you feel comfortable discussing it with? If you can’t think of anyone, you could speak with the resource teacher / counselor, or you can contact either the Kids Help Phone Line at 1-800-668-6868 or Teen Touch at 204-783-1116.”
3. “Provide the following explanation: We live in a diverse world and why a person likes or is attracted to one person and not the other, is one of life’s great mysteries. We should always be respectful of every person’s human rights, diversity, and dignity.”

All of these responses send a clear message that diverse sexualities are not acceptable to discuss in front of other students. Despite the instruction to “answer factually,” all three of the responses shut down conversation and inquiry, and do not leave space to respond to the question that was asked. Instead, they send a number of messages to the whole class. The first response suggests that if students want to know anything about sexual orientation, they will have to visit the teacher one-on-one on their town time. The second response projects feelings onto the student, and equates questions about sexual orientation with a need to speak to a counselor. The third response, by calling attraction

“one of life’s great mysteries,” suggests that there is no answer to the student’s question. None of these messages support students with LGBTQ+ identities, and actively tell students that LGBTQ+ identities are not acceptable to discuss. It is also worth noting that the school division published this official statement on April 20th, 2016, and that Teen Touch—one of the organizations recommended in the second response—shut down in 2009 (“Teen touch shutting down phone service,” 2009).

In this same school district, in this situation, a teacher is also obligated to inform the student’s guardian(s) that they have been asking questions about sexual orientation. This policy has three major effects on students. First, it makes it difficult for students to acquire information about sexual orientation, which then makes it difficult for students to question or explore their own sexualities. Secondly, it potentially outs students to their guardian(s). This removes agency from the student regarding if or how they come out to their guardian(s), and runs the risk of putting the student in a situation where their guardian(s) might not be supportive. Thirdly, it sends a message to students that LGBTQ+ identities are not normal or appropriate to discuss. This othering of LGBTQ+ identities negatively affects both the esteem and personal safety of LGBTQ+ students (Almeida *et al.* 2009), as it undermines inclusivity and reinforces heteronormative and cisnormative discourse. Withholding information about LGBTQ+ identities, and treating it as “sensitive content” makes it more difficult for non-LGBTQ+ students to relate to their LGBTQ+ peers, and suggests to LGBTQ+ students that they are not normal, which is often perceived negatively. Through exclusion and LGBTQ+-negative language, heteronormative and cisnormative discourse reinforces ideas that LGBTQ+ identities are not only abnormal, but also inferior and not worthy of discussion.

A similar situation to the one in Manitoba exists in Alberta, where, up until 2015, under the Alberta Human Rights Act (Gereluk, 2011), teachers were required to obtain consent from parents prior to directly discussing human sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion. In 2015 this topic was moved to the Alberta Education Act, where it now states “A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality” (2017, p. 57). While this policy does not apply to “incidental or indirect” (p. 58) references to human sexuality—meaning that teachers can respond to student questions about sexuality without giving parental notice—it allows parents to remove their students from classes that directly address this content. This can drastically limit the information that a student can obtain to explore and understand their own and others’ sexuality and gender identity. This is particularly troubling in that LGBTQ+ students whose guardian(s) are not supportive of their sexuality or gender identity could be prevented from discussing their sexuality or gender identity at school. This severely limits teachers’ abilities to provide a safe environment for LGBTQ+ students. Gereluk (2011) argues that this does a disservice, not only to the individual students, but to citizens in general, stating that “it is not a mere preference that children be exposed to different experiences in order to secure autonomy, but a necessity,” and “schools are integral to preserving the political culture necessary for a liberal democracy to survive” (p. 77).

Simply by existing as an LGBTQ+ person, students might have trouble navigating areas of schools that are heteronormative and cisnormative spaces. In recent years, various forms of media in Canada have provided increased visibility for people with

diverse genders and sexual orientations. However, many schools were established and built before these identities were as recognized as they are now, and the ideologies of the times influenced the infrastructure of these institutions. Conventions such as girls' and boys' bathrooms, change rooms, and sports teams, as well as less-common traditions such as homecoming/prom queens and kings reinforce ideas about gender binaries, and do not easily allow space for people whose gender identity does not conform to a female/male binary.

According to the bylaws of the British Columbia Teacher Regulation Branch (bcteacherregulation.ca), BC teacher education programs must “Have content which recognizes the diverse nature of our society and which addresses throughout the program philosophical, ethical, and societal concerns with specific attention to the following areas: ...gender equity...sexual orientation, homophobia, and heterosexism.” While this statement requires that BC teacher education programs include content about sexual orientation, it does not require programs to specifically address strategies for supporting LGBTQ+ students, nor does it make any specific reference to gender diversity.

In the survey conducted by Taylor *et al.* (2015), many teachers reported that, if they received any university training about LGBTQ+ issues, it was about homophobia. While training preservice teachers about how to address homophobia is important, this should not be the primary way they engage with LGBTQ+ content. In addition to focusing disproportionately on sexual orientation over gender diversity, the common iterations of this approach have contributed to a discourse centred around suffering and a fixation on anti-bullying strategies, as opposed to a celebration of diverse identities or a reassessment and reconstruction of the heteronormative and cisnormative structure inherent in school

environments (Bloomfield & Fisher 2016).

Personal Challenges Faced by LGBTQ+ Students

It is important to remember that, instead of being a homogenous group, LGBTQ+ youth have different life experiences, and their needs will represent this. A strategy for supporting the needs of one LGBTQ+ student will not necessarily work for another. That said, there are three factors that often contribute to the unmet needs of LGBTQ+ students.

- a. Negative discourse - A discourse that uses homonegative and transnegative language, which contributes to othering and negative perceptions of LGBTQ+ people.
- b. Victimization - Verbal, physical, or visual/written attacks and other acts of exclusion by peers or adults.
- c. Uncertainty - Lack of resources with LGBTQ+ content, lack of practical information from teachers, lack of confidence in whether teachers will offer support, or lack of clarity about attitudes and beliefs of peers (Kosciw *et al.* 2009; Taylor *et al.* 2015; Jennings 2015; Robinson 2016).

Mental Health in LGBTQ+ Youth

Often, when discussing challenges facing LGBTQ+ youth, conversations will focus on higher rates of mental illness compared to their cisgender, heterosexual peers. One potential consequence of this is the emergence of a discourse that portrays LGBTQ+ youth as constantly suffering, or in danger of succumbing to suicidal thoughts. While it is vital to understand and acknowledge that LGBTQ+ youth often face challenges that can negatively affect their mental health, it is equally important to not equate LGBTQ+ identity with the presence of mental illness. A discourse centred around mental illness as a consequence, symptom, or side effect of sexuality cannot effectively meet a student's

needs for celebration or understanding. This is especially true in a society that often responds poorly to non-heterosexual and non-cisnormative sexualities and genders. As such, the following examples are intended to provide insight into mental health challenges faced by some LGBTQ+ youth, but should not exclusively form the basis for discourse around LGBTQ+ identity (Bryan & Mayock, 2016).

Research conducted by Almeida *et al.* (2009) shows that among a sample of grade 9-12 students from Massachusetts, LGBTQ+ students exhibited disproportionately high levels of depressive symptoms, and were more likely than heterosexual, cisgender youth to report suicidal thoughts (30% vs 6% $p < 0.0001$) and self-harm (21% vs 6% $p < 0.0001$). The authors suggest that perceived discrimination most likely contributes to emotional distress among youth. Similar results discussing links between LGBTQ+ identity and depressive behaviours in different sample populations were published in a study by Heck *et al.* (2011). Results of this study revealed that LGBTQ+ youth who attended a school with a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) demonstrated lower instances of suicidality and psychological distress.

A study by Mustanski *et al.* (2010) assessed the mental health of 246 LGBTQ+ youths by using diagnostic interviews and criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)* to determine the frequency of mental disorders within the sample. They found that 33% of the participants met the diagnostic criteria for some mental disorder; 15% met diagnostic criteria for major depression, 17% met criteria for conduct disorder, and 9% met criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. 31% of participants reported having attempted suicide at some point in their lives. Mustanski *et al.* state that “the prevalences of mental disorders and suicidal behaviours in

our sample are sufficiently high to warrant special attention to the needs of this population” (p. 2431).

These studies suggest that LGBTQ+ students exhibit disproportionate levels of depressive symptoms, that these symptoms can be affected by factors such as perceived discrimination, and that support systems like GSAs can help reduce these symptoms. For the students’ wellbeing, it is essential that teachers understand how to offer support to LGBTQ+ students.

Inclusive Education as it Relates to LGBTQ+ Youth

George Dei (2014) describes inclusion as “not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone. A space that values, acknowledges, and brings to the forefront those on the peripheries” (p. 19). In order to support LGBTQ+ students on a large scale, one would need to critically analyze and restructure the heteronormative and cisnormative nature of school environments (Jennings, 2015). The act of transgressing and deconstructing norms surrounding gender and sexuality can be referred to as “queering.” Dennis Sumara and Brent Davis (2013) discuss how queer theory relates to curriculum theory, explaining that queer theory does not aim to sexualize curricula, but to assess and analyze the ways in which it is already sexualized in a way which privileges and normalizes heterosexual identities. They state that “rather than defining queer identities in strict reference to bodily acts and aberrant or quirky lifestyles, queer theory asks that the continued construction of narratives supporting the unruly category ‘heterosexual’ be constantly interrupted and renarrated” (p. 315).

A school environment that is inclusive for LGBTQ+ identities would be one where

heteronormativity and cisnormativity were critically analyzed and challenged, and where LGBTQ+ identities were not only destigmatized, but normalized and freely discussed. By looking at the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of recently graduated teachers, I hoped to get an idea regarding if and how they intended to create an inclusive classroom for LGBTQ+ students.

Current Efforts

In recent years, several provincial governments have issued documents that discuss guidelines for supporting LGBTQ+ students, and which give specific focus to transgender and gender-diverse identities. For example, in 2014, the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development published a document called *Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Gender-nonconforming Students*, which was used as the basis for similar documents, such as Alberta's *Guidelines for Best Practice: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions* (2016), and Manitoba's *Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Manitoba Schools* (2017). This last document was of particular interest to me, as I not only attended public high school in Manitoba, but I first learned about the document when my high school theatre teacher posted it on Facebook. Seeing this made me think about how school culture has changed since I attended high school, and what teachers are willing to talk about now. A number of the participants in my study have taught in Manitoba, and while this document was released after they had submitted their contributions to this study, I would be curious to know if and how this document affects their impression of the teaching climate there.

Manitoba's Department of Education and Training describes *Supporting*

Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Manitoba Schools as being “designed to support transgender and gender diverse students in Manitoba by providing guiding principles, an overview of legal and policy developments in Manitoba, information about trans and gender diverse identities, guidelines for working with trans and gender diverse students, including guidance for, supporting the transition process, (and) information about trans and gender diverse support services in Manitoba and Canada” (Santos & Auclair, 2017). This document, along with a letter to the superintendents of school divisions and the principals of funded independent schools, was posted on the Government of Manitoba’s website. The letter outlined the purpose of the document, and advertised two half-day meetings that would take place in October of 2017 to discuss and review the document. These documents are relevant to my research as they offer clear and straightforward strategies and guidelines for teachers wanting to support their transgender and gender diverse students.

In addition to the provincial documents, Kearns *et al.* (2017) recently published an article that discusses transphobia, cisgender privilege, and gender rigidity from the perspective of preservice teachers. The authors argue that teacher education programs need to explicitly discuss “the gender binary and the importance of challenging gender norms,” (p. 21) as this can foster an educator’s ability to interrupt and dismantle genders and heteronormativity at all levels of education.

Both the provincial documents and the arguments by Kearns *et al.* make a strong case for the importance of increased education for teachers about supporting trans and gender diverse students. By focusing on the experiences of recently graduated teachers regarding a broad range of LGBTQ+ identities, my research expands on these strategies

for support and can help empower even more teachers in supporting their students.

Intersectionality and Métissage

Intersectionality has become an increasingly common theme in queer studies recently. Intersectionality addresses the ways in which various aspects of a person's identity interact and intersect with society, particularly as it pertains to discrimination and oppression (Carbado *et al.*, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Fotopoulou, 2012). In *Writing: A method of inquiry* (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), Laurel Richardson states that “because the individual is subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, one's subjectivity is shifting and contradictory—not stable, fixed, and rigid” (p. 962). LGBTQ+ students often find themselves situated in places of tension as a result of these interactions. For example, a bisexual girl from a conservative religious family in a liberal city with a patriarchal system of government might be exposed to several different discursive forces, and might, as a result, experience the world through a number of different lenses. To support that individual, it would be necessary to acknowledge and understand all the different ways that society intersects with her identity. Intersectionality lets one focus on the unique needs of an individual, rather than viewing that individual primarily as a member of a single broad group.

Intersectionality is important when discussing LGBTQ+ issues to account for the fact that the term LGBTQ+ encompasses a wide range of identities, with wildly differing experiences of various aspects of society. For example, a pansexual transgender girl living in Russia might face different types of discrimination and experience challenges with different power structures than a gay cisgender boy who recently emigrated from Syria to live in Canada. While both of these people might identify under the broad

category of LGBTQ+, treating them as though they shared the same challenges would likely not meet their needs. An intersectional approach to support would involve looking at all aspects of their identity and tending to each of their unique needs and experiences.

It is because of these intersecting discourses that I chose to use *métissage* in this research. *Métissage* is, simultaneously, both a process and a product—a way of actively engaging with narratives, as well as the product that is created by working with those narratives. Both the product and process of *métissage* allow space for the intersecting aspects of a person’s identity to be represented and explored. Erika Hasabe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo (2009) write that *métissage* is “a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts, and identities” (p. 9). Hasabe-Ludt (2003) also states that the word *métissage*—originally negatively defined as “mixed-blood”—has been appropriated as a metaphor for fluidity and a “creative strategy for the blending of gender, race, language and place into autobiographical texts” (p. 459).

The process of *métissage* involves collecting narratives from a number of people, and braiding them together to highlight areas of affinity and contrast. Dwayne Donald (2012) suggests that rather than separately analyzing the experiences and voices of individuals, *métissage* can be used to look at the interactions between these voices as part of a “collective expression of larger conversations” and as a way to tend to the “tensions and ambiguities” felt at these points of intersection (p. 535). Also, instead of searching for a solution or attempting to resolve these feelings, Donald discusses how to “interpret and give voice to the difficulty and ambiguousness of life itself” (p. 546).

Given the subject matter of my study, I felt that it was important to sit with feelings

of tension, and to conduct my research in a way which gives voice to the feelings that arise at these points of intersection. Many of the conflicts that arise when discussing LGBTQ+ issues stem from binaries, and the implied hierarchies within those binaries, such as straight/gay, male/female, and cisgender/transgender. Many LGBTQ+ students exist in spaces outside of or between these binaries, and métissage provides an opportunity to move away from a structuralist focus on categorization to recognize, explore, and give voice to the fluidity and ambiguous nature of identities.

In order for research to be broadly applicable it must also be accessible (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). With quantitative research, important findings can be summarized through abstracts and visual aids, which can convey information succinctly to both specialists and casual readers who are interested in the topic, but who might not be familiar with the technical language required to read the entire work. With qualitative research, however, the meaning is often only conveyed through the act of reading the entire text. Laurel Richardson (2005) states that “qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading” (p. 960), and argues that exploring new styles of writing can help engage readers to read the entire work. By using artistic styles of writing, such as poems, dialogues, and humour, one can not only convey a broad range of emotions to the reader, but also capture and hold the attention of the reader for an extended period of time. While working with the participants for my research, I encouraged them to write creatively in whatever style they felt comfortable, and I ended up braiding a number of participants’ narratives together into found poems.

Richardson (2005) uses the term CAP (creative analytical processes) to refer to scholarship where the author “has moved outside conventional social scientific writing”

(p. 962). As a postmodern approach, CAP recognizes that writing is always subjective, and that the author(s), writing process, and product are intertwined. I see the process of *métissage* as falling within CAP. Due to the unconventional nature of CAP works, Richardson proposes four criteria that can be used to assess the quality and effectiveness of writing that takes this form.

1. *Substantive contribution* - Does this piece contribute to an understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? Does this piece seem “true”—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the real?
2. *Aesthetic merit* - Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
3. *Reflexivity* - How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold themselves accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people they have studied?
4. *Impact* - Does this piece affect the reader emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move a reader to write or to action? (p. 964).

While weaving together the data from participants, I worked to arrive at a *métissage* that not only honestly represented the emotions of the participants, but that would also engage the reader in such a way as to invoke empathy and have them experience the same emotions. If a reader can connect authentically with a text, there is a greater chance that

they will take its message to heart. I will further elaborate on the process of métissage—particularly as it relates to my study—in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 – Design & Methodology

Design

This study involved collecting written narratives from 6 teachers who graduated from Canadian teacher education programs since May 2012. The narratives were written in response to prompts and focused on a participant's knowledge, belief, and experience regarding support for LGBTQ+ students.

Recruitment

I chose to use teachers who had completed teacher education programs within the past five years for this study. I was interested in the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of recently-graduated teachers for two main reasons. Firstly, They would have completed their teacher education programs and had experience working in schools. Secondly, they would have done so during the recent increase in visibility for LGBTQ+ issues (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2015; Taylor *et al.*, 2015). In contrast to this, if I were to work with preservice teachers, they might not have had many experiences with LGBTQ+ youth, or they might not yet have taken a course that discussed LGBTQ+ issues. I hoped that this would also provide information about the current state of teacher education programs, as opposed to what they were like in the past.

The participants were selected from different provinces across Canada in order to provide a greater variety of perspectives. A person who completed their teacher education program in Manitoba might have a vastly different set of experiences and attitudes relating to LGBTQ+ issues than somebody who completed their program in British Columbia. Tay and Diener's work on universal needs (2011) suggests that certain needs—including those for personal safety, community, and celebration—are universal

and associated with subjective well-being for people across the world. However, how these needs are met might differ wildly between contexts, as well as individuals. By examining experiences from a range of provinces, I hoped to identify a wide variety of manifestations of needs, as well as strategies that could be used to support students. It is important to note, however, that my goal was not to do a comparative analysis of how teacher education programs differ across the country, as that question is outside the scope of this study. It is also important to note that participants who completed a program in one province did not necessarily continue working in that same province or city, and their current knowledge and attitudes will have been informed by experiences from other places they have lived and worked. If the participant provided this information, I included it at the start of Chapter Four, as it illustrates the range of contexts represented in this study.

In order to recruit participants, I used opportunity sampling. I approached teachers who I had opportunities to be in contact with through work, through professional development events, and through colleagues. Using a variety of media, including in-person, through email, and through social media, I reached out to the people who I knew and had graduated since May 2012. I stated that I was looking for volunteers for a study about supporting LGBTQ+ students, and to contact me if they wished to participate. Of the people I reached out to, six agreed to participate in the study. Notably, the six individuals who agreed all stated that they wanted to participate because support for LGBTQ+ students was a subject that they cared about. Given that the goal of this study is to explore teachers' experiences with LGBTQ+ issues, and not to proportionately represent the attitudes of Canadian teachers, I was unconcerned about only recruiting

participants with prior investment in the subject.

Selecting Participants

Participants were accepted based on the order in which they contacted me, and whether or not they were available to meet to discuss the study further. Anybody who contacted me was given a consent form, which further outlined the study. Upon receipt of the consent form, I arranged a time to discuss the research with them.

Meeting with Participants

Some of these meetings occurred in person and some were conducted online. At the start of each meeting I briefly outlined the purpose of the study, provided statistics around teachers' perceptions of their training, and described the process of métissage and narrative inquiry and why I would be using that approach. I did not provide my working definition of support (recognizing and addressing the needs of an individual), as I was interested to see how the different participants conceptualized it. Participants were encouraged to ask questions at any time if they were seeking clarity about anything discussed.

I further explained that I wanted to know about the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of recently graduated teachers, and would like them each to write 3 short pieces, each of which could take the form of a poem, short story, anecdote, or other style of short writing. These pieces would be in response to the following prompts (which were either written and handed to participants, or sent to them via email):

1. Write about any experience you have had involving (maximum 1 page) an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you were unsure how to respond.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this. Answer briefly (1-2 paragraphs)
3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond (maximum 1 page).
 - a. A student happily initiated a conversation with you about their same-gender crush.
 - b. At the start of one of your classes, a student who used to use male pronouns requested that people address her with female pronouns.
 - c. You overheard another teacher using transphobic slurs in the staff room.
 - d. A student used homonegative language (e.g. "That's gay!") in the classroom.
 - e. You overheard a student telling a peer that asexuality isn't real and that the peer is just a "late bloomer."
 - f. You observed a student being called a homophobic slur and thrown against a locker.
 - g. A student came out (as being attracted to people of their same gender) to you during a one-on-one conversation, in a school where teachers are required by school policy to report to a student's parents if that student makes comments or asks questions about homosexuality.

Participants were then excused, after being asked to write their pieces sometime over the next two weeks and send it back to me using the email address they received earlier, which was also present on the sheet of writing prompts.

In addition to these prompts, there were three short-answer questions on the paper.

1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?
2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

3. What is your interest in this topic?

While planning this research, I wondered if there might be a correlation between what education stream the participants had been in and their exposure to LGBTQ+ topics in their teacher education program. In the end, however, there was insufficient data to make any statements about whether different education streams were approaching LGBTQ+ topics in different ways.

It is possible that participants performed their own research over the two weeks, which might have affected their writing. I was not concerned about this, as the resulting pieces of writing would still represent the participants' current knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. While having conducted research might have changed the way in which participants reflected on past experiences, it would not have changed those experiences themselves (for the full transcript of participant responses, see Appendix B).

Collecting Data

Participants emailed their writing to me. After 10 days had passed from the meeting, I sent an email to any participants who had not yet submitted their writing. If they still did not respond, I did not send any more messages and made do with the data I had collected. Participants who did submit writing were also asked to submit a pseudonym for use in the *métissage*, which would help the reader distinguish one participant's voice from the others, while maintaining participant anonymity.

Throughout this process I kept research notes that included my thoughts about the recruitment, meetings with the participants, literature, and the writing process itself. Elements of these notes were incorporated into the written *métissage*.

Métissage as Narrative Research Practice

Because the subject of this study involves the fluidity and complex nature of personal identity, I chose to use a research methodology which rejects rigid categorization and blurs the lines between less rigid categories. The practice of métissage not only allows for, but thrives on the existence and recognition of vastly different—and sometimes contradictory—narratives, both within and between individuals. By braiding these narratives together, one can highlight the similarities, differences, points of interaction, and dialogues between these stories. In this sense, métissage is an approach to narrative inquiry that is consistent with a theoretical framework which recognizes and fosters diversity and ambiguity in identity. Métissage also facilitates a collective effort between researcher and participants (Chambers *et al.*, 2008; Hasabe-Ludt *et al.*, 2009; Lionnet, 1989). Given that the participants were asked to discuss topics relating to personal identity, a collective approach seemed more likely to help the participants feel comfortable and open to sharing, compared to a dynamic with the researcher studying—but not working alongside—the participants. The participants' submissions were then woven in with my own experiences as a teacher who recently graduated from a Canadian teacher education program, and theoretical aspects of queer theory and inclusive education to create a narrative that provides insight into what recently graduated teachers know, believe, and have experienced about supporting LGBTQ+ students. This is why there are seven contributors listed at the start of Chapter Four, as my writing is braided in with the writing of the six participants.

Another reason for including my own experiences comes from the fact that métissage is both a process and a product (Lionnet, 1989). The experiences that I

contributed to the *métissage* are experiences that helped drive and shape my interest in this study. They were written in response to the same writing prompts as the volunteer participants, and are an integral part of the research process, as they informed not only why I care about this topic, but also how I approached working with the participants' submissions. Given that the *métissage* represents an analysis of the data and not raw data itself, including my experiences situates myself within the research, and acknowledges the subjective nature of my role in that analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Once written, I shared the *métissage* with the participants who provided contributions and invited them to provide responses via email. Given that this is a collective writing process, this gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their contributions, check that they felt accurately represented in the final work, and see the completed project.

Design Rationale

When designing this study, I considered a number of potential formats before deciding on a narrative approach and the practice of *métissage*. I first considered conducting one-on-one interviews with participants about the prompts listed in the previous section, as it would allow me to ask follow-up questions to clarify ideas and maximize the amount of data I could get from each participant. I abandoned this approach because of the possibility of participants' responses being influenced by my presence. Also, if participants felt they were being tested on their progressiveness or sensitivity, they might respond differently than they otherwise would. Furthermore, sexual orientation and gender identity are topics that people might be guarded about discussing, and having a conversation about personal identity with a male they have

never met before might lead to more guarded responses. A number of studies have investigated the effect of an interviewer's gender on participant responses (Agula *et al.*, 2015; Benstead, 2014; Huddy *et al.*, 1997; Kane & Macaulay, 1993), and while the results of these studies vary considerably depending on the context (Agula *et al.*, 2015; Benstead, 2014;) and the topics discussed (Huddy *et al.*, 1997; Kane & Macaulay, 1993), when discussing gender and sexuality, both male and female participants tended to provide more feminist-positive responses to female interviewers than male interviewers. Notably, these studies did not investigate nonbinary gender identities, and the results from these studies should not be used to make generalized assumptions about how people in all contexts will behave. However, given the patriarchal nature of homophobic discourse—where boys behaving in ways that are traditionally viewed as feminine get called “gay” as an insult (Fair, 2011)—I would personally have felt uncomfortable discussing my experiences with gender and sexuality one-on-one with a male who was in a position of power over me within the researcher/participant dynamic. Because of these concerns, I decided that one-on-one interviews were not optimally suited for obtaining the data I was interested in.

The next approach I considered was conducting a survey comprised of written responses by participants. I ran into three main concerns with this approach. First, I had difficulty figuring out how to ensure I would get sufficient data from each participant, as they could simply write a one-sentence response to each question. The second concern was that the structure made the research seem more like a test to determine what people did not know, as opposed to a study of what they did know. The third concern was that a survey format lends itself more to quantitative analysis than qualitative, and my sample

size was too small for a quantitative approach to be particularly useful. Furthermore, the research question of “What do teachers who have recently graduated from teacher education programs know, believe, and experience regarding supporting the needs of LGBTQ+ students?” is well-suited to qualitative research, as it invites a vast array of nuanced, personal responses.

The written narrative approach to my inquiry allowed me to obtain data in a manner which allowed participants to think over their responses without the influence of having a researcher present. Given the importance of emotions in narrative inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Salter, 2017), this time and freedom of expression allowed participants to create something that effectively expressed their emotions about the topic. Employing *métissage* as a way to analyze and weave the data allowed for anonymity, a collective approach instead of a test, and freedom of creative expression through narrative writing. Furthermore, *métissage* has a history of being used to explore a variety of social issues, including Greg Lowan-Trudeau’s work with environmental education (2012), and Dwayne Donald’s research into indigenous *métissage* as a decolonizing research approach (2011). It was my hope that this approach to research would facilitate conversation and self-reflection about a social issue that matters to me greatly.

While I determined that narrative inquiry was the approach best suited to my research, it is not without its limitations. Rose and Granger (2013) identify three issues when working with narrative data: how to decide what matters most in telling a story, how to account for the partial nature of narratives, and how to account for the participant’s unconscious knowledge. In narrative research, stories collected from participants will always be partial, and a number of processes—unconscious and

conscious—will have determined what aspects of the story are told, which are emphasized, which are minimized, and which are omitted entirely (Rose & Granger, 2013). Personal narratives are inherently subjective, dependent on the storyteller's understanding of storytelling, social goals, mood, memory, and the ideological lenses that are used to understand events, both at the time of their occurrence and at the time when they are recounted as a story. Rose and Granger (2013) suggest that these limitations can result in contradictions and gaps in stories, which, paradoxically, can tell researchers important information about the storyteller's thought processes.

Process

When I initially conceived this research, my plan was to work with participants who were still in their teacher education programs. I received ethics approval to approach university instructors and asked for permission to speak to their classes, where I provided an outline of my research and left my contact information so that anybody who was interested in participating would be able to contact me. I eventually amended this to instead focus on recently graduated teachers for two reasons. Firstly, I assumed that recently graduated teachers might have more experiences working directly with students than preservice teachers, and would be able to speak to their experiences through their whole teacher education program, instead of just the first few years. Secondly, when I attempted to recruit volunteers from a pool of preservice teachers, I was unsuccessful in securing any participants, possibly due to the fact that I was recruiting participants near the end of term, right before final exams and practica.

Soon after amending my research to focus on recently graduated teachers, I received a number of submissions from teachers I had reached out to, and I began the

process of working with the narrative data. When I first read the participants' stories I attempted to identify broad themes, and then arranged the complete stories into groups that shared a dominant theme. Some of the themes that I initially noticed included "institutional supports" and "one-on-one strategies," both of which were present in the writing prompts. As such, it would not be fair to say that these themes emerged organically, or that this collection of stories was a proper or deep exploration of the participants' narratives. At the time, I was unsure of my role as researcher, and felt that I wanted to preserve all aspects of each participant's writing, so that a reader could form their own meaning. I had the impulse to treat the researcher as an objective third party capable of presenting raw data, even while I had been actively researching and practising a fundamentally different style of research. As a result, what I created was a loosely-organized pile of data, instead of an analysis.

I reread my notes on *métissage*, and approached the submissions again, this time bearing in mind my own subjectivity. I read the submissions aloud and retyped them into new word documents. Every time I worked with one of the submissions, I felt that I gained a deeper understanding of it, and once I had read them so many times that the content was largely memorized, I began noticing more aspects of the writing style—how the sentences flowed together, what words were used, the pacing—as well as how the cornerstones of narrative inquiry discussed by Clandinin *et al.*, (2007)—temporality, sociality, and place—were explored. During this process, I began noticing words and phrases that were present in multiple submissions from different participants. In order to highlight the extent to which the participants shared a certain idea, I took all of the instances where a participant expressed that idea and, treating each line like a thread from

a different patch of fabric, wove them together into a short poem. I then read the narratives again with the poem in mind, and then rewrote it, adding new sections and moving others around. I did this a number of times, and as I reread the narratives and rewrote the poem, I gained a deeper understanding of how that idea featured in the participants' experiences.

After the first poem, I repeated this process of reading and rereading the submissions until certain commonalities or points of contrast became apparent. I then arranged these into a format that emphasized those commonalities or contrasts, using form, spacing, and line breaks to highlight points of affinity and tension. Sometimes this took the form of a short poem, sometimes I modeled it after a stage performance where three or four performers take turns delivering monologues, and sometimes I structured it as though the reader had just walked into a school hallway and were being bombarded from all sides by snippets of conversations. In each of these cases, the format was intended to emphasize the emotions expressed by the participants and help instill them in the reader. For example, the piece entitled "Support" is arranged to emphasize similarities in the participants' responses and suggest unity, with some of the lines put together as though they are part of the same sentence, while the piece entitled "Back in University" is intended to mimic the feeling of being in university and hearing short sections of overlapping, sometimes contrasting, conversations from peers and strangers.

As I repeated this process—reading, writing, and rewriting—I began to notice that I would read certain pieces one after the other each time. I made note of this and continued working with the individual pieces. This continued happening throughout the process, and over time I naturally came to organize the pieces into three distinct groups, each of

which shared a general theme—trust, uncertainty, and empowerment. These groups became the three braids of the métissage. I arranged the braids in this order based on the interactions with students that participants shared; in many cases, the stories followed a similar trajectory where trust was established between a teacher and student, then, because of that trust, uncertainty could be acknowledged, and once that uncertainty was acknowledged, they could work together to empower that student. I also noticed that, while some narratives featured uncertainty as a prominent focus, threads of uncertainty ran throughout many of the stories that focused primarily on trust or empowerment. Uncertainty's placement between the other two themes highlights its connections to the other two themes. It is important to note that uncertainty was mentioned in one of the writing prompts, where participants were asked to write about an experience they had had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where they were unsure how to respond. However, the extent to which uncertainty featured in many narratives—not just in response to this particular writing prompt—emphasizes its prominence as a theme. As such, I did not feel the same hesitation in calling uncertainty a theme as I had when discussing themes in my first attempt at working with the narratives,

Once the three braids of the métissage were established, I looked for a way to make the delineation between braids clear, while emphasizing how they flow together. In my notes I kept a list of certain quotes from articles that caught my attention, and I chose a few of these that seemed to fit with the themes to mark the end of one braid and segue into the next. In this way I was able to situate the métissage within a larger ongoing conversation.

As the braids started taking shape, I reread the participants' submissions, specifically to look for sections that I had not yet included. I wanted to make sure that I properly honoured the work that the participants had done and did not leave out anything significant. Deciding what constituted significant caused me considerable grief, as what I identified as significant would almost certainly be different from what another researcher or the participant themselves would deem significant. Nevertheless, the flow and feelings that were coming together in the collective pieces would be harder to achieve if I were intent on using every single word that the participants submitted. As such, I attempted to use as many of the participants' words as I could, and made sure that every narrative piece that a participant submitted was represented in the final *métissage*. I tried not to leave any large ideas out, and only removed phrases from individual pieces when what I deemed the central idea could still be conveyed using fewer words. As I read through the submissions I found a few pieces that I did not feel had been adequately represented in the *métissage*, and worked with them repeatedly until I found a way to weave them into either existing narratives or new ones.

As I worked on the *métissage*, I regularly reminded myself of Laurel Richardson's Critical Analytical Processes criteria (2005): substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, and impact. After each writing session I reflected on each of these criteria, and made notes on how to address them in the following session. This frequently involved navigating the interplay between offering a substantive contribution to understanding of teachers' experiences and having an emotional impact on the reader. Interestingly, by altering the aesthetics of a piece—for example, by working with line lengths and white space on the page—I often found that I could better meet both the

substantive contribution and impact criteria.

Throughout this process, I was working in the role of both participant and researcher. It was important to me that I not hold myself apart from the storytelling as somebody working with other people's data, but demonstrate the same vulnerability in sharing personal experiences that I was asking of my participants. I subjected my own pieces to the same rigorous reading and rereading as the other participants' writing, although I had an easier time pulling apart and omitting sections from my own writing, since I was not troubled by the thought of misrepresenting my own experiences or identifying different significant features than somebody else would have. As such, it is important to reiterate that the *métissage* in the following chapter represents one analysis of the data, and different researchers or the participants themselves would almost certainly produce different analyses.

In order to maintain anonymity, all of the participants in this study chose their own pseudonyms. To preserve the interconnectedness of the voices, I also chose a pseudonym for myself. One of my reasons for using *métissage* was to weave all of the voices together, blurring lines between rigid categories of identity, including participant and researcher. Without a pseudonym, I feared that my voice would appear separate from the other pieces in the eye of the reader. That said, it is also important to acknowledge my own position within the study, especially given that my experiences around this topic influenced my interest in pursuing this research. As such, I chose to use the same font for my writing during the *métissage* as I have elsewhere in this work. I felt that this would strike a balance between sharing focus between the voices, and acknowledging my position as researcher and contributor.

While it is not a usual practice to include full transcripts in the appendix of a thesis, I have chosen to do so for the purposes of transparency and transference. In Chapter Five, I recommend that other teachers use *métissage* as a way to reflect on their own experiences with LGBTQ+ students. Including the participants' transcripts in the appendix allows those teachers—or other researchers interested in using *métissage*—to see how I used the process of *métissage* to transform the data into the product of *métissage*.

Chapter 4: Métissage

Reading the Métissage

Reading this métissage will not be like reading most prose texts. It will not be like reading a single poem, or a play, or any other sort of writing. It contains stories, found poems, and dialogues, but it is not simply a collection of those things. Each participant has been assigned a particular font. I invite you to think of each section written in a specific font as a single thread pulled from one piece of fabric and woven in with other threads from other pieces of fabric. When a thread first appears, its significance might not be immediately clear. It might then disappear for a while beneath the other threads, surfacing from time to time like the warp and weft on a loom before its significance becomes apparent. I invite you to be patient, curious, and open. This work will ask you to feel different, contrasting feelings at the same time. Rather than attempting to resolve those into a single feeling, try sitting with that tension. If you find a sad thread tightly wound around a joyful one, I invite you to feel the sadness, feel the joy, and feel the tension between them. I encourage you to read this text actively. Read sections aloud. Go back and follow particular threads that catch your attention. If you are reminded of your own experiences, take a moment to dwell on them; this text will still be here when you are finished.

Above all, I invite you to take your time. Notice the individual threads, the short works made from those threads, the braids made from those short works, and the whole métissage together. Instead of a linear experience, think of this métissage as something to explore.

THIS IS THE FONT FOR MARIA FITZPATRICK, WHO GRADUATED IN 2012 FROM A MANITOBA TEACHER
EDUCATION PROGRAM AND SUBSEQUENTLY TAUGHT IN MANITOBA.

This is the font for Dany, who graduated in 2013 from an Ontario
teacher education program and subsequently taught in Manitoba.

This is the font for John Smith, who graduated in 2017 from a Manitoba teacher
education program and subsequently taught in Manitoba.

This is the font for Howl Prenderghast, who graduated in 2013 from a Manitoba teacher
education program and subsequently taught in British Columbia.

This is the font for M.B., who graduated in 2015 from an Ontario teacher
education program and subsequently taught in Ontario.

This is the font for Carly, who graduated in 2014 from a British Columbia teacher
education program and subsequently taught in British Columbia.

This is the font for Nikita, who graduated in 2014 from a Saskatchewan
teacher education program and subsequently taught in British Columbia.

And this is the font for citations from books, articles, and other external sources.

Braid One - Trust

I DID NOT WANT TO BREAK THE TRUST OF THE STUDENT

You trust me and look to me and value my opinion

Typically if the student is telling me this they likely

already trust me and recognize me as an ally.

I SAID HE WAS BRAVE AND THANKED HIM

FOR TRUSTING ME WITH THIS INFORMATION

My peers and I might become trusted adults in that time,

and at the very least, we would be put in positions where

societal norms and structures told students that we were

people who should be listened to.

If the student trusts me enough to come out to me,

that is amazing and I will support them

throughout their journey,

coming out to other teachers,

students and parents on their own terms

and in their own time frame.

I DID NOT WANT TO BREAK THE TRUST OF THE STUDENT

“Hey, can we talk?”

In one of my classes, a student (I will use the pseudonym Ashley) reached out to let me know that she was transitioning and that she might need extra support within the class.

I already make it a practice to have students identify their preferred pronouns when we first meet each other, but I was not sure what kind of support she might need.

IN MY SECOND YEAR OF TEACHING, ONE OF MY STUDENTS APPROACHED ME AND
SHARED THAT HE IS GAY.

MY RESPONSE WAS POSITIVE IN THAT

I SAID HE WAS BRAVE

AND THANKED HIM FOR TRUSTING ME WITH THIS INFORMATION.

I INQUIRED IF HE HAD ANYONE CLOSE TO HIM THAT WOULD SUPPORT HIM.

HE SAID THAT HE HAD A STRONG GROUP OF FRIENDS,

BUT HE WAS AFRAID TO TELL HIS PARENTS

BECAUSE OF THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

I was called in to give a workshop to a bunch of students who ranged in age from seven to twelve.

I prepared a character-creation workshop, where students would explore different characters in a variety of different ways;

some chose to move around the room like their character would,

some wrote detailed backstories,
and some of them drew pictures.

Two of the youngest girls worked together to design a character who had long flowing hair, an elegant dress, and a huge beard.

“This is the King of Space,” they explained,
smiling and holding up the picture to me,
“She’s a cross-between.”

I volunteered to help with the Gay-Straight Alliance at my practicum school, and got to know some of the students who were showing up.

The other teacher put in charge of running the student group was cis het like myself, so we figured the best we could do was promote the group and ensure that it was a true safe space in the building for all students.

The kids who would return were always looking to us as someone they could talk to.

On the second day of class, another student had joined who knew Ashley from before she began transitioning.

We did our introduction activity where they picked a partner and interviewed them, and introduced the partner back to the class.

They were asked to find out name, preferred pronoun,

and the story of their name.

When this new student introduced Ashley,

she used her former pronouns, and

I was not sure what to do.

Do I interrupt the class to correct this student?

Would that make Ashley more uncomfortable?

I OFFERED THAT IF HE EVER NEEDED TO CONFIDE IN AN ADULT,

MY DOOR WAS OPEN.

HOWEVER, THIS EXPERIENCE BECAME MORE COMPLICATED BY

THIS STUDENT'S WRITING PIECE ON THE FINAL ELA EXAM.

HIS WRITING PIECE WAS A FICTIONAL SHORT STORY, BUT IT SEEMED TO

HINT THAT HE WAS HAVING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS.

ONE OF THE POLICIES OF MY SCHOOL DIVISION

IS TO INFORM A SENIOR STAFF MEMBER

OR PARENT

IF A STUDENT DIVULGES THAT TYPE OF INFORMATION AS IT SERIOUSLY INFRINGES UPON THEIR SAFETY.

I WAS UNCERTAIN HOW TO PROCEED

AS THIS STUDENT HAD NOT TOLD HIS PARENTS ABOUT HIS SEXUALITY, AND

I DID NOT WANT TO BREAK THE TRUST OF THE STUDENT

OR AGGRAVATE HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PARENTS.

My first response was joy,
because obviously,
along with a bit of nostalgia, since this was a term I had used when I was their age.
My second response was remembering how, at most of the other schools I'd worked at,
the odds that somebody—teacher or student—would make a negative comment about a
gender non-conforming character were incredibly high.

Like many other schools in that end of the city, the Filipino students made up a
large majority, some having only lived in Canada for a few years.

Their parents spoke the mother tongue at home, their friends hung out and
communicated in Tagalog, and this trend continued in the schools.

Teachers in their classrooms would sometimes snap and scold students for not
speaking English, which I thought was overly harsh
and harkened back to Canada's dark history of education.

My cooperating teacher was old-school,
and had no qualms telling kids to speak English in her presence.

She was everything I didn't want to be.

I told myself that I would always welcome and celebrate the culture

of the students in my class, not silence it.

I elected not to interrupt,

but to make sure I referred to Ashley by her preferred pronouns multiple times in the following conversation.

At the end of class,

I pulled Ashley aside and apologized for not interrupting, and asked how she would like me to proceed in the future.

Ashley said it was fine,

and that because she had known this student for so long and the student was part of Ashley's home community, she did not mind that the old pronouns were used and preferred that I did not talk to the other student about it.

WHAT I RESOLVED TO DO WAS FIRST TALK TO THE STUDENT

ABOUT HIS EXAM WRITING PIECE

AND ASKED IF HE WOULD HARM HIMSELF.

HE ASSURED ME THAT HE WOULD NOT;

AT THE SAME TIME, I TOLD HIM THAT I LEGALLY NEEDED TO TAKE SOME KIND OF ACTION.

THROUGH OUR DISCUSSION, WE AGREED THAT TALKING TO THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR WOULD BE THE BEST OPTION FOR HIM.

Any concerns I had were unnecessary.

When the girls presented their character to the rest of the class, there was a response of

“That’s so cool!” from a number of students,

and “What pronoun should we use for them?” from others.

No negative comments whatsoever.

Shortly after this workshop ended I begged for a job at this school.

When I told her how I felt, I didn’t know what to expect.

But her response surprised me.

She was concerned about one of the other Filipino students in the class.

“He speaks Tagalog but he’s not one of them,” she said.

“The other kids pick on him, and they do it right in front of our faces.”

I hadn’t noticed that he was gay,

and that he was the most vulnerable student in the class.

I felt completely powerless, knowing that this had been going on the whole time and

I had almost no way of stopping it.

Yet somehow, she knew.

“Hey, can we talk?”

“For sure, what’s up?”

“So you know Mark?”

“Of course.”

“Well I don’t actually have a crush on him.”

“No?”

“No. I mean, I wanted it to seem that way, because, well, it was a ruse.”

“Oh man, okay. What kind of ruse?”

“A real gay one.”

“Great.”

“See, I actually like Allie.”

“Aw!”

“But I didn’t want her to know—not because it’s gay, obviously, but because, you know, crush.”

“Right.”

“So I started choosing seats so that I could gaze longingly at her, but it would just look like I was looking at him.”

“Smart. Why are you telling me this in front of the whole class, then?”

“Oh, well yesterday she asked me if I liked her and I couldn’t lie.”

Educators need to recognize that childhood and adolescence are critical periods of identity formation in which gender and sexuality are understood as fluid, and their related expressions may change frequently as children and youth develop and grow. Fluidity of gender identity should not be

perceived as a problem, nor should the evolving nature of gender expression. The problem or significant and pressing issue is the strict nature of gender roles and sex role stereotyping in society that imposes limits on a child's natural gender expression. Therefore, the more educators seek to break down sex role stereotypes and gender regulation behaviours, the more inclusive their classrooms will become

(Manitoba Education and Training, 2017, p. 26)

Braid Two - Uncertainty

I Wish I Knew

I wish I knew how best to proceed with all my students.

I WAS UNCERTAIN HOW TO PROCEED

I was not sure what kind of support she might need

I felt completely powerless

I would first let the student know that I support them

I would support their decision in the moment and would begin honouring their request immediately

Did I have confidence that my peers and I could do right by those students?

I included different family structures. I would include families with two mothers or two fathers, even transgender parents.

I remember feeling unsure about how I would have responded in the situation

I want to say, you're brave

(You're braver than I am)

You trust me and look to me and value my opinion

But what can I say? Should I tell you to go?

Should I suggest you hide your secret again, back where it can't be seen?

Should I tell you my duty to report and hope to god you understand?

To even consider telling your principal. Your superintendent. Your parents.

Can I live with seeing your tears on Monday? Provided you even return?

How can I fear for my job when your fear is for safety?

I want to say, I'm proud

Proud that you've learned your truth, and shared it

(I will say that, at least. I wish I knew what else to do.)

Back In University

I was sitting in class.

There were thirty-something of us there,

all studying to become teachers.

We hadn't been taught anything. Not really.

We were not given much training.

I felt like there should have been a particular course which showed

teachers how to support students

or help counsel students.

I DID NOT RECEIVE ANY TRAINING FROM MY UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COURSES

TO ASSIST ME WITH SUPPORTING LGBQ+ STUDENTS

We were told that bullying was bad,

and we patted each other on the back for saying we had intervened during bullying,

and we said we lucked out if the schools we were placed at

had zero-tolerance policies around bullying,

but growing up queer,

there's a lot more to think about than bullying.

I realized that I really am not totally sure how
to support LGBTQ+ students effectively in school.

I have not received any formal training during my education
to help me support LGBTQ+ students or any students with these topics.

As well, I did not have any opportunities for formal discussions
during class time about this topic.

There are joys,
and questions,
and irritations,
and rage at society,
and comfort.

It is important that all teachers
have a base understanding of how to have these discussions
with their class in a respectful way
so that the message is consistent
and the students
feel
safe.

Bullying sucks, for sure,
but having a teacher swan in and tell the person calling you a fag
not to use bad language
isn't exactly the type of support you want.

We took a required course called

“Mental Health Issues”

that very briefly talked about the DSM and

how mental disorders are defined and labeled.

The topic of homosexuality being listed as a disorder came up,

and we discussed this as a class.

Of course, no one in the class disagreed that

that classification was ridiculous.

I was involved in an Anti-Racist student group

called STARS

that focused on anti-racism and anti-oppression

which included professional development for student teachers

around becoming an ally for those who experience

systemic

and

blatant

oppression and discrimination.

While in teachers college

there was mention of student support,

but we were not given much training

This was a voluntary group and the professional development was optional for student teachers and teachers once they were in the field.

The more people who have conversations and create understandings about this topic the more inclusive schools and communities will become.

This is vital especially in schools, which are a place where all students should be able to feel safe and loved.

So if any among these peers hadn't been taught anything about queer rights, or challenges, or identity.

If any of them still possessed the understanding of sexuality that they developed in high school, formed after watching VHS tapes from the '80s and labelling old diagrams—possibly originally from some sort of workbook given out at a PD day—the original image long gone, and the fifteenth-generation photocopy blurry almost to the point of illegibility.

There was no formal training on supporting LGBTQ* students.

There wasn't much formal training on
anything, to be honest.

I was there at a time when one of the students was transitioning
and I helped facilitate understanding of this process
with the rest of the students.

I really did not receive any support that I can recall
for working with LGBTQ+ students.

I think we discussed how to set up a GSA,
but we did not talk about what to do
if there was push back from the administration
or from parents,
or anything of the sort.

If any preached tolerance and considered that good enough.

With two-year programs being implemented,
there should be a course for teacher candidates
on supporting students.

If any guys goaded their female friends to make out with one another
but flipped out if they accidentally touched another man's hand.

As I have worked mostly with younger students,
I have not come across a situation
when an LGBTQ+ student has appeared to need support.

I have not faced students having a difficult time
because they are LGBTQ+.

There was a situation when a student
at our elementary school was in the process
of transitioning.

I feel like there are many supports
set in place for students in schools,

I remember feeling unsure about how
I would have responded in the situation
if I were the students' primary teacher,

But I know that one day I will face a situation
where I do have to support a student.

but felt as though the student at the
public school had the support of the
staff and her parents.

If any considered "you throw like a girl" to be an insult.

The college of Education had a department
called Foundations which had amazing
leadership within it around the topics of
LGBTQ+ rights
as well as anti-racist
and anti-oppressive content.

In my classes about Language Arts, we explored some literature that touched on themes of family and what that might mean if you (students) have different family structures and how to be supportive and inclusive regardless of family structure and gender.

I think there is a lack of updated understanding of

Sexuality,

Sexual orientation

And gender expression in school systems today.

I think it is very important that this information be part of the core curriculum in all teacher education programs.

It would be important to create an environment in the class where these topics are discussed openly and often.

If I did not have the drive to find out this information myself, I don't know that I would be able to do this work effectively.

After all,

We don't know what we don't know.

I AM FREQUENTLY LOOKING FOR DIFFERENT WAYS TO SUPPORT LGBTQ+
IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM.

Could we give our students what they need?

Or would we screw up real bad?

“In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed the diagnosis of “homosexuality”
from the second edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)”

(Drescher, 2015, p. 565)

“In their struggles, our pre-service teachers referred to the lack of gender education and the need
for more awareness of trans and LGBTQ issues in school as problematic, as it limits the gender
expression of all youth and creates heteronormative, homophobic, and transphobic school
climates.”

(Kearns *et al.*, 2017, p. 20)

Braid Three - Empowerment

Ask

To show

That you genuinely care about the student's happiness and well-being,

It's important to follow up and ask a question.

It is the student's right

To choose when they want to come out to others.

I would do my best

To support the student to have support but also maintain their

Independence and integrity.

My main method

To address this was to have the student who was going through the

Transition to take the lead.

I would follow up

With the student to let them know that I support them.

It is not my place

To push a student into coming out to their parents.

If the student was not wanting me

To do that, I would respect that too.

We had many discussions

About how they wanted to address the topic

I would also let them know

That I respected their privacy.

When the student is ready

To begin telling others, whether other teachers, administrators or

Parents, they will do so themselves.

I asked

How she would like me to proceed.

I would ask.

I INQUIRED.

It's important

To follow up

And ask a question.

Support

I completed one of my teaching practicums at
an alternative outdoor experiential learning school.

Here the students choose to attend the school for a
variety of reasons but with the overarching reason that they
don't enjoy or succeed in the public system.

Some of the students were LGBTQ+ and had searched out this
school to find a sense of belonging,
safety and understanding
that they had not previously found in public school.

No one is allowed to tell you
who you are allowed to love
or who you should to be.

If a student opened up to me about being attracted to someone of the
same sex, I would first let the student know that I support them

This won't sound like much but I treat it the same as
if it was an opposite-gender crush.

I would ask where they met, how they started talking,
if they have any classes together,
when they plan to hang out.

**TEACHERS NEED TO BE POSITIVE ROLE MODELS
THAT DEMONSTRATE RESPECT
AND ACCEPTANCE
OF DIVERSITY
IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM.**

**I WOULD APPROACH THIS TEACHER AND ASK THAT THEY NOT USE THAT TYPE OF LANGUAGE AS IT IS
HATEFUL AND OFFENSIVE.**

If this happened in a class where I did not know the students,
for example as a TOC,

I would still have a discussion either with the
students involved in the conversation or with the class

and leave a message for the teacher that this topic should be followed up when they return.

IF THEIR RESPONSE IS DISMISSIVE AND LACKS ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR BEHAVIOR,

I FEEL I WOULD HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BRING THIS ISSUE TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION.

Students have the same rights as anyone to make their own choices and do things at their own pace

I would do my best to support the student to have support but also maintain their independence and integrity.

I would ask the student if I could let the principal know so that we could discuss the procedures to take with the staff and on the school level.

If the student was not wanting me to do that, I would respect that too.

I found that more so than facing difficulties and prejudice from other students, often textbooks or readings included certain stereotypes.

These stereotypes of what families should look like or how people should act/who they should love, etc put more pressure on the LGBTQ+ students.

I WOULD NOT STATE WHICH SPECIFIC STAFF MEMBER WAS UTTERING THE SLURS

AS PERHAPS THEY DO NOT HAVE ANY EDUCATION ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRANSGENDER.

I WOULD ASK ADMIN TO CONSIDER HOSTING A HALF/FULL DAY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

THAT FOCUSES ON AN INTRODUCTION TO TRANS IDENTITY AND ISSUES,
AND HOW STAFF SHOULD ADDRESS THESE IN SCHOOL.

A few students had had previous suicidal tendencies
and had dropped out of school.

Finding the time to connect with each student
to hear their story,
their struggles
and successes
was what allowed me to help foster a positive environment
for the students to find a sense of community,
belonging
and love.

The school had a great support system set in place for the students.

I would also let them know that I respected their privacy
and if they were wanting to talk about how the experience with other
students and staff was going in honouring their request, that
I would be open to talking to them about their present experiences.

IF AFTER THIS (ASSUMING ADMIN AGREES TO THE PD) THE SAME STAFF MEMBER IS STILL USING
TRANSPHOBIC SLURS, I WOULD REPORT THEM TO ADMIN/FOLLOW THE PROPER CHANNELS FOR FILING
A HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINT.

It is important to include more inclusive readings and texts,
to show students that
it is important to be themselves.

I have worked with students who have told me that their teachers and community were very supportive through incredibly isolating and dark times through their process of transitioning and it truly saved their lives.

I am always there for the student if they need anything.

We know from feminist poststructuralist research (Blaise, 2005; Davies, 2003) that traditional notions of binary, heterosexually organized patterns of gender exert vast influence within early childhood and elementary school settings.

(Ryan *et al.*, 2013, p. 86)

We acknowledge that preparing pre-service teachers to disrupt gender rigidity in schools is challenging...However, there is much to be shared from the experience of recognizing interlocking forms of oppression and explicitly creating a space to train and increase the awareness of pre-service teachers.

(Kearns *et al.*, 2017, p. 21)

Chapter 5: Discussion

Emergent Themes

While working with the submissions, I began placing short works—found poems, snippets of dialogue—with other short works that shared a similar idea or thread. In the first braid, for instance, the works “I did not want to break the trust of the student...” and “Hey, can we talk?” both deal with one-on-one interactions and trust, but they also share specific threads, such as the line “I did not want to break the trust of the student,” which is present in both. It is initially introduced at the start of Braid One, alluded to throughout the first piece, and then explored fully in “Hey, can we talk?” Through this process, I eventually ended up with three distinct braids, each of which were connected through several features, but which could be summarized under a broad theme. The first braid shares an overall theme of trust, the second braid explores uncertainty, and the third braid focuses on empowerment. I refer to these as emergent themes, as they were not planned out beforehand, but were identified after the pieces had been grouped according to a variety of criteria, including shared threads, language, and concepts. It was the act of braiding these voices and experiences together while retelling the individual and collective narratives that facilitated a deeper analysis of the subject (Clandinin *et al.*, 2007).

That these ideas of trust, uncertainty, and empowerment would emerge when discussing LGBTQ+ students is not a groundbreaking revelation. Taylor *et al.* (2015) identified similar concepts after surveying a number of Canadian teachers, and a number of studies have explored how these individual concepts affect LGBTQ+ youth (Almeida, 2009; Bryan & Mayock, 2016; Heck *et al.*, 2011). What is valuable in this study is

exploring how individual teachers engaged with students around these topics. Due to the gaps in teacher education programs demonstrated by Taylor *et al.* (2015), it is clear that programs need to address these broad themes. The métissage in Chapter Four explores participants' experiences within these gaps, and reveals the needs that were alive for them during those experiences (Tay & Diener, 2011). The narratives in Braid One identify a number of needs associated with the theme of trust. Using Tay and Diener's categories, these include needs for safety and security, and needs for social support and love. The narratives in Braid Two explore needs associated with uncertainty, including needs for mastery, needs for perceived respect and pride, and needs for safety and security. The narratives in Braid Three feature needs associated with empowerment, including needs for self-direction and autonomy, needs for mastery, needs for social support and love, and needs for perceived respect and pride. Note that some of these categories of needs are associated with more than one theme, and that each of Tay and Diener's categories contain many more needs; for example, a need for celebration and a need for recognition would both fall under Tay and Diener's category of a need for perceived respect and pride (2011). Since I have defined support as recognizing and addressing the needs of an individual, looking at the ways in which participants attended to unmet needs reveals how support was offered in these situations.

In addition to identifying needs, the métissage provides specific examples of navigating situations that participants did not feel they had been adequately prepared by their teacher education programs to handle. Through these explorations, this research suggests additions that could be made to teacher education programs in order to address gaps relating to LGBTQ+ issues.

Trust

The first theme that emerged while working with the narratives was trust. Trust featured heavily in a number of the participant's narratives, and the first piece in *Braid One* introduces a number of threads that discuss this theme. These threads are closely woven together at the start, and while some are explored in depth soon after, others are not explored fully until later on. This opening piece highlights the importance of trust in the participants' narratives, and establishes the way in which the *métissage* works, with narratives being hinted at—and their affinities with other narratives being highlighted—before their full context is revealed.

The participants' narratives explored trust in a number of ways, including times when trust was assumed and when trust was required. These narratives featured a number of needs associated with trust, including needs for safety and security, and needs for social support and love (Tay & Diener, 2011). Some participants also discussed situations where their ideas about trust appeared to be challenged. For example, one of Maria Fitzpatrick's threads explores a scenario where she was entrusted with information about a student's sexuality, and then made an observation that suggested the student was having suicidal thoughts. Maria explicitly states that she did not want to break the trust of the student—recognizing that the student trusted her—but that her school's policies, as well as concern for the student's well-being, raised the question of whether or not she should break that trust. In this situation, Maria chose to engage the student in a discussion and openly state her legal obligations, but not out the student to his parents. In this situation, the student appeared to have a need for safety, as well as a need for support and love. Maria, meanwhile, had a need to maintain her professional integrity, as well as a need to

provide safety and support to her student.

The strategy of openly engaging a student in discussion is also explored by Dany, who, like Maria, was entrusted with personal information before encountering a situation where she was unsure how to proceed. Dany resolved this issue through clear and direct communication, but her story also features several other examples of trust, including the trust between the students tasked with introducing one another, Dany's trust in her students to engage in the introductory activities, and the established trust between Ashley and the other student, given how long they had known one another. In this same section, Dany mentions that she habitually has students identify their preferred pronoun when she first meets them and when they introduce themselves to one another. This strategy not only affords individuals the opportunity to identify themselves (Sumara & Davis, 2013), it also challenges the idea that a person's preferred pronoun should be self-evident based on how that person looks or sounds. This action sends a message to the students that the teacher recognizes and wants to honour students' diverse experiences with gender, which could make a student feel more comfortable approaching that teacher to discuss LGBTQ+ issues. In this way, this one action is able to meet needs associated with trust, as well as those associated with uncertainty, and empowerment.

Another strategy is explored by John Smith, who recounts a story about perceiving his cooperating teacher as "old-school," for insisting that her students only speak English, and being reminded of "Canada's dark history of education." John's story ends with the reveal that the teacher had been concerned about the students picking on a gay student in Tagalog in front of the teachers. John's story explores trust between a teacher and her students, and the strategy she used to support a gay student when she did not trust the

other students not to pick on him. It also explores the trust between teachers, and the assumptions that John made about his cooperating teacher's motivations, while highlighting both teachers' needs for integrity and to provide security to their students. This story also highlights the importance of intersectionality in education, as there were a number of different social dynamics informing this experience, including John being a younger male student to his older female cooperating teacher, and a straight white teacher to his gay Filipino student, in a school system with a history of racial injustice.

The different ways that trust features in these narratives highlights the complex nature of navigating teacher/student dynamics regarding LGBTQ+ issues. Trust is important to establish, but maintaining it can be complicated by institutional policies, ethical concerns, and safety concerns, such as in Maria's story, unknown factors, like a student's social dynamics with others and a lack of opportunities to seek clarity, as in Dany's story, and systemic issues, such as the language barriers, concerns about Canada's history of oppression, and the intersection of racial and homophobic oppression that feature in John Smith's story. Through these narratives, the participants recounted strategies that they used to establish and maintain trust despite these challenges, while meeting both their own needs and the needs of their students.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty was another common theme in the participants' narratives, and while threads of uncertainty are woven throughout the whole *métissage*, the collective pieces in *Braid Two* share this theme as their dominant focus. Many of these pieces feature statements about one's own uncertainty, as well as explicit statements about what teacher education programs need to do to better address LGBTQ+ issues. Notably, this braid also

features narratives that touch on certainty and decisions made with confidence. I have referred to this theme as uncertainty due to the number of stories that explored it from that perspective, but the positive perspective illustrates the broad range of experiences of the participants. Moreover, both stories about uncertainty and certainty address the same need for clarity and understanding (Tay & Diener, 2011).

One of the writing prompts asked the participants to write about any training they had received that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. While some participants mentioned LGBTQ+ issues being discussed in their courses, most of the participants stated that they had not received any formal training about LGBTQ+ issues or strategies for supporting LGBTQ+ students. The piece “Back in University” largely explores participants’ experiences with their formal education, as well as what they believe teachers should know about LGBTQ+ issues. Uncertainty manifests in a number of ways in these narratives, including needs for clarity, needs for confidence, and needs for support. For example, during “Back in University,” John Smith states that “there was no formal training on supporting LGBTQ+ students. There wasn’t much formal training on anything, to be honest.” This statement raises a number of questions about what was being taught in his teacher education classes, and emphasizes the fact that, if anything was being taught, its usefulness or importance was not effectively communicated. A similar idea features in M.B.’s statement “while in teachers’ college there was mention of student support, but we were not given much training.” In this statement, a possibly well-intentioned act (mentioning support) is not received as helpful, as there was not sufficient instruction around it to make it useful.

Uncertainty also features in participants’ stories about their own interactions with

students. The piece “I Wish I Knew” features a collection of statements exploring participants’ emotions at times of uncertainty, and the actions that they took in those situations. It concludes with a poem by Dany, that explores her feelings of uncertainty, including uncertainty as to what she should do, uncertainty about what might happen as a result of that decision, and certainty about one thing that she will do.

The second braid of the métissage highlights the need for a revised approach to teaching LGBTQ+ issues in teacher education programs, and explores situations where participants reported experienced varying degrees of certainties in their decision-making. The feelings and actions described by the participants in these uncertain situations can inform preservice teachers about situations that might arise and the results of actions taken in these situations. These narratives can also send the message that, for a number of reasons, including formal training, social pressures, and school policies, feelings of uncertainty around LGBTQ+ issues are a common experience for teachers. Acknowledging this as a shared experience can encourage teachers to discuss this openly and seek support from their peers.

Empowerment

The third braid of the métissage highlights the importance of student empowerment, and explores a number of strategies for how teachers can empower their students, including during one-on-one interactions and while establishing a classroom environment. Many participants discussed experiences where they had—or would have—fostered a student’s right to self-identify and to make decisions about their own life. This was evident through explicit statements like “it is the student’s right to choose when they want to come out to others,” and “When the student is ready to begin telling others...they

will do so themselves,” both of which were written by M.B., as well as in Nikita’s statement that “I would do my best to support the student to have support but also maintain their independence and integrity.” The piece entitled “Ask” explores the importance of asking questions and encouraging students to take the lead in matters of their own identity.

In addition to actively empowering students through dialogue and facilitating their needs for autonomy, participants also discussed creating a classroom environment that allowed them to support LGBTQ+ students. This included stories about confronting staff members, scheduling professional development days, challenging heteronormative and cisnormative norms through routines, and having conversations with groups of students. M.B. describes the importance of “including inclusive readings and texts, to show students that it is important to be themselves,” and mentions including LGBTQ+ families in examples given to the class. These actions challenge heteronormativity and cisnormativity, and send a message to students that their identities are valid and recognized.

The piece “Support” also includes a number of statements highlighting the positive impact a supportive teacher can have, including Carly’s statement about “students who have told me that their teachers and community were very supportive through incredibly isolating and dark times through their process of transitioning and it truly saved their lives.” This statement emphasizes how students’ needs for safety and security can be tied to their needs for community.

While discussing the themes of trust, uncertainty, and empowerment, I have pulled specific examples from the text to make particular points. However, the quotes discussed

in this section do not represent the full range of strategies or emotions discussed by the participants, nor are the quotations only significant in the manner that I have discussed them in this section. The intersection of the threads themselves should be viewed as a “collective expression of larger conversations,” (Donald, 2012, p. 535), where significance comes not only from the individual narratives, but the connections between them. More examples of the range of strategies and each thread’s significance are explored throughout the *métissage*.

Theoretical Frameworks and the *Métissage*

In Chapter One I stated that this research was informed by the theoretical frameworks of inclusive education, queer theory, intersectionality, and narrative inquiry. These approaches affected both the structure of my research and how I engaged with the participants’ writing.

Both inclusive education and queer theory involve analyzing and deconstructing existing power structures, and together, these informed the primary goal and strategies used in this research. The overarching goal of this research was to empower teachers to create more inclusive classrooms, and one of the primary strategies used to accomplish this was the act of queering—challenging established norms around sex and gender. The *métissage* explored teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and experiences around these norms, as well as the strategies they used to challenge them. However, constructing the *métissage* itself was also an act of queering. While working with the participants’ narratives, I wove stories and statements together in order to highlight certain norms, explore certain aspects of identity, and emphasize certain moments of subjectivity. By participating in this research—giving voice to queer identities and exploring challenges within a

heteronormative and cisnormative school environment—the participants and I engaged in an act of queering.

From the beginning, intersectionality was an important aspect of this research. Critically, this included the idea that one cannot effectively support a person without an intersectional understanding of how they exist in society. Intersectionality is essential to effective support, and in order to facilitate this, I chose a research methodology that encouraged self-authorship and allowed space for moments of intersection to be highlighted and explored. I used narrative inquiry in this research as a way to honour the importance of intersectionality and develop a more complete understanding of the participants' lived experiences. I used *métissage* for this same reason, as the process and product of *métissage* facilitate a complex and fluid understanding of a person's identity—one that acknowledges and attends to its interactions with different aspects of society.

Application

Given the size of this study, it is important to remember that the results of this research are not necessarily representative of any larger population of teachers, nor is it intended to serve as an illustration of what the teaching climate is like across Canada. Rather, this research provides a snapshot of some of the beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of a small group of Canadian teachers. The purpose of this research was to explore these topics, in order to identify specific issues that could be addressed in teacher education courses so that new teachers could be better prepared to support their LGBTQ+ students. Previous research has brought to light the fact that gaps exist in teacher education programs regarding LGBTQ+ issues (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). The fact that many of the teachers in my study reported receiving insufficient training about supporting

LGBTQ+ students from their teacher education program emphasizes the idea that an improvement to training programs would be beneficial both to preservice teachers and their future students.

This research can be used in a number of ways, including as a resource to identify topics for teacher education programs to cover, as a resource for teachers to learn about the experiences of their peers, and as a model of a way to reflect on one's own experiences.

The métissage in Chapter Four represents an analysis of the attitudes and experiences of a number of teachers. One way to use this analysis would be as a series of stories and strategies that deal with a particular topic, such as trust, uncertainty, or empowerment. In a teacher education classroom, one would first need to make space for discussions of LGBTQ+ issues, and then use the narratives from the métissage to inform decisions about what content would be discussed. Alongside general information about LGBTQ+ identities, one could focus on specific needs held by students and teachers and specific strategies used for meeting these needs. Throughout the métissage, common needs of students included needs for security, needs for celebration, needs for autonomy, needs for pride, and needs for social support and love. Common needs for teachers included needs for professional integrity, needs for confidence, needs for support and resources, and needs for the security of their students. The narratives reveal different ways that the participants navigated meeting these needs, which included a number of different one-on-one strategies with students, and different ways of challenging and queering established norms in their classrooms.

In addition to identifying specific areas to cover in teacher education programs, the

results of this research could be used as a resource in those programs. One could use these narratives to guide discussions about strategies. For example, when the importance of establishing and maintaining trust was discussed, a class could explore the strategies and experiences from Braid One, and discuss how they might respond in similar situations. Using the *métissage* as a resource in this way could also promote a sense of camaraderie between teachers, as it highlights the shared experiences that teachers have, and is a piece of work written by teachers specifically to help support other teachers.

The *métissage* itself could also be used to model a particular approach to self-reflection. By actively engaging with the text—retelling the stories, adding their own stories—preservice teachers could gain a greater understanding of these experiences, and of their own feelings regarding this topic (Clandinin *et al.*, 2007). One way to explore this idea could be through the performance of Reader’s Theatre—a type of oral performance where the *métissage* would be read aloud, with different performers taking on the voices of the different participants (Clover & Sanford, 2016). This could be approached in a teacher education class with some of the preservice teachers taking on the performer role, and some acting as the audience. Both the performers and the audience would experience the spoken text in different ways, and by giving the performers the freedom to add their own voices and partake in a conversation with the audience afterwards, one could greatly increase the number of voices and points of intersection represented in the *métissage* (Salter, 2017). With preparation beforehand, preservice teachers could write their own responses to the prompts, and collectively create whole new poems to add to the analysis. In this sense, the experiences explored through this research could continue to be developed and analyzed by the people who engage with it. Were one to explore the data

in this way, it would be wise to take inspiration from and apply the conventions and styles of Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974/2001), which has been used worldwide to help communities actively engage with social change (Giesler, 2017).

If one wishes to properly support LGBTQ+ students, it is vital that one be able and willing to disrupt the established social norms around gender and sexuality that are inherent in many school environments. The data from this research could prove valuable in establishing a starting point for identifying, addressing, and disrupting these norms. It does this through content, by drawing attention to the needs of students and teachers and their experiences with certain norms, as well as through discourse and process. Instead of looking at LGBTQ+ students as being defined by a single aspect of their identity, the *métissage* illustrates the complexity and fluidity of identity. It mimics the lived experience of many LGBTQ+ students by having a number of opinions, attitudes, and feelings, some of which support or compliment one another, and some of which stand in contradiction to one another, all woven together.

The act of taking part in this research might have been beneficial to the participants as an opportunity to reflect on aspects of their own teaching practice and experience, and to share their experiences in a safe, anonymous fashion. Furthermore, it is possible that teachers who read this will, in turn, reflect on their own practices in the same way. After the participants were emailed the *métissage*, a few responded with comments on the work itself, and one of them shared her thoughts about the process. Dany wrote "some of the questions posed to me through the narrative reflection were things that had not occurred to me to question. Despite identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community, I have experienced a lot of privilege within education as most of my relationships have

been heteronormative and I had not critically examined how that shaped me as an educator. Having the time to sit back and think and reflect about the choices I've made inside the classroom and how I could do them better has changed the way I discuss or approach education, not just for identifiably LGBTQ+ students in my classroom but for everyone. Those who might be "invisible" queers like myself or those who are cis/hetero/binary folks.” By encouraging teachers of all experience levels to engage with this *métissage*, one could facilitate similar self-reflection to that described by Dany (Stone-Mediatore, 2003).

Because of these potential applications, I would recommend that this research be used to develop curricula for teacher education programs. The fact that only 4-7% of Canadian teachers felt that their teacher education program left them very well prepared to discuss diverse genders and sexualities (Taylor *et al.*, 2015) highlights the need for improvement in these programs, and the data collected through this research suggest possible ways to begin to address that. In addition to the content and results of this research, the process itself would be worthwhile to replicate in teacher education programs, both as a work of self-reflection, and as a collaborative way to brainstorm ideas for student support.

Future Research

While continued volunteer work with a large sample might provide examples of a wider range of experiences, it would be beneficial to take a different approach going forward with this research. For example, by surveying a variety of teacher education programs from across the country, one could gain specific information about if and how LGBTQ+ content is supposed to be addressed in individual programs.

It might also be useful to interview LGBTQ+ students directly, as this would provide firsthand information about individual needs and experiences with school infrastructure, administration, teachers, and peers. While considerable research has been done on the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, especially in the past decade (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2015), it would be beneficial to approach students specifically to discuss teacher support. By sharing the results of this research with LGBTQ+ students and seeking their input, one could gain a valuable perspective on how widely applicable this research is, and how best to apply it in schools.

I have mentioned already that the process of *métissage* could be used as a valuable tool for self-reflection and self-representation. One could use this research—where I have outlined the creative process and included both the original submissions and the finished *métissage*—to teach university instructors how to engage with narrative data in this way. The instructor could then go through this process with their preservice teachers, in turn teaching them how to use *métissage* with their K-12 students to facilitate self-reflection and expression.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of recently graduated teachers about supporting LGBTQ+ students. I used approaches derived from inclusive education, queer theory, intersectionality, and narrative inquiry to explore this topic. By doing so, I hoped to provide a resource that would help improve teacher education programs, and also educate and empower teachers to reflect on their own teaching styles and make changes in their classrooms to better support LGBTQ+ and all students. Meeting the needs of students while disrupting and

rethinking established norms can be a daunting task, but doing so is essential to building authentically inclusive classrooms (Dei, 2014). Judith Butler states that “It is a collective struggle to rethink a dominant norm” (Butler *et al.* 1994, p. 35), and this research can provide ideas about how to move forward in dismantling those norms that adversely affect LGBTQ+ youth during their school years.

The skills that appear to be most important when offering this support are those for critical analysis and empathy. Critical analysis allows one to observe and deconstruct the social norms and hidden curricula in school environments, and empathy is required to connect with an individual student and address their needs. Art is an effective way to invite an emotional response from an audience, and art like this—poems written in the voices of real people, that can be spoken aloud to or with an audience—can foster empathy. By actively listening and allowing oneself to be moved, by speaking in someone else’s voice, and by telling and retelling someone else’s experiences, a person can form an emotional connection to a work of art and the artist behind it. When that connection exists, even a person who might have been resistant to an idea can come to empathize with an individual. All of the participants in this research stated that they were positively disposed towards LGBTQ+ issues, but many teachers working with LGBTQ+ students are not. In these cases, the aesthetics of this *métissage*, which encourage audience engagement, emotional awareness, and empathy for an individual speaker, might be able to move a reader or audience member away from thinking about LGBTQ+ content solely as a political idea and towards focusing on and empathizing with the individual students that it affects.

Conducting this research met two important needs for me. First, it allowed for considerable self-reflection, as I was constantly questioning and thinking about my own experiences, beliefs, and ways of thinking. Second, it met a need to be useful for my students. I was driven to do this research in order to make life easier for my students and other students like them, and it was the feeling of doing something to help them that kept me motivated throughout this project.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Human identity is a complicated, nuanced thing which is not easily defined. As such, the following terminology should not be considered to define or encompass all of a person's identity, but to provide common interpretations for phrases that will be used in this study. It is important to note that people who identify with a certain term may not share the explanation I have given here.

Adapted from Taylor *et al.* (2015) and lgbtqhealth.ca.

Asexual - A person who generally does not feel sexual attraction towards others.

Bisexual - A person who primarily experiences attraction towards two genders. Often these are their own and another gender.

Cisgender - A person whose gender identity matches traditional assumptions and expectations about the gender they were assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity - A societal bias that favours and normalizes cisgender individuals, under-represents trans identities and gender diversity, and assumes cisgender as a default.

Coming out - The process of acknowledging one's sexual orientation or gender identity to other people.

Demisexual - A person who primarily experiences sexual attraction only with someone with whom they share an emotional bond.

Gay - A person who is primarily attracted to members of their own gender. Often used to refer specifically to attraction between two men.

Gender - A social system that classifies people, sometimes based on their biological sex. In some contexts this exists as a binary (e.g. woman/man), and in other contexts represents a broader spectrum.

Gender diverse - Umbrella term used to refer to anybody whose gender identity exists outside of a cisnormative male/female binary.

Gender dysphoria - A person's discomfort or distress associated with a discrepancy between their biological sex and their gender.

Gender euphoria - A person's feelings of elation and joy associated with their gender identity.

Genderfluid - The idea that gender is fluid and can change, or a person who does not identify with a fixed gender.

Gender Identity - A person's individual experience of gender.

Genderqueer - A term used to refer to somebody whose gender identity challenges established and rigid ideas about gender in a given societal context.

Heteronormativity - A societal bias that favours and normalizes heterosexual relationships, under-represents non-heterosexual identities, and assumes heterosexuality as a default.

Heterosexual - A person who is primarily attracted to people with a gender identity that is not their own. Traditionally assumes a woman/man gender binary, with a heterosexual woman being one who is attracted to men, and vice-versa.

Homosexual - A person who is primarily attracted to people with the same gender identity as them. Often considered more of a clinical term associated with pathologizing of sexual orientation.

Homonegative - A negative attitude towards same-sex attraction and people who experience same-sex attraction. Distinct from homophobia in that it is more focused on the attitude than an emotional response to it. For example, describing something as "so

gay” would be homonegative language.

Homophobia - Prejudice and discrimination based on the assumption that heterosexuality (and people in heterosexual relationships) are more favourable.

Intersectionality - The way in which the various aspects of a person’s identity and social positioning (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) intersect and interact within society, particularly as it pertains to discrimination and oppression.

Intersex - Somebody whose chromosomes or sexual anatomy do not correspond with traditional definitions of “female” or “male.”

Lesbian - A woman who is primarily attracted to other women

LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, +. An acronym that will be used throughout this research to refer to the wide range of individuals who do not identify as both heterosexual and cisgender. The + acknowledges the range of identities not covered by the first five terms. Quotations from other sources that use smaller or less-inclusive versions of this acronym, such as LGB, will be left as they were written in the original source.

Pansexual - A person who experiences attraction towards others regardless of their gender.

Queer - Umbrella term often used by LGBTQ+ people to refer to the wide range of diverse sexualities and gender expressions. Also used as a verb to describe the process of reevaluating and reinterpreting the foundations of a concept through a lens that includes ideas about gender and sexuality.

Questioning - Sometimes used to refer to the process of questioning and exploring one’s sexuality and gender.

Sex - Determined based on biological characteristics such as internal and external organs, hormones, and chromosomes.

Sexual fluidity - The idea that sexual orientation is fluid and can change.

Sexual orientation - The type of sexual, romantic, or physical attraction felt between and towards people.

Transgender - A person whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth.

Transnegative - A negative attitude towards transgender people. Distinct from transphobia in that it is primarily focused on the attitude rather than the emotional response.

Transphobia - Fear, contempt, or hatred of a transgression of traditional gender norms.

Transsexual - A person whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth, and who might or might not undergo medical treatments to make their biological sex match their gender identity.

Two-Spirited - A person who has both a feminine and masculine spirit. Sometimes used as an umbrella term to refer to the myriad words in different indigenous languages to refer to a wide range of diverse sexualities and gender identities. A translation of the Anishinaabemowin term “niizh manidoowag” (lgbtqhealth.ca).

Appendix B: Full Transcript of the Participants' Responses

Note: Some small details have been changed to hide names of people and places.

Dany

Part A

1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?

2013

2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

It was Ontario, so it was Junior/Intermediate (Grade 4 to 10)

3. What is your interest in this topic?

I am a bi cis woman, and when I was approached to contribute to this research, I realized that I really am not totally sure how to support LGBTQ+ students effectively in school. I certainly did not see support beyond having a Gay Straight Alliance at my high school, and I did not learn anything within my teacher education program to bridge that gap. My experience is unique as I could pass as straight, and because being a bi woman is more socially acceptable than being a bi man, so I did not necessarily seek out extra supports within my high school education. I have tried to bridge this gap by reading and doing my own research, but I think it is very important that this information be part of the core curriculum in all teacher education programs. If I did not have the drive to find out this information myself, I don't know that I would be able to do this work effectively. After all, we don't know what we don't know.

Part B

1. Write about any experience you have had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you

were unsure how to respond.

I teach at a university. In one of my classes, a student (I will use the pseudonym Ashley) reached out to let me know that she was transitioning and that she might need extra support within the class. I already make it a practice to have students identify their preferred pronouns when we first meet each other, but I was not sure what kind of support she might need. On the second day of class, another student had joined who knew Ashley from before she began transitioning. We did our introduction activity where they picked a partner and interviewed them, and introduced the partner back to the class. They were asked to find out name, preferred pronoun, and the story of their name. When this new student introduced Ashley, she used her former pronouns, and I was not sure what to do. Do I interrupt the class to correct this student? Would that make Ashley more uncomfortable? I elected not to interrupt, but to make sure I referred to Ashley by her preferred pronouns multiple times in the following conversation. At the end of class, I pulled Ashley aside and apologized for not interrupting, and asked how she would like me to proceed in the future. Ashley said it was fine, and that because she had known this student for so long and the student was part of Ashley's home community, she did not mind that the old pronouns were used and preferred that I did not talk to the other student about it. I am glad that my instincts worked for that instance, but I do not know whether they will always work and I wish I knew how best to proceed with all my students.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this.

As I stated earlier, I really did not receive any support that I can recall for working with LGBTQ+ students. I think we discussed how to set up a GSA, but we did not talk about

what to do if there was push back from the administration or from parents, or anything of the sort.

3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond.

g. A student came out (as being attracted to people of their same gender) to you during a one-on-one conversation, in a school where teachers are required by school policy to report to a student's parents if that student makes comments or asks questions about homosexuality.

I want to say, you're brave

(You're braver than I am)

You trust me and look to me and value my opinion

But what can I say? Should I tell you to go?

Should I suggest you hide your secret again, back where it can't be seen?

Should I tell you my duty to report and hope to god you understand?

To even consider telling your principal. Your superintendent. Your parents.

Can I live with seeing your tears on Monday? Provided you even return?

How can I fear for my job when your fear is for safety?

I want to say, I'm proud

Proud that you've learned your truth, and shared it

(I will say that, at least. I wish I knew what else to do.)

Maria Fitzpatrick**Part A****1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?**

I completed my Bachelor of Education degree in 2012.

2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

I specialized in the secondary years education stream.

3. What is your interest in this topic?

I am interested in this topic as I am frequently looking for different ways to support LGBTQ+ in and out of the classroom.

Part B**1. Write about any experience you have had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you were unsure how to respond.**

In my second year of teaching, one of my students approached me and shared that he is gay. My response was positive in that I said he was brave and thanked him for trusting me with this information. I inquired if he had anyone close to him that would support him. He said that he had a strong group of friends, but he was afraid to tell his parents because of their religious beliefs. I offered that if he ever needed to confide in an adult, my door was open.

However, this experience became more complicated by this student's writing piece on the final ELA exam. His writing piece was a fictional short story, but it seemed to hint that he was having suicidal thoughts. One of the policies of my school division is to inform a senior staff member or parent if a student divulges that type of information as it seriously

infringes upon their safety. I was uncertain how to proceed as this student had not told his parents about his sexuality, and I did not want to break the trust of the student or aggravate his relationship with his parents. What I resolved to do was first talk to the student about his exam writing piece and asked if he would harm himself. He assured me that he would not; at the same time, I told him that I legally needed to take some kind of action. Through our discussion, we agreed that talking to the school counsellor would be the best option for him.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this.

I did not receive any training from my university education courses to assist me with supporting LGBTQ+ students.

3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond.

c. You overheard another teacher using transphobic slurs in the staff room.

Teachers need to be positive role models that demonstrate respect and acceptance of diversity in and out of the classroom. I would approach this teacher and ask that they not use that type of language as it is hateful and offensive. If their response is dismissive and lacks acknowledgment of their behavior, I feel I would have the responsibility to bring this issue to school administration. Initially, I would not state which specific staff member was uttering the slurs as perhaps they do not have any education about what it means to be transgender. I would ask admin to consider hosting a half/full day of professional development that focuses on an introduction to trans identity and issues, and how staff should address these in school. If after this (assuming admin agrees to the PD) the same staff member is still using transphobic slurs, I would report them to

admin/follow the proper channels for filing a human rights complaint.

John Smith

Part A

1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?

Winter 2017.

2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

Secondary Stream.

3. What is your interest in this topic?

Sex education is interesting to me and I think there is a lack of updated understanding of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender expression in school systems today.

Part B

1. Write about any experience you have had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you were unsure how to respond.

I volunteered to help with the Gay-Straight Alliance at my practicum school, and got to know some of the students who were showing up. The other teacher put in charge of running the student group was cis het like myself, so we figured the best we could do was promote the group and ensure that it was a true safe space in the building for all students. For the most part, that's just what we did: the occasional newcomer would drop in to hang out, but the kids who would return were always looking to us as someone they could talk to.

Like many other schools in that end of the city, the Filipino students made up a large

majority, some having only lived in Canada for a few years. Their parents spoke the mother tongue at home, their friends hung out and communicated in Tagalog, and this trend continued in the schools. Teachers in their classrooms would sometimes snap and scold students for not speaking English, which I thought was overly harsh and harkened back to Canada's dark history of education. My cooperating teacher was old-school, and had no qualms telling kids to speak English in her presence. She was everything I didn't want to be. I told myself that I would always welcome and celebrate the culture of the students in my class, not silence it.

When I told her how I felt, I didn't know what to expect. But her response surprised me. She was concerned about one of the other Filipino students in the class. "He speaks Tagalog but he's not one of them," she said. "The other kids pick on him, and they do it right in front of our faces." I hadn't noticed that he was gay, and that he was the most vulnerable student in the class. I felt completely powerless, knowing that this had been going on the whole time and I had almost no way of stopping it.

Yet somehow, she knew.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this.

We took a required course called "Mental Health Issues" that very briefly talked about the DSM and how mental disorders are defined and labeled. The topic of homosexuality being listed as a disorder came up, and we discussed this as a class. Of course, no one in the class disagreed that that classification was ridiculous, so at least that affirmed that most of my class were accepting of LGBTQ* students.

We also talked about Manitoba's Bill C-16 many times, but there was no formal training

on supporting LGBTQ* students. There wasn't much formal training on anything, to be honest.

3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond.

I figured that in real life you don't get to choose which situation to respond to, so I randomly generated a number between 1-7. I got 1, so I choose situation A.

a: A student happily initiated a conversation with you about their same-gender crush.

I have been in this situation before. This won't sound like much but I treat it the same as if it was an opposite-gender crush. I would ask where they met, how they started talking, if they have any classes together, when they plan to hang out. Of course, it's important to use gender neutral language in situations like this, but typically if the student is telling me this they likely already trust me and recognize me as an ally.

Following up is especially important. When making small-talk with any student, it can help to build relationships by following up with a question about past conversations (e.g. "How did your hockey tournament go this weekend?", etc). In this situation, the student has confided something that is likely very personal. To show that you genuinely care about the student's happiness and well-being, it's important to follow up and ask a question (in a safe place if possible, if not try to avoid disclosing too much publicly) that not only signals that you're still someone they can talk to, but that you're willing to support them if things go bad.

Nikita

Part A

1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?

2014

2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

Elementary

3. What is your interest in this topic?

I am fairly interested in this topic.

Part B

1. Write about any experience you have had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you were unsure how to respond.

As I have worked mostly with younger students, I have not come across a situation when an LGBTQ+ student has appeared to need support. There was a situation when a student at our elementary school was in the process of transitioning (had transitioned the year before I was there), and staff let me know about the process informally as I worked with her younger brother. I remember feeling unsure about how I would have responded in the situation if I were the students' primary teacher, but felt as though the student at the public school had the support of the staff and her parents.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this.

I was involved in an Anti-Racist student group called STARS that focused on anti-racism and anti-oppression which included professional development for student teachers around becoming an ally for those who experience systemic and blatant oppression and discrimination. This was a voluntary group and the professional development was optional for student teachers and teachers once they were in the field.

I also took a few courses in my degree program that focused on anti-racism and anti-oppression. The college of Education had a department called Foundations which had amazing leadership within it around the topics of LGBTQ+ rights as well as anti-racist and anti-oppressive content. In my classes about Language Arts, we explored some literature that touched on themes of family and what that might mean if you (students) have different family structures and how to be supportive and inclusive regardless of family structure and gender.

3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond.

b. At the start of one of your classes, a student who used to use male pronouns requested that people address her with female pronouns.

Regardless if the student decided to announce it in front of the class or to speak to me privately and ask me to let other students know, I would support their decision in the moment and would begin honouring their request immediately. I would follow up with the student to let them know that I support them and would be considerate of their request to have female pronouns instead of male. I would also let them know that I respected their privacy and if they were wanting to talk about how the experience with other students and staff was going in honouring their request, that I would be open to talking to them about their present experiences. I would ask if their parents know about their request, and how that was being handled at home. In an elementary school context, I would probably also ask the student if they wanted to tell the other teachers themselves. Depending on how this conversation went I would do my best to support the student to have support but also maintain their independence and integrity. I believe I would ask the student if I could let the principal know so that we could discuss the procedures to take

with the staff and on the school level. If the student was not wanting me to do that, I would respect that too.

Carly

Part A

1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?

2014

2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

Secondary

3. What is your interest in this topic?

The more people who have conversations and create understandings about this topic the more inclusive schools and communities will become. This is vital especially in schools, which are a place where all students should be able to feel safe and loved. This is incredibly important to me and something I have been interested in for a long time. A greater understanding of this topic could and most likely will save people's lives! I have worked with students who have told me that their teachers and community were very supportive through incredibly isolating and dark times through their process of transiting and it truly saved their lives.

Part B

1. Write about any experience you have had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you were unsure how to respond.

I completed one of my teaching practicums at an alternative outdoor experiential

learning school. Here the students choose to attend the school for a variety of reasons but with the overarching reason that they don't enjoy or succeed in the public system. Some of the students were LGBTQ+ and had searched out this school to find a sense of belonging, safety and understanding that they had not previously found in public school. A few students had had previous suicidal tendencies and had dropped out of school. I had a unique opportunity to connect with the students both during the day and in the evening as it was an overnight school. Finding the time to connect with each student to hear their story, their struggles and successes was what allowed me to help foster a positive environment for the students to find a sense of community, belonging and love. I was there at a time when one of the students was transitioning and I helped facilitate understanding of this process with the rest of the students. My main method to address this was to have the student who was going through the transition to take the lead. We had many discussions about how they wanted to address the topics and how they would like to be addressed.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this.

I have not received any formal training during my education to help me support LGBTQ+ students or any students with these topics. As well, I did not have any opportunities for formal discussions during class time about this topic.

3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond.

d. A student used homonegative language (e.g. "That's gay!") in the classroom.

I chose this topic because it is very common. I have encountered this situation often in a variety of settings. Ideally if this happened with a group of students I worked with on a

regular basis this incident would follow with a continued discussion around acceptance, diversity and harmful language. It would be important to create an environment in the class where these topics are discussed openly and often. Talking about inclusive language and how using language in a negative manor can be extremely harmful. However if this happened in a class where I did not know the students, for example as a TOC, I would still have a discussion either with the students involved in the conversation or with the class and leave a message for the teacher that this topic should be followed up when they return. It is important that all teachers have a base understanding of how to have these discussions with their class in a respectful way so that the message is consistent and the students feel safe.

M.B.

Part A

1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?

2015

2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

Elementary

3. What is your interest in this topic?

English

Part B

1. Write about any experience you have had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you were unsure how to respond.

While working in my last position, as a teacher in a Northern high school, there was a big population of LGBTQ+ students. The school had a great support system set in place for the students and offered a weekly support group. My situation was not one particular situation, but in general, as a teacher, I had to be open and inclusive to all students during my lessons. While teaching there was many times when, instead of saying a stereotypical family, which has a mother, father, child or children, I included different family structures. I would include families with two mothers or two fathers, even transgender parents. I found that more so than facing difficulties and prejudice from other students, often textbooks or readings included certain stereotypes. These stereotypes of what families should look like or how people should act/who they should love, etc put more pressure on the LGBTQ+ students. With a changing society and changing family structure, it is important to include more inclusive readings and texts, to show students that it is important to be themselves.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this.

While in teachers college there was mention of student support, but we were not given much training. I felt like there should have been a particular course which showed teachers how to support students or help counsel students. To date, I have not faced students having a difficult time because they are LGBTQ+, I feel like there are many supports set in place for students in schools. But, I know that one day I will face a situation where I do have to support a student. With two-year programs being implemented, there should be a course for teacher candidates on supporting students.

3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond.

g. A student came out (as being attracted to people of their same gender) to you during a one-on-one conversation, in a school where teachers are required by school policy to report to a student's parents if that student makes comments or asks questions about homosexuality.

My frame of thought is this: no one is allowed to tell you who you are allowed to love or who you should be. If a student opened up to me about being attracted to someone of the same sex, I would first let the student know that I support them, that it is a big step to come out; I am always there for the student if they need anything. In regards to the school policy, it is not my place to push a student into coming out to their parents, if they have not to this point. I would tell the student the school policy and if they are comfortable, I will tell the administrators, if the student is not I will not. When the student is ready to begin telling others, whether other teachers, administrators or parents, they will do so themselves. It is the student's right to choose when they want to come out to others. I would therefore not tell administrators or parents that the student came out to me, especially if they have not yet come out to anyone else; it is not my place. Students have the same rights as anyone to make their own choices and do things at their own pace. If the student trusts me enough to come out to me, that is amazing and I will support them throughout their journey, coming out to other teachers, students and parents on their own terms and in their own time frame.

Howl Prenderghast/Colin Deane

Part A

1. What year did you complete your teacher education program?

2013

2. Were you in the secondary or elementary teacher education stream?

Middle/Secondary

3. What is your interest in this topic?

Extreme

Part B

1. Write about any experience you have had involving an LGBTQ+ student appearing to need support or a situation involving an LGBTQ+ student where you were unsure how to respond.

A few years ago, I was called in to give a workshop to a bunch of students who ranged in age from seven to twelve. This was at a school that I had heard good things about, but hadn't had a chance to meet the students before. I prepared a character-creation workshop, where students would explore different characters in a variety of different ways; some chose to move around the room like their character would, some wrote detailed backstories, and some of them drew pictures. Two of the youngest girls worked together to design a character who had long flowing hair, an elegant dress, and a huge beard. "This is the King of Space," they explained, smiling and holding up the picture to me, "She's a cross-between."

My first response was joy, because obviously, along with a bit of nostalgia, since this was a term I had used when I was their age.

My second response was remembering how, at most of the other schools I'd worked at, the odds that somebody—teacher or student—would make a negative comment about a gender non-conforming character were incredibly high.

Any concerns I had were unnecessary. When the girls presented their character to the rest of the class, there was a response of “That’s so cool!” from a number of students, and “What pronoun should we use for them?” from others. No negative comments whatsoever.

Shortly after this workshop ended I begged for a job at this school.

2. Write about any training you received from your courses that dealt with supporting LGBTQ+ students. If you did not receive any, state this.

I was sitting in class.

There were thirty-something of us there, all studying to become teachers.

In the classroom next to ours were another thirty-something, and supposedly the other cohort who had their classes at a different time had another thirty-something, although none of us had ever seen them, and we thought of them a bit like the Loch Ness Monster—they could exist, for sure, but we’d never seen any evidence of them—only heard whispers and rumours, and maybe seen a blurry photograph on Facebook.

That made for ninety-something future teachers coming out of this institution, and ninety-something teachers who would, in a few weeks, start their teaching practicum, where they would be running classes, getting to know students, and would be responsible for the well-being of those students.

So, when each of those ninety-something student teachers went off to their schools, they might influence the lives of thirty to sixty to ninety students. They might become a trusted adult in that time, and at the very least, they would be put in a position where societal norms and structures told students that they were people that should be listened to.

So ninety-something student teachers, each influencing anywhere from thirty to ninety students.

That's a lot of students.

Statistically speaking, some of them would be LGBTQ+.

The odds that every single one of those possibly eight thousand-something students would be cisgendered, heterosexual, not the least bit curious about their gender or sexuality, and would never do anything to have an impact on the lives of any LGBTQ+ individuals would be insane.

Did I have confidence that my peers and I could do right by those students?

We hadn't been taught anything. Not really.

We were told that bullying was bad, and we patted each other on the back for saying we had intervened during bullying, and we said we lucked out if the schools we were placed at had zero-tolerance policies around bullying, but growing up queer, there's a lot more to think about than bullying.

There are joys, and questions, and irritations, and rage at society, and comfort.

Bullying's lame, for sure, but having a teacher swan in and tell the person calling you a fag not to use bad language isn't exactly the type of support you want.

So if any among these peers hadn't been taught anything about queer rights, or challenges, or identity. If any of them still possessed the understanding of sexuality that they developed in high school, formed after watching VHS tapes from the '80s and labelling old diagrams—possibly originally from some sort of workbook given out at a PD day—the original image long gone, and the fifteenth-generation photocopy blurry almost to the point of illegibility. If any preached tolerance and considered that good

enough. If any goaded their female friends to make out with one another but flipped out if they accidentally touched another man's hand. If any considered "you throw like a girl" to be an insult.

Could they give their students what they need?

Or would we screw up real bad?

3. Choose one of the following situations and write about how you might respond

c. A student happily initiated a conversation with you about their same-gender crush

"Hey, can we talk?"

"For sure, what's up?"

"So you know Mark?"

"Of course."

"Well I don't actually have a crush on him."

"No?"

"No. I mean, I wanted it to seem that way, because, well, it was a ruse."

"Oh man, okay. What kind of ruse?"

"A real gay one."

"Great."

"See, I actually like Alison."

"Aw!"

"But I didn't want her to know—not because it's gay, obviously, but because, you know, crush."

"Right."

"So I started choosing seats so that I could gaze longingly at her, but it would just look

like I was looking at him.”

“Smart. Why are you telling me this in front of the whole class, then?”

“Oh, well yesterday she asked me if I liked her and I couldn’t lie.”