

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY EXPLORING
TEACHERS' QUEERING OF LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN UPPER
ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

By

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Abstract: This multiple case study interrogates the pedagogical practice of queering LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in 3rd-6th grade classrooms. Five teachers, representing both private and public schools, demonstrated their process of using LGBTQ-inclusive literature by participating in interviews, observations, and providing supporting documents. Three main assertions emerged through the case studies. 1) Teachers treated LGBTQ issues and/or issues related to gender and sexual equality as they would any other topics. They anticipated and prepared for parent and/or administrative reactions with resolve to persist in their desire to integrate LGBTQ topics into their teaching. 2) Intentionally queering the curriculum with LGBTQ-inclusive books and issues extends beyond the individual classroom and ties to school climate and culture. Specifically, successfully queering curriculum and teachers' pedagogy occurs when educators teach within schools aligned with their convictions. 3) The teaching of LGBTQ literature facilitates both a personalization and depersonalization spectrum needed to meet the needs of each student. Teachers craftily queered their pedagogy through literature to respond to needs they noticed within their students, classrooms, or society. Each participating teacher queered their curriculum and pedagogical practices in their own way. Their aim of "queering" their curriculum through the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature allowed their instruction to be anti-normative, countering heteronormative and queerphobic practices prevalent in our educational system, and encouraging all students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. As LGBTQ-identified characters continue to appear more often in children's literature this study offers many implications for practice as teachers incorporate these inclusive books into their curriculum.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Mainstream publishers, such as Scholastic, are beginning to produce a small number of books with gender-nonconforming, queer, and Trans* characters. These books appear mainly as picturebooks for young children, or for adolescent and young adults with much more overt sexual situations (Clark & Blackburn, 2015; Lester, 2014). However, the lack of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature published for upper-elementary students remains a concern for teachers seeking to disrupt notions of homophobia and heteronormativity in middle-grade classrooms (Clark & Blackburn, 2015; DePalma & Atkinson, 2008; Smolkin & Young, 2011). Until recently, acquisition of such books relied on small independent publishing houses for a niche market. Teachers rarely used them in school settings, and such books largely included picturebooks for small children discussing diverse family structures and issues of tolerance (Emfinger, 2007; Letts & Sears, 1999). With an increase of books involving LGBTQ-inclusive themes and characters emerging into mainstream literary markets geared for educational purposes, the need exists for a critical examination of how teachers could, or do, implement them into classrooms across the country. The seeming inability of teachers to confront issues of

gender and/or sexuality with upper-elementary students presents another factor that necessitates attention (Smolkin & Young, 2011). The recent increase in early-childhood books and young-adult books makes obvious the missing, age-appropriate resources for upper-elementary children to interrogate issues of gender and sexuality.

Furthermore, and possibly the most pressing issue at hand, without a sufficient understanding regarding gender and sexuality, and/or without the systemic and curricular support necessary, teachers may be hesitant to include LGBTQ issues into the curriculum (Swartz, 2003). In fact, it appears to be a rare occurrence for teachers to use LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in the classroom. One possible reason could surely be the limited amount of resources and books available. However, I assert that most classroom teachers hold significant amounts of freedom and power to choose texts for their students but perceive certain topics to be off limits (Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Ryan, Patraw, & Bednar, 2013). Factors must exist that support a limited number of teachers to courageously use literature that many deem objectionable while most teachers steer clear.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in the upper-elementary classroom. Some research has focused on the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature at the early-childhood level (pre-kindergarten through third grade) (Clark & Blackburn, 2009; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Flores, 2014). LGBTQ-themed early childhood picturebooks, though rare, have been published in English beginning in 1981 with the book *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* (originally in Danish as *Meete bor hos Morten og Erik*) which focused on representing same-sex parenting to young children (lgbthistoryuk.org). A relative explosion of young adult books dealing with gay, lesbian, and Trans* issues have been recently published to help counter homophobia and heterosexism among adolescents (Emfinger, 2007).

The apparent void of published LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature relevant and appropriate for upper-elementary students, referring here to third through sixth grades, lacks attention at all levels of publication, from authors and publishers, and most importantly from the use of such literature in the American educational system. Society views pre-adolescent children as unable to discuss issues of gender and sexuality (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007; Swartz, 2003). Compounded with the misguided belief that groups cannot discuss gender and sexuality without the explicit discussion of sex, gender non-conforming and/or queer students have experienced little support within the classroom due to the issue confounded as inappropriate (Schall & Kauffmann, 2003). Frank and overt investigations of gender roles and the way sexuality is culturally defined *are* appropriate (Swartz, 2003).

As evidenced by the 2010 U.S. census, LGBTQ family demographics and structures have changed significantly (O'Connell & Feliz, 2011). This shift in family demographics heightens the visibility of LGBTQ people and ultimately changes how we "think about school curriculum issues, sexuality, definitions of family, and attitudes towards these issues" (Wimberly, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, studies show that "many of the approximately 7 million LGBTQ families across the United States do not feel supported by their child's school" (Watson & Russell, 2015, p. 75). Teachers, administrators, and other schooling personnel can no longer ignore or sweep LGBTQ issues under the rug in our current educational environment.

All children deserve to see themselves represented in the books and stories they read (Bishop, 1994; Wolf, 2004). Much effort persists in the representation of various races within children's books with an emphasis on "culturally conscious" literature (Bishop, 1994; Wolf, 2004). However, books representing non-conforming genders and/or sexualities are largely absent, especially at the upper-elementary level (3rd-6th grades). This representation remains necessary for both the LGBTQ and/or gender non-conforming students as well as those identifying as heterosexual or adopt conventional gender norms. It is the aim of this study to

assist teachers in the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in the upper-elementary classroom by exploring the pedagogy and experiences of five teachers who have endeavored to use such literature in their classrooms. I seek to determine ways in which teachers, through using inclusive LGBTQ literature, queer literacy practices within upper-elementary classrooms and create space for tolerance and acceptance of all students, leading to a more tolerant, democratic, and just society.

In response to the problem presented above, I designed this study to answer the following grand tour question:

What are the teachers' queering practices emerging throughout the process of using LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with upper elementary students?

This overarching question is broken down with the following three sub-questions:

- Why do teachers choose to use LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in the upper elementary classroom?
- How do teachers use LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature? How do they describe their pedagogical practices with upper elementary students?
- How do teachers reflect on their pedagogical practices and accomplishments with the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature?

Using a multiple-case study methodology (Stake, 2006) with a constructionist perspective, I observed and interviewed five practicing classroom teachers (the cases) from across the Midwest United States using an LGBTQ-inclusive piece(s) of children's literature with upper-elementary students. The significance of this study is to extend the current research pertaining to the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with elementary children, specifically upper-elementary students in grades 3-6. Many effective pedagogical practices for the use of children's literature in general within an English Language Arts curriculum are already well established (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Taberski, 2011; Wolf, 2004). However, based on the data I collected, I assert that

some experiences and pedagogical practices differ from those established practices when using books containing LGBTQ themes or issues.

Subjectivity Statement and Assumptions

It is important to acknowledge my interest in this specific topic. As a gay male born in the early 1970's, I spent the first 35 years of my life trying to hide my sexuality. Growing up in a conservative Christian environment ensured a very sheltered life from diverse family structures and minoritized sexual identities, both at home and at school. LGBTQ-related issues were rarely discussed in my family and church, and then only in a hushed and negative manner. Never were LGBTQ issues discussed openly at school by adults. Throughout my studies, it has become clear to me that openly discussing issues of gender and sexuality are important practices with our children.

Elementary School Teacher and Reading Specialist

With a teaching career spanning over 25 years at the elementary level, I have taught a variety of grades and subjects. More importantly, I have taught a wide variety of children. Reflecting on a long career already, I can still remember many young students that simply did not conform to dominant gender practices. Over the past eight years, the number of students at the elementary level that seem to fit within the category of “gender non-conforming” seems to be increasing, at least within the small suburban school in the Midwest state in which I teach. Not a single student at the elementary school in which I teach has come “out” as LGBTQ. However, I am aware of many over the years who have come “out” in middle school or high school. Over the past several years I have had four former students come “out” as Trans* during middle school. My gnawing question persists: What could I have done as a teacher to make their elementary years more accepting? As a teacher, what is my role in the continuation of heteronormative and homophobic social norms and values? Furthermore, what are the roles of all teachers, especially

the non-LGBTQ identified, to promote tolerance and equality for all? It is obvious to me the role of the teacher is critical in the continuation or cessation of heteronormativity and homophobia.

My Passion: Connecting the Teaching of Literacy, Children's Literature, and Gender

I am a teacher. Whether I am teaching elementary students to read or pre-service teachers how to teach students to read, I am continually struggling to expand my repertoire of effective pedagogical practices. It has become evident to me that the inclusion of social justice issues, such as countering homophobia and ensuring that all students see themselves represented in the texts they are required to read, is, and should be, a component of my teaching practices (Allan, et. al, 2008; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Chapman, 2013; Cullen & Sandy, 2009). Likewise, when books are not offered or available due to issues of censorship, we, as the educational establishment, cannot rely on self-selected independent reading as a means of students accessing such information. It is also apparent to me that cisgender students are complicit in perpetuating cultural norms that may or may not further heterosexism and homophobia. The need for teachers to lead all students, not just LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming, through the process of deconstructing society's messages regarding gender and sexuality is critical for developing and attaining a truly democratic society.

Over the past few years I have implemented LGBTQ-inclusive literature into my classroom practice. My initial and most deliberate attempt was the reading of *The Misfits* by James Howe (2001). This chapter book is the tale of four 'misfits' as they navigate their way through middle school. One of the main characters is openly gay, his coming out story is explicitly stated in the story, and he has a crush on another male student throughout the story. The gay character in this book is not a supporting character, nor does the author hide the fact that the character is gay. Gayness for this character is the trait that identifies him as a 'misfit' and plays into the books theme of anti-bullying and refraining from name calling and the use of offensive language. Throughout the reading of this book, which I read aloud to my fourth grade class, my

students kept reading reflection logs. Class discussions on the book rarely included mention of the gayness of the character, and in order to get them to reflect on the issue, I had to provide a specific prompt for them to write about in their journals. Not a single parent commented, positive or negative, on the use of the book. Upon analyzing their journals after the conclusion of the story, a few students appeared to develop a more accepting attitude toward the gay character over the course of the book, with only two students out of twenty-two stating homophobic remarks when asked specifically about reading a book with a gay character. The use of this book was a positive experience, and the students responded well to all the characters.

After the success of reading *The Misfits* (Howe, 2001), I began to add LGBTQ-inclusive books to my classroom library. The following year I was called into the principal's office with a parent concern over a book that a student was reading. Evidently, the prior evening as she was reading *George* (2015) by Alex Gino about a Trans* girl, she stopped reading and asked her father what the word "porn" meant. The father was concerned and called the principal the following day to complain about the book. The principal did a little research, found the book to be sold by Scholastic (a reputable publisher our school frequently uses), marketed for the age/grade level the student was in, and listed on several notable book award lists. She still asked me to remove the book from my classroom library. In addition, she suggested that I add a section to my syllabus the following year warning parents that children's literature may contain sensitive issues and they should monitor what their children read. This experience confirmed my apprehension of using such literature with my students in our small, suburban school in the Midwest.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the number of participants who were purposefully sampled based on specific qualifications (Patton, 2002). Through my networks, I was unable to identify many teachers who used LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with their students as part of their

language arts curriculum. Coupled with the necessity of a multiple case study research design to limit the number of subjects, the experiences of five classroom teachers are not expected to fully reflect the wider population of upper elementary teachers. Qualitative research does not aim to be generalizable.

This study also acknowledges the limitations imposed by the specific time period and geographical features currently at play in society. Issues pertaining to LGBTQ individuals can be highly time and location specific. Not only can geographical locations reflect various cultural issues that affect LGBTQ people on a larger scale and change over time, but, more specifically, the space in which students and teachers interact can be constricted or opened depending on the people, dialogue, and relationships existing within a place (Blackburn, 2012). While I interviewed all participants within the same short time span of a few months, the participants' school and cultural locations may have affected their perceptions and attitudes toward LGBTQ issues. My participants were all from urban or suburban areas in Midwestern states of the United States. While this may be a limitation, it is also viewed as a strength allowing for more diverse subjects.

In this study, I sought to evaluate or critique the teaching or lived experiences of the teacher participants. The teachers recruited in this study have recently used, or are currently using, LGBTQ-inclusive literature in their classrooms with students ranging from 3rd-6th grades. Participants were encouraged to openly share their experiences, both good and bad, without judgement to their teaching abilities or teaching styles. I acknowledge that the number of possible subjects is extremely small, as few teachers of upper-elementary students have used LGBTQ-inclusive literature in their classrooms for a variety of reasons. Yet, Stake (2006) argues that case studies should ideally be focused on a small number of cases.

Terms

The following terms are always in flux and new connotations are being added continuously to old terms. For this study, I am purposefully using these terms aligned to the current moment.

LGBTQIAS- The letters within the acronym LGBTQIAS are not ordered hierarchically and may be ordered in a variety of ways. Most commonly in this study I will use the term LGBTQ to identify gender and sexual non-conforming or minority statuses, and seeks to serve as a general categorization “of the individuals, groups, issues, behaviors, and identities” discussed (Wimberly, 2015, p. 5). As Wimberly (2015) points out, while the use of the term LGBTQ combines many identities and referents into an overarching label, we must remember that “gender expression, sexual behavior, attraction, and identity are each separate and distinct domains” (p. 5). I use the term LGBTQ in this study unless specifically citing another source which chose another variation of this acronym. The following is a list of the terms and their corresponding letter within the acronym.

L- lesbian (sexual orientation) - Women who are attracted sexually and emotionally to other women.

G- gay (sexual orientation) - Predominately used to refer to men who are attracted sexually and emotionally to other men. However, the term gay often may be used as a collective term for same-sex attraction in both males and females.

B- bisexual (sexual orientation) - Refers to an individual that is attracted sexually and emotionally to both genders.

T- Trans* (transgender) (gender) - Refers to an individual that is assigned a gender at birth that contradicts with their internal/mental gender. The asterisk following the term trans (Trans*) can denote an array of sexual identities, but *not* a cisgender man or woman.

Q- queer (gender)- Refers to an individual that is gender non-conforming or that purposely counters the typical gender binary; can also be used as a term to include all of the LGBTQIA community.

I- intersex- Refers to an individual born with an anatomy that appears different from the typical male/female binary.

A- asexual- Refers to an individual that is predominately a non-sexual person; occasionally the 'A' may refer to ally (a person who supports queer individuals and the queer community).

S- supporter- Refers to allies and supporters of the queer community; is someone who uses their privilege and their resources to stand with those under attack and to dismantle systems of oppression (Kivel, in Kimmel & Ferber, 2014, p. 112).

Children's literature- Books, written text/prose, and/or illustrations intended to be read primarily by children for educational and/or recreational purposes.

Cisgender: An individual whose gender matches the sex assigned to them at birth.

Compulsory heterosexuality: The social institution and notion that our current social contract designates heterosexuality as *the* frame of intelligibility; that is, men and women can only be understood through the lens of heterosexuality. The terms 'man' and 'woman' assume heterosexuality for they are inherently coupled. Therefore, women are by necessity heterosexual (Wittig, 1992). Adrienne Rich (1986), from whom the term originated, views compulsory heterosexuality as a political institution used to oppress women. She argues that women are coerced into heterosexuality as a weapon of patriarchy and a primary vehicle for women's oppression. Butler (2006) understands compulsory heterosexuality as the heterosexual matrix- the category 'woman' only materializes and makes sense in the heterosexual matrix.

Gender non-conforming: For this study, I am using the term “gender non-conforming” to describe individuals who often exhibit characteristics or stereotypes of the gender opposite of what they were assigned at birth. This term is also salient to describe individuals that have same-sex sexual orientations. All children will cross borders (Anzaldúa, 2012) throughout their childhood as they experiment and explore their interests and abilities. The occasional crossing of borders would not typically carry the label of “gender non-conforming.” Limited research exists on alternate gender expression among children and young adults (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Wimberly, 2015).

Hegemonic masculinity: The “predominant, overpowering concept of what it is to be a ‘real man’” creating an “idealized notion of masculinity” (Coston and Kimmel, in Kimmel & Ferber, 2014, p. 126). Hegemonic masculinity then works as a constantly mutating ideology, as well as culturally normative constraints for men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemonic system: A system of power that “provides a worldview—an intellectual framework, a language, and a set of values—that is promoted as common sense, as just the way things are, as unchallengeable” (Kivel, in Kimmel & Ferber, 2014, p. 110). In regard to gender and sexuality it is the positioning of subaltern groups as less than or inferior because they lack enough resistance to change the status quo.

Heteronormativity: The assumption that heterosexuality is the norm and that male and female are complimentary genders; often linked to heterosexism and homophobia.

Heterosexual matrix: This concept refers to the idea that gender is produced through heterosexual desire, what makes one intelligible is their sex and gender, which is all about a certain heterosexual desire; being able to be seen as a gender requires the heterosexual matrix; Butler uses the term, drawing from Witting (1992) and Rich (1986), to “characterize a hegemonic

discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender” (Butler, 2006, p. 208).

Heterosexuality: Sexual interest directed at members of the opposite sex; should not be thought of as simply a sexual act between women and men- rather a constructed identity, a performance, and an institution that is not necessarily linked to sexual acts (Messner, in Kimmel & Ferber, p. 77-78).

Homonormativity: The idea that there is a hierarchy within the LGBTQIA community privileging white cis males over other oppressed categories such as transgender or female. It is a system in which the oppressed become the oppressors for others within their community by creating a hierarchy of what “normal” should be within the LGBTQ community.

Homophobia: “The deep-seated cultural discomfort and hatred toward same-sex sexuality” (Coston and Kimmel, in Kimmel & Ferber, 2014, p. 135).

Intersectionality: The “interaction of multiple social identities” (Ferber, in Kimmel & Ferber, 2014, p. 227) denoting the intersection of the structural positioning of race, gender, ability, and sexuality. First developed by women of color and critical race theorists who argued that the variables of race, class, gender, and sexuality could not be separated in understanding their experiences (Crenshaw, 1991).

LGBTQ-inclusive children’s literature: Books, pieces of written text or prose, and/or illustrations intended to be read primarily to/with/by children for either educational or recreational purposes that contain gay, lesbian, bisexual, Trans*, or queer characters or themes. Such books may include characters that openly identify as L, G, B, T, or Q. Inclusive literature may also include books dealing with same-sex parenting, characters who are gender neutral or gender non-conforming, and/or queer characters. The LGBTQ characters may be protagonists, antagonists, or function as a secondary or tertiary character. LGBTQ themes may be overt or more subtle. My

interpretation of LGBTQ-inclusive literature for the purpose of this study includes any LGBTQ text that includes character(s) or topics in which a discussion of gender and/or sexuality is likely to occur among students reading the book.

Queer/queering: The term queer is also used a verb. Queer theory calls for the intentional queering or questioning and challenging of gender and sexual norms, including the destabilization of what constitutes normal.

Theory of Performativity: The idea that gender is performed by an individual. The theory of performativity troubles coherent notions of gender and renders gender unstable because one must continually perform the same performance of their gender identity. For non-binary persons, the matrix of intelligibility doesn't allow for non-coherence to gender; if the performance changes daily then they become unintelligible. Different performances of gender by an individual expose the counterfeit of gender and serves as a political act (Butler, 2006).

Dissertation Overview

The use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature as part of the elementary curriculum deserves exploration. It is my belief that all teachers should be using such literature to provide opportunities for all students to see themselves represented in text, use narratives to explore the lives of those different from themselves, and intentionally, yet non-confrontationally queer elementary curricula and fight heteronormativity and homophobia still rampant within our education system. This study seeks to identify and learn from the lived experiences of five practicing experienced teachers throughout the Midwest United States to explore their use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature, the pedagogical implications, and how teachers use such literature to queer their teaching and/or curriculum. Through this study I seek to make a case more fully for the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature and to determine ways in which such literature can critically queer the language arts curriculum.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed explanation of current theories which serve as lenses through which I analyzed the data, including queer theory and critical literacy. It further contains a review of the past and current literature and empirical studies available on the topic of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature. Limited studies exist on practicing teachers and their actual use of such literature. Studies reviewed predominantly focus on work with pre-service teachers and their attitudes and perceptions on the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature in educational environments. Chapter 2 also identifies the various types of children's literature available dealing with LGBTQ issues and themes.

Chapter 3 outlines the methods used to interrogate the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature within the upper-elementary grade classrooms. Chapter 4 presents the data collected from five experienced, practicing teachers who used LGBTQ-inclusive literature in their classrooms with students ranging from 3rd – 6th grades. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and implications found across multiple cases. This chapter seeks to answer the research questions set forth in chapter 1.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The use of LGBTQ-themed literature in classrooms at any grade level is relatively rare; and as with elementary-aged children, it is extremely rare (DePalma & Atkinson, 2008; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). At the ground-breaking publication of *Queering Elementary Education* (Letts & Sears, 1999) twenty years ago, the thought of openly addressing sexual identity with elementary-aged students remained largely out of reach. Within the past two decades, many societal changes have occurred in LGBTQ rights and acceptance, however the research and practice of LGBTQ issues into elementary curriculum remains largely absent. As society's views towards and prejudices about LGBTQ individuals are quickly changing, we are beginning to see an increase in attention paid to the educational well-being and inclusion of that marginalized population. However, more work needs to be done at all levels and with all populations.

The scope of available research published on this topic remains limited, revolves mainly around the challenges of addressing such at the early childhood and adolescent levels (Blaise, 2010; DeJean, 2010; Mudrey & Medina-Adams, 2006), and offers much more theoretical and conceptual research than empirical studies. This review of current literature offers explanations and examples of the available research by which teachers seek to better serve the often

presumed LGBTQ and/or gender non-conforming students in an elementary school as well as how to counter discrimination of LGBTQ students and/or those students with LGBTQ members of their family (dual mom or dual dad family structures, Trans* parent or sibling, etc.). Children's literature appears to yield great promise in addressing this sensitive issue with young children (Banks, 2009; Blackburn, Clark, & Martino, 2016; Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; McDonough, 2007; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013). Unfortunately, the preponderance of the research continues to surround the areas of adolescents and young adult education and underrepresents issues of gender and sexuality in elementary education.

Why Teachers Use LGBTQ-Inclusive Curricula at the Elementary Level

Children identifying as gender variant often identify when first entering school, usually at a young age (Menvielle, 2012). The age of individuals identifying as lesbian or gay has historically occurred between early adolescence and early adulthood, but it seems to be dropping and could have implications for upper elementary teachers (Menvielle, 2012). McAndrews and Warne (2012) interviewed gay men about their childhood experiences and found that all of their subjects "knew by the ages of six, seven, or eight years old that they were different in terms of their sexuality" (p. 350). The subjects did not possess the language necessary to articulate their differences, but experienced a felt difference from their peers and possessed an "intuitive knowing that their difference was something that was a source of conflict and needed to be hidden" (McAndrews & Warne, 2012, p. 352). Tierney and Ward (2017) concur that LGBTQ youth "are increasingly coming out and openly identifying at younger ages," which they interpret to suggest a trend of students becoming more comfortable in affirming their own identities, lessening the internal conflicts and need for remaining closeted (p. 501). Gender-nonconforming students and students with a *felt difference* enter classrooms every day at all grade levels with little to no support from the institutions they are required to attend. In studies, few students

indicate exposure to “positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events in their school curriculum (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015, p. 95; Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008).

The heteronormativity embedded within our social institutions remains present in all aspects of schooling; including the rituals, implicit and explicit rules, sports activities, curriculum, and pedagogical practices (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Letts & Sears, 1999). The constant enforcement of heteronormativity, both at a systemic level and reinforced by teachers themselves, stigmatizes LGBTQ young people (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Letts & Sears, 1999). A study by Watson & Russell (2015) looking at curricula found that few textbooks include LGBTQ issues. In the few instances that LGBTQ families were mentioned, no pictures were included, and LGBTQ topics “were often portrayed in ways that reinforced negative stereotypes or that perpetuated heteronormativity” (p. 81).

With a heteronormative framework solidly in place in our educational institutions, it is no wonder that “approximately 7 million LGBTQ families across the United States do not feel supported by their child’s school” (Watson & Russell, 2015, p. 75). Sexual minority children and youth are much more likely to report feeling unsafe, bullying, and verbal harassment than their peers (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008; Watson & Russell, 2015). GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, et al, 2012) repeatedly finds that schools with an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum are “less hostile toward LGBTQ students” (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015, p. 94). While the relationship is unknown whether or not the inclusive curriculum creates a less hostile environment, or whether a less hostile environment allows space for a more inclusive curriculum, there is a strong likelihood of a symbiotic relationship between climate and curriculum (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015, p. 94). Because queer students are undoubtedly a part of our heteronormative and homophobic school communities and they face challenges created or reinforced by their peers and teachers, it is imperative that preventative efforts be taken to lessen the physical and psychological challenges faced at an early age (Gerouki, 2010). Not only do

LGBTQ students exist, but children do possess knowledge about gender and sexuality and continue to construct their own theories about sexuality, despite the notion of perceived childhood innocence and naivety (Blaise, 2010). It therefore should become the task, and more so the responsibility, of adults and teachers to engage with children about their knowledge in order to expand, rather than limit, spaces in the curriculum for student's gender and sexual orientation knowledge to be understood and valued. Teachers possess the power to act as agents to question normative theories thereby challenging and preventing the heteronormativity prevalent within our schools. As with any preventative measure, Gerouki (2010) argues and urges for efforts to begin early, certainly before puberty. In the case of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, specifically children's literature, waiting until students are adolescents and reading young adult literature would be too late.

In addition to the recent trend of younger children coming out and openly identifying at earlier ages (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015), the presence of Out individuals within classrooms should not determine teachers' willingness to address LGBTQ-inclusive topics. Whether or not teachers and administrators are able to identify exactly which students fall under the LGBTQ umbrella is inconsequential to the type of curricula children deserve.

The demand for queer recognition need not assume that we know beforehand precisely what forms of queer social identity forms are being recognized; nor does it require that we be able to identify exactly which children are 'queer children' and which ones are not, so that we can on that basis 'recognize' them accordingly. Rather, it assumes that some children will discover at some point in their development—perhaps not until they are adults—that they cannot live well as heterosexuals (McDonough, 2007, pp. 797-798).

Because teachers cannot pick out beforehand which students are, or will be, queer, teachers should offer "alternative models of identity" to all students as they develop their individual gender and sexual identities (McDonough, 2007, p. 798; Miller, 2015). Additionally, with the

staggering fact from GLSEN that only 16.8% of students report having any positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events in their school curriculum (Kosciw, et al, 2012; Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015), the school curriculum and teachers clearly need to address this anti-homophobic and counter-heteronormative mission.

The benefits of LGBTQ-inclusive texts to school and classroom libraries is not disputed as a major step forward. The issue remains that the presence of such texts, especially at the upper elementary levels is very limited, and the inclusion of such texts into the curriculum is even more inadequate. It is often assumed that the addition of LGBTQ-inclusive books to the bookshelf is a positive and affirming step in the right direction, which it very well could be. However, one or two texts cannot possibly be entrusted to represent such a diverse population as the LGBTQ community (Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

The pedagogical practices surrounding the inclusion of LGBTQ issues revolve around two distinctly different issues, anti-homophobic work and counter-heteronormative work (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). Many teachers approach the teaching of LGBTQ issues from the stance of countering homophobia which is rooted in “advocating acceptance, assimilation, and tolerance” (Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009, p. 45). Teachers believe that breaking down stereotypes and increasing acceptance and tolerance of LGBTQ individuals provides an effective attack on bullying (Flores, 2014; Gerouki, 2010). Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) assert that the act of countering anti-homophobic beliefs does not necessarily investigate “the construction, production, and maintenance of what is considered normative, nor does it challenge the status quo” (p. 45). Moving beyond the act of acceptance and tolerance, teachers encourage students to question the power dynamics at play and “disrupt traditional hierarchies and imagine alternative ways of being in the world” (Sieben and Wallowitz, 2009, p. 45).

In addition to countering homophobia, it is necessary to also call into question prevalent heteronormative discourse. The work of DePalma & Atkinson (2009), through their participatory action research project, built upon the conceptual and theoretical foundation laid by previous scholars (Bond-Stockton, 2009; Lester, 2014; Letts & Sears, 1999) and blends theory with practice seeking notions of praxis. Lester (2014) and DePalma & Atkinson (2009) both acknowledge the complexities of children's literature to work towards sexualities equality, LGBTQ inclusion, and anti-homophobia practices while also working to counter notions of heteronormativity and *normal* gender roles and sexuality. Countering homophobia and questioning heteronormativity represent two distinctly different outcomes, but both require investigating for a correct manner in which to tackle such literature with children most effectively. If the goal is to instill in young children ideas of "social justice and equality for all people" it then becomes difficult to address one form of oppression without addressing others (Lester, 2014, p. 262). Martino (1999) further cautions against the presentations of gay and lesbian characters as *normal* and like everyone else while also being different (in Letts & Sears, 1999, p. 138).

How LGBTQ-Inclusive Literature Has Been Used in Elementary Classrooms

The term LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature encompasses a wide array of interrelated topics including: gay familial awareness (i.e., same-sex parenting, adoption), bullying, gender nonconformity, love and marriage, biographies of prominent LGBT leaders, non-fiction selections, and Trans* issues (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Sapp, 2010) and inasmuch offers a plethora of ways to be included into the upper elementary curriculum. Through children's literature, three approaches are commonly used to incorporate and address LGBTQ related topics and issues. The use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature, the queering of "straight" or non-LGBTQ-inclusive literature, and/or the queering of LGBTQ-inclusive literature are the primary ways in

which teachers have addressed gender and sexuality issues within classrooms at the elementary levels (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

Teachers using LGBTQ-inclusive literature ground its use in one or more of the following ways: as part of a multicultural educational experience (Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Flores, 2014), as critical literacy studies (Banks, 2009; Leland & Harste, 2000), as part of a social justice focus (Mackenzie & Talbott, 2018; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011), and/or with a direct emphasis on anti-homophobic/counter-heteronormative work (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). Through the available research several teachers have positioned their incorporation of gender and sexuality within their curriculum as part of multicultural studies. Gabriel Flores (2014), a college adjunct professor and elementary teacher candidly shared his experiences with using LGBT-inclusive children's literature with second and third grade students. In his article detailing how to deal proactively with parents, he grounds his use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature as part of a multicultural educational curriculum which allowed him the ability to incorporate LGBTQ literature while also dealing positively with parents and administration. Based on his own experiences, Flores encourages teachers to adhere to the utmost level of professionalism at all times, work to increase empathy for bullied students through themes of kindness and respect, address character traits and development, post inclusive pictures and graphics, and "read gender-nonconformative-themed literature" (Flores, 2014, p. 119). Similarly, Crisp and Knezek (2010) detail their process to a critical multicultural reading of inclusive literature by selecting novels that represent a range of LGBTQ characters and encourage fellow teachers to consider both how the characters are positioned in the text and to how their students will be expected to identify with the book characters.

The largest scale study conducted to date involving LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature occurred in the United Kingdom as primary and early-childhood teachers participated in the *No Outsiders* project (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). DePalma and Atkinson enlisted an array

of teachers and provided them with a classroom library of LGBTQ-inclusive picturebooks. Teachers then utilized the books in their teaching. The results focus on the persistent issues of how texts are utilized in the classroom, whether or not they challenge homophobia while continuing to reinforce heteronormativity, or seek to queer the texts by exploring non-normative discourses (Cullen & Sandy, 2009; DePalma & Atkinson, 2008; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). Several teaching strategies implemented by the participants in the *No Outsiders* project appeared useful and may contribute to future best practices regarding the incorporation of LGBTQ-themed literature. One strategy that the researchers deemed beneficial is the use of “hotseating.” When reading an LGBTQ-inclusive book the teacher/reader assumes the role of a specific character and students ask the character questions. The teacher/reader will then answer the questions from the point of view of the character in the book (Cullen & Sandy, 2009).

In addition to the several articles and books discussing the *No Outsiders* project (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009), Blackburn and Clark (2011) conducted teacher inquiry groups over the course of three years with teachers interested in combatting homophobia through their school’s Gay-Straight Alliance. Participants formed literature discussion groups and met approximately every month discussing a book or piece of literature. Discourse analysis of session transcripts identified two main types of discourse. Blackburn and Clark (2011) found both LGBTQ-inclusive discourse, which often combatted homophobia while also perpetuating a heteronormative discourse, as well as a queer discourse which challenged the reinforcement of heteronormativity. Even though both discourses appear to be competing discourses, the researchers concluded that they each have their place and through these conflicts, make possible the potential for promise and change (Blackburn & Clark, 2011).

Ryan, Patraw & Bednar (2013), drawing from a larger multi-case study, found that students “made deep and lasting connections with the characters they read about” in high-quality children’s literature that included Trans* and gender-nonconforming people (p. 102). The need

for district officials, parents, and other advocates to assure that such literature is available is of utmost importance. The inclusion of Trans* and gender-nonconforming people introduced students to “new ways of taking and thinking about gender, while also providing a space to connect new knowledge to what was already familiar” allowing students to comprehend more fully lived experiences (Ryan, Patraw & Bednar, 2013, p. 102). The educational implications for the class comprised of mostly cisgender students were substantial. Cisgender students developed a vocabulary around diverse ways of expressing gender, made personal connections to gender diversity, understood characters in texts and in popular culture more deeply, and learned to think critically about issues related to gender, even when the lesson was not focused on LGBTQ related topics (Ryan, Patraw & Bednar, 2013). Framing discussions about gender as personal, whether it be through characters students have grown to love in books or their own friends and family, helps to avoid distancing “other” people and helps to make our schools and communities safer and more supportive spaces.

Qualitative interviews conducted by Martino & Cumming-Potvin’s (2011) outline the experiences of two teachers committed to incorporating social justice issues into their elementary pedagogical approaches. They highlight the contradictory moments that occur within the critical literacy practices in elementary classrooms. The “addressing of same-sex parenting and non-normative sexuality” affords teachers and students the opportunity to interrupt heteronormativity through a “*queer-infused critical literacy framework*” (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011, p. 499). In line with the other available articles, Martino & Cumming-Potvin provide theoretical and conceptual interpretations of anecdotal experiences of teachers.

Other than grounding their LGBTQ teaching on foundational curriculum ideals such as multiculturalism and social justice, teachers who have begun using LGBTQ-inclusive texts offer other recommendations for implementation. Flores (2014) acknowledges “parental concerns” as one of the most cited topics during implementation of LGBT themes in elementary classrooms.

Therefore, teachers—of all sexual orientations—who seek to include discussions of different familial structures and/or counter and challenge heteronormativity and homophobia often alert parents and administrators before including such topics into the curriculum (Chng & Wong, 1998; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). Further recommendations include always offering an “opt out” option for students and parents (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Schall & Kauffmann, 2003). This practice gives students agency which teachers felt shielded them from parent and administrator criticism while enabling them to continue with LGBTQ content and the ability to engage in important conversations. Teachers made accommodations as necessary and proceeded with their plans for inclusive teaching (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

The most recent work of Caitlin Ryan and Jill Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) outlines their work with LGBTQ-inclusive literacy instruction in the elementary classroom over the past five years. Through their work co-teaching in classrooms with elementary teachers they have first-hand experience in possibilities at the elementary level regarding the teaching of LGBTQ literature. Through their work they divide the use of such literature into three distinct categories; expanding representation of LGBTQ individuals, the ability to question categories and queer literature, and question silences and expand representations to complicate the “single-story” (Adichie, 2009) often found in literature. Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) encourage the implementation of an anchor lesson(s) to serve as a “foundational experience for the class” which serves to develop students’ abilities to question categories such as gender, identity, and power (p. 80). Through anchor lessons, teachers use text(s) to create a touchstone experience for the class to explicitly begin a discourse on identity and power. This experience then becomes “a regular part of classroom discourse” and “formulate[s] new ways of thinking for students and teachers that help[s] them question and discuss taken-for-granted and culturally constructed notions of identity categories over time” (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018, p. 81).

While it is important to create a common language and discourse through the use of an anchor lesson, Hamilton (1998) reminds teachers of the importance of a dialogic continuum in which students are free to explore and “try on” attitudes, beliefs, and ways of thinking (Hamilton, 1998, p. 28). In order to queer texts and push students thinking further, teachers should put “complimentary and competing discourses in conversation with each other around diverse contexts and in complex contexts” intentionally creating conflict and ruptures in thinking about the topic (Blackburn & Clark, 2011, p. 247). This type of rupture and conflict in thinking offers great potential and promise for change to occur (Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Miller, 2015). Through focusing on competing and conflicting discourses within the concept of a dialogic continuum teachers and students can define and re-define concepts, shape and re-shape their ideas, and gives space for multiple perspectives on characters, events, and ideas.

The discussion of current events is one way teachers feel justified integrating LGBTQ topics into their ELA curriculum and class discussions (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). Using current events as an entry point, Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) found that texts such as Scholastic News or other popular news articles generated for children easily connect to curricular ideas in math, science, or social studies. They found extending class discussions to include LGBTQ people or topics was an ideal fit. Teachers used current events to connect to diverse families represented in their classrooms and to respond to instances of bullying involving LGBTQ identities. They found the critical aspect of including such texts was to talk with their classroom community about LGBTQ topics as they would any other world events. The use of current events provides the opportunities to explore topics that students hear about in their daily lives but are quite possibly not fully understanding (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

Martino & Cumming-Potvin (2016) extend this pedagogical application with their use of “teachable moments” used to de-pathologize same-sex desire and gender variance. Through a matter-of-fact discourse teachers seamlessly introduce, reiterate, and sustain sexual and gender

differences found in opportune teachable moments as “just an ordinary part of the diversity of everyday lived experience[s]” (p. 821). This manner of including LGBTQ-topics into the curriculum accomplishes the desired discourse without the use of LGBTQ-inclusive texts if teachers do not find the inclusion of such texts a viable option due to parents, administration, or career safety concerns (Blackburn & Smith, 2010).

The use of high-quality (Crisp & Knezek, 2010) and developmentally appropriate (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018) children’s literature should be a cornerstone of using LGBTQ-inclusive children’s literature with any child. The concern for LGBTQ-inclusive literature with upper elementary students is the limited amount of books available for that age group, as well as the seemingly limited amount of teachers willing to tackle such work with upper elementary students.

What Are the Pedagogical and Curricular Outcomes of Using LGBTQ-Inclusive Children’s Literature in the Classroom?

The available research conducted to date, which is limited, offers contradictory results. In contrast to reasons mentioned above that teachers choose to integrate LGBTQ-inclusive literature, it appears those goals do not always come to fruition. Blackburn and Smith (2010) found the use of LGBTQ-inclusive texts to possess a couple of shortcomings in its attempt to combat homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia. First, using such texts can continue to perpetuate homophobia when addressed within a heteronormative framework (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Lester, 2014). Students and teachers have been “indoctrinated with the understanding that gender and, implicitly, attractions are both denoted and inescapably determined by one’s genitalia” (Blackburn & Smith, 2010, p. 627). With this belief deeply engrained, students and teachers struggle to “image anything but a traditional gender binary related to heterosexual desires in formalized school spaces” (Blackburn & Smith, 2010, p. 627), thereby often leaving homophobia and heteronormativity intact (Blackburn, Clark & Martino, 2016; Wickens, 2011).

Blackburn and Smith (2010) further identified the differences they faced in addressing homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia. What emerged from their work with teachers was an understanding that each of these foci were clearly different and combating each provided unique challenges and issues. Focusing only on LGBTQ people distracts from addressing the problems of homophobia and heterosexism. Martino (2009) found that focusing on LGBTQ people often draws attention away from the larger issues of oppression and thereby lacks any benefits for LGBTQ people, their allies, and educating those people ignorant about LGBTQ populations (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). In a study with young adult (YA) LGBTQ literature used to challenge homophobia, Wickens (2011) concluded that many of the books ultimately leave homophobia intact, the opposite of the teachers' intentions.

Furthermore, the use of LGBTQ-inclusive texts often overlooks the intersectionality of multiple categories of positionality by focusing on the sexual identities of queer people and thereby ignoring race, ability, and/or class. Sexual identities cannot be isolated from other identity markers since no one is solely a sexual being (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Efforts to combat heterosexism and homophobia will always fall short when scholars and teachers do not address intersecting identities (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Lester, 2014; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

Teachers who seek to use LGBTQ-inclusive texts continue to face scrutiny from administration, parents, and community members. Inclusive literature continues to be among the most challenged and banned books from classrooms and libraries (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015). Educators consider the use of such texts, historically considered 'controversial' by some, risky and fear a lack of professional safety (Logan, Watson, Hood & Laswell, 2016). In addition to concerns about administrators' and parents' reactions, teachers predominately worry about the appropriateness of the books they choose for the age range of students they are teaching, fret over how the students will react, worry whether or not students will connect to the story and/or

characters, and are fearful that they will not be able to answer students' questions (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

Flores (2014) citing "parental concerns" as one of the most cited topics during implementation of LGBT themes in elementary classrooms, Flores and many other educators face fear of administrators and parents when willing to breach such a topic. In addition to being upfront with parents and administrators about topics and texts that will include discussion of families that may differ from their own (Chng & Wong, 1998; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018), further recommendations include always offering an "opt out" option for students and parents (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Schall & Kauffmann, 2003). Teachers felt the ability of the student to opt-out shielded them from parent and administrator criticism while enabling them to continue with LGBTQ content and engage in important conversations. Teachers made accommodations as necessary and proceeded with their plans for inclusive teaching (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) acknowledge the reading of even a single "mirror book" can be powerful for students needing to see themselves represented in books, but one book or text fails to achieve the level of LGBTQ-inclusive teaching (p. 35). To help counter the "single story" dilemma, teachers engaged with LGBTQ-inclusive texts often develop text sets since "one text cannot carry the burden of representing a diverse population" and classroom bookshelves need to "reflect a range of LGBTQ identities" (Crisp & Knezek, 2010, p. 79). It is recommended throughout the research that teachers use LGBTQ-themed texts that "involve careful and strategic juxtapositioning of a range of LGBT-themed texts to allow for various and different permutations of gender [and gendered] lives" (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016, p. 812). Unfortunately, especially at the upper elementary level, the number of available books remains quite small. In addition to the limit in quantity of books, the books available fail to include diverse representations (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

Researchers have found that the predominance of LGBTQ-inclusive texts generally include white, middle-class adult LGBT characters where women display “culturally expected characteristics of femininity, and men, likewise, express their masculinity in culturally expected ways” (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015, pp. 440-441). While the inclusion of any LGBTQ-inclusive texts remains a positive stride forward, heteronormative and gendered limits exist within the available texts and needs to be addressed by teachers through their pedagogical practices and curricular development. Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan (2015), as well as GLSEN (Kosciw, et al, 2012) found “curriculum silences around LGBT topics” contribute to “unsafe and unwelcoming” school environments (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015, pp. 436-437).

Although several studies have highlighted the apparent shortcomings of teachers to fully address issues of heteronormativity and homophobia, Ryan, Patraw & Bednar (2013) argue that with properly planned and scaffolded instruction teachers *are* capable of appropriately and effectively addressing gender diversity with students. Through their use of both “straight” texts and LGBTQ-inclusive texts, Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) concur the help and guidance of a teacher facilitates students’ abilities to “notice how identity categories work,” not just within the categories of the heterosexual matrix (biological sex, gender, sexuality), but the layering of multiple intersectional categories—such as race, class, and ability (p. 89). It bears mention, work with the *No Outsiders Project* found that students possess the ability to re-appropriate the “official narratives” of the authors, publishers, and/or teachers (Cullen & Sandy, 2009, p. 146). The process of teaching students to “read against the grain” and “queer” texts, has the potential to allow students to interpret the chosen text(s) in ways different or opposite of the teacher’s intended purpose (Cullen & Sandy, 2009) while also allowing “straight” texts to be read queerly—a double-edged sword.

The benefits of quality LGBTQ-inclusive children’s literature is touted by several researchers for its abilities to combat heteronormativity and other forms of oppression (Hermann-

Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015; Lester, 2014) as well as allowing for the engagement of all students into classroom discourse. Inclusive literature “shifts the conversation from ‘other’ to ‘all’ (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015, p. 439). Teachers are able to help instill the inherent value of all people through their pedagogy and curriculum.

One area in which the available research is clear is in its effectiveness to open up classroom discourse and provide for meaningful lessons that fit well within the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. Through the work conducted by Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth (2018) they document a multitude of ELA standards and objectives that, along with other practicing classroom teachers, were able to teach effectively. First and foremost, students were able to engage with, learn from, and even love the LGBTQ characters and books they used (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). As with all effective teaching, engagement with the curriculum is vital, and the integration of LGBTQ-inclusive books appear to have yielded new and fresh mirrors and windows for students which created an engaging and meaningful learning experience(s) (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). All lessons helped develop students’ abilities “in the interconnected areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing” (p. 32-33). LGBTQ-inclusive lessons were able to address specific ELA skills related to vocabulary development, reflective writing, comparing/contrasting, making predictions, making text-to-text/text-to-self connections, making inferences, creating graphic organizers, deep synthesis, critical thinking, and questioning. Furthermore, teachers were able to create lessons in which students can respond to texts, are able to clarify understandings, interrogate multiple meaning words, and craft arguments (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). The integration of inclusive texts clearly fits well within the ELA curriculum of upper elementary classrooms.

Types of LGBTQ-Inclusive Children’s Literature Available

There are a growing number of children’s books available with an LGBTQ-theme or LGBTQ characters in which “different” or queer students can see themselves mirrored in texts

(Kelso, 2015; Sapp, 2010). The inclusion of LGBT themes into children's literature is still in its infancy and the number of books is still relatively small (Sapp, 2010; Smolkin & Young, 2011). Young adult literature has made significant gains within the past decade and the literature supports the use of LGBT-inclusive books to "contribute to the formation of a stable sense of personal identity by reassuring young people that they are not alone" (Chapman, 2013, p. 545). The research regarding the use of these books with pre-adolescent children is often anecdotal at best, and, while it provides a groundwork to begin with, it still needs expansion upon to determine the effects and consequences of using children's LGBTQ-themed literature with elementary students.

A recent study by Lester (2014) analyzed 68 picturebooks (for early childhood students) containing LGBTQ characters or themes for their ability to confront heteronormativity. The number of available books with LGBTQ themes or characters at a level appropriate for 3rd-6th graders is only about 1/10 of the books available for even younger students. Sapp (2010) expanded on an earlier study conducted by Frances Ann Day conducted in 2000 looking at gay and lesbian themed early childhood children's literature. Day's initial study found only 27 early childhood books, the earliest published in 1989. Early LGBT-themed children's books lacked characteristics of quality literature and concentrated explicitly on making gay and lesbians visible in society during the early days of the gay/lesbian civil rights movement. Sapp's (2010) study expanded on the books reviewed by Day to include more recently published books, bringing the total of books analyzed to fifty-three; an increase of only 22 books published throughout the decade after Day's study. Sapp (2010) found that children's books published after 2000 improved on their literary merit and presented stories engaging to children to gay and lesbian themes more nuanced. Looking for themes from all 53 books, Sapp (2010) found six themes prevalent in the picturebooks: visibility for same-sex parents, celebrations of family diversity, love and marriage, adoption, biography, and gender variance. Many of the children's picturebooks written between

1989 and 2010, the majority of which are picturebooks intended for early childhood audiences, provide “valuable counter narratives to heteronormativity” and have become seminal works in an ever growing body of literature.

LGBTQ issues related to the elementary grades center around two distinct foci. The first is the approach to addressing family constructions, specifically same-sex parents; the second revolves around the approaches to addressing the needs of gender-nonconforming students. The inclusion of LGBT-themed literature also falls under these two categories, and books used to address these issues are divided as such by scholars and teachers (Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). Books presenting characters with same-sex parents are the most common (Sapp, 2010). Within the past decade, a growing number of books available for elementary students including LGBT-themes focus almost entirely on the issue of Trans* individuals and their acceptance into the school environment. According to Bond-Stockton (2009), the majority of individuals do not acknowledge their queerness until they are older and only then, in retrospect, can see themselves as the gay child they were. “She refers to this as the ghostly gay child” since they are not, and cannot, be viewed as a gay child within the societies confines of childhood innocence. With societal views changing regarding gay and lesbian issues, there are more children “coming out” at younger ages (Menvielle, 2012). The available children’s literature has not kept pace with this phenomenon.

Summary of Existing Research

The scope of available research already published on the topic of LGBTQ-inclusive children’s literature remains limited, revolves around the challenges of addressing such a topic at the early childhood and adolescent levels (Blaise, 2010; DeJean, 2010; Mudrey & Medina-Adams, 2006), and offers much more theoretical and conceptual research than empirical studies. The most prevalent area lacking research is at the level of upper-elementary aged students. The

existing LGBT-inclusive literature is largely picturebooks for early childhood aged students or young adult literature often tackling overtly sexual situations many would find inappropriate for elementary students. This review of current literature attempts to offer explanations and examples of the available research by which teachers have served, or attempted to serve, *all* of their students, both their LGBTQ/gender non-conforming students and otherwise.

Research on the teaching of LGBTQ children's literature remains in the beginning stages and focuses on how teachers work to counter discrimination of LGBTQ students, students with LGBTQ family members, and/or all marginalized populations through the ELA curriculum. Children's literature yields great promise in addressing this sensitive and critical issue with young children. While the lack of LGBTQ-inclusive books appropriate for an upper-elementary classroom persists, there are a few books which offer opportunities for research. Such research could provide a basis for pedagogical best practices, influence future curriculum development, motivate publishers to increase their LGBT-inclusive offerings, and interrogate the construction of knowledge and understanding of gender and sexuality issues of our pre-adolescent students.

Theoretical Framework

Queer Theory

Queer theory (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Bond Stockton, 2009; Butler 2006; Letts & Sears, 1999; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014) encompasses a multi-faceted evolving theory with various definitions and, aligned with a largely poststructuralist perspective, seems to avoid definitions at the same time. While the term queer theory varies greatly in definition, in the context of this study becomes a way of destabilizing the gender/sex binary and allowing for an interrogation of how heteronormativity and domination function in the lives of children.

Judith Butler's seminal text *Bodies That Matter*, first published in 1993 and drawing on Foucault's (1978) *History of Sexuality: Vol. I*, paved the way for today's incarnation of queer

theory. Butler's (2011) central critique is of sex as gender. Her belief questions the essential nature of sex, and she asserts there is no sex in gender, everything is just gender. Gender then operates at an external, rather than internal function. Sex masquerades as gender and functions as a performative act. Butler troubles coherent notions of gender by suggesting that the performative nature of gender renders it unstable since one must continually perform the same performance repeatedly to gain intelligibility within the systems of gender in which they move. Non-binary persons do not fit the matrix of intelligibility, according to Butler (2006), because they are outside society's view of normal and therefore non-coherent, or unintelligible. Because we *do* gender, we have the capacity to act in a variety of manners, in fact we are constantly acting and performing our gender with a large amount of agency. However, the conditions by which someone can perform their gender is constrained by sociocultural notions of normativity and involves issues of power.

Butler (2006) articulates two specific regimes of power, phallogocentrism (the privileging of the masculine) and compulsory heterosexuality. In this view, male hegemony and heterosexual desire work to regulate gender. Butler understands compulsory heterosexuality, originally coming from Adrienne Rich (1980), as a political institution in which heterosexuality operates to oppress women, coerce women into heterosexuality, acts as a weapon of patriarchy, and becomes a primary vehicle for women's oppression. The heterosexual matrix designates "that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (Butler, 2006, p. 208). Because the heterosexual matrix assumes heterosexuality, it becomes normative, which in turn becomes a highly rigid, regulatory frame of gender. This heterosexual matrix becomes problematic when a subject does not fit neatly within the heterosexual matrix, resulting in the formation of a queer subject.

Queer theory seeks to alleviate all binary thinking and is a non-identity. Eve Sedgwick (2008), whose work deals largely with the issues of homophobia and how it operates through

silence and ignorance, proposes a destabilization of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Without ridding of the binary completely, she argues for an unsettling of the distinctions between binary ways of thinking. Heteronormative culture operates through a binary way of thinking; male/female, straight/gay, silence/speech, right/wrong, in/out, good/bad, are all manners in which the normative measures of the heterosexual are reinforced in culture, and homophobia is maintained and reproduced. Sedgwick's work on silence, which she sees as produced by the closet and is integral for gay identity, gives ignorance an element of power. It is often the ignorant party in an exchange that holds the power of the dialogue by defining the terms of the exchange. The use of language, even silence, becomes a deeply productive force behind sexuality. Employment of a gay/queer--heterosexual binary functions to oppress those individuals at the queer end of the binary. Sedgwick asserts that it is through the discourse and silence of the closet that homosexual identity reifies, reinforcing the hetero/homo binary and resulting in definitively homophobic behaviors.

Queerness is thoroughly and deeply anti-normative. Because queer theory works to destabilize current normative cultural practices, it must, at the same time, actively guard against the establishment of a new foundation that becomes compulsory for everyone, thus resulting in a new heteronormativity. A queer politics would be oriented around the idea of a continual sense of instability. Queer theory constantly calls into question anything termed 'normal.' Queer theory is obviously not a homogenous theory.

Queer theory's importance for the futurity of children cannot be understated, not as a measure of accepting LGBTQ individuals, but as a means of expanding the possibilities for all children, especially the non-normative. Elementary classrooms and playgrounds offer daily examples of what Butler (2006) deems the "feminized fag or phallicized dyke," which at an early age appears as the *sissy* or *tomboy* (Butler, 2011, p. 66). It is through the educational process that challenges can be made to notions of heteronormativity and the power issues that are included

therein. As Warner (1999) points out, the overwhelming majority of children grow up in families that consider themselves heterosexual, which creates a sense of anguish, estrangement, and shame for those children who do not feel as though they fit within their professed family structure. Children can and do experience a sense of queerness throughout childhood (Warner, 1999, p. 8). In other words, the institution of the family cannot be adequate for addressing childhood queerness and opens the possibility to enact change within the educational environment.

There is widespread belief that children do not, or should not, know about sexuality, nor should there be any attempts to engage children around issues of sexuality in the early years (Blaise, 2010). The popular belief holds that children are much too innocent to know about, or deal with, sexuality. Letts and Sears (1999) assert that “childhood innocence is a veneer that we adults impress onto children enabling us to deny desire comfortably and to silence sexuality” (p. 9). Since children grapple with queerness and innocence simultaneously, the child needs to figure prominently into a critique of queer culture (Degnan, 2014). The deployment of queer theory into the lives of children, the destabilization of gendered norms, works to confront and reduce heterosexism and homophobia through purposive interventions (Letts & Sears, 1999). The responsibility falls onto the adults (specifically for educators) to teach queerly not about sex and sexuality, but about the factors that contribute to and reinforce homophobia and heterosexism, which make life difficult for those with non-normative sexual orientations or gender identities. It is well within the power of elementary teachers to deconstruct sexual and gender binaries as a part of meaningful multicultural and social justice initiatives. Teaching a curriculum that is the “product of the lowest common cultural denominator” may suffice to avoid offending anyone, but it also serves no one (Letts & Sears, 1999, p. 12). Sears’ (1999) work focusing on elementary education calls for a queering of education that allows for a view of children and schooling as upside-down and inside-out. Challenging who, what, and how children are taught common taken-

for-granted assumptions of diversity, identities, childhood, and prejudice is a much-needed practice (Sears, 1999).

Teaching queerly, used here as a verb and not a specific pedagogical practice, “embodies educators who model honesty, civility, authenticity, integrity, fairness, and respect” (Letts & Sears, 1999, p. 4). It creates classrooms “that challenge categorical thinking, promote[s] interpersonal intelligence, and foster[s] critical consciousness” (Letts & Sears, 1999, p. 5). A relatively small amount of theorizing relates to children in the context of queer theory, since queer often remains used synonymously with gay and lesbian individuals, and most children have not yet identified in regard to a sexual orientation (Bond Stockton, 2009). Queer theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) asserts that *all* children are queer since they do not completely adhere to adult normality, and by extension on my part, could benefit from diverse literature.

Much of the scholarship to date on queer theory and its inclusion of children revolves around the use of fictional representations of children through literature and media. Bond Stockton asserts that the queer child has largely eluded us because queer children have not been included in history. The queer child has not been a part of historians’ writings or of the “general public’s belief” (Bond Stockton, 2009, p. 2). The queer child has been silenced throughout history and this silence can be broken using fictional forms; thus, the use of children’s literature in elementary classrooms.

One apparent method for the theorizing of queer studies, especially when attempting to discuss queer theory’s application to children, is the use of pieces of literature or film as units of analyses. If queerness, especially in children, has been ignored by writers of history as proposed by Bond Stockton (2009), it stands to reason that the use of popular media may be our only scope into the cultural understanding of non-normative children. Given that popular media is often a lens into our society it can be used to analyze the queerness of children. Therefore, in order to analyze society’s acknowledgement of queer children, Bond Stockton (2009) uses fictitious books

and movies such as, just to name a few, *Charlie and Chocolate Factory*, *Capote*, and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Savoy uses *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James (Bruhn & Hurley, 2004), Degnan (2014) uses *Heart* and *Sarah* by JT LeRoy (really Laura Albert), and Martinez (2012) even uses the comedy act of Margaret Cho as queer lenses into our society.

The use of children's literature is an important and vital way of queering elementary education to confront heteronormativity and heterosexism. Young adult fiction, written purposely with LGBTQ themes and characters, may do much to help promote the platform of LGBTQ activism, leading to an open discussion of queer/non-normative orientations. However, as stated previously, confronting heteronormativity differs from the use of such literature to critique, question, and shake up existing gender norms to open future possibilities for liberation, pleasure, and being. The use of queer theory, in tandem with critical literacy practices, offers a means of interrogating *queering* practices, this allows teachers and students to question and dialogue about the manner in which books portray gender, which perspective becomes dominant, and whose voice(s) lacks equal attention.

Critical Theory and Critical Literacy

Critical theory, based on the work of Freire (2012) in Cuba with illiterate field workers, explores the potential of readers looking at their world to identify the forces constructing it for them. Freire theorized the issues of power, dehumanization, and oppression as key issues concerning education and pedagogy. Critical theory interrogates the unjust practices of society which dehumanizes individuals. The humanization of all individuals should be the ultimate goal of any society. When a dichotomous and hierarchical relationship is established between an oppressor and an oppressed, dehumanization occurs, creates tension among the parties involved, and removes the good qualities of humanism. One group is thus exploited at the expense of the other. The oppressed individuals lack agency to shape and reshape their world. Instead, the oppressors prescribe (impose) behaviors for the oppressed and create as the status quo non-equal

treatment among groups. Freire views the oppression of a group of people as a dehumanizing experience to both those being oppressed, as well as those doing the oppression. The very act of dehumanizing and oppressing others creates a situation in which the oppressor cannot be himself fully self-actualized and free.

Several situations need to occur, according to Freire (2012), for the oppressed to liberate themselves and their oppressors. Initially, the oppressed must become aware of their oppression and view such as not a situation in a “closed world” but rather a “limiting situation which they can transform” (p. 49). The reflection and gaining an awareness of their oppression can then lead to action. The integration of both reflection and action is what Freire terms *praxis*. It is through this process that the oppressed recognize that conditions need to change, are able to name their world, and begin countering the myths created by the oppressors. Freire views this action as the initiation of love. As the oppressed fight to take away the power of the oppressors, “they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression” (p. 56). In Freire’s model, both the oppressors and the oppressed become more humanized, the axiomatic goal of any society.

Critical literacy practices derive from “the conviction that we read the world and the word expands our social imagination” so that it opens ways in which we can “change oppressive social relations” (Krasny, 2013, p. 17). With issues of oppression sure to surface, both in teaching practices and student access to content, it is clear to see how the incorporation of critical theory applies to issues related to LGBTQ-inclusion regarding curricular and pedagogical areas.

Queer Literacy Framework

Queer Literacy Framework (QLF), based largely on the work of sj Miller (2015), seeks to address the gender and sexuality norms that “have colonized and established unstable social and educational climates” for the “lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans*, intersex, agender/asexual, gender creative, and questioning youth (LGBT*IAGCQ)” (p. 37). QLF attempts to address how teachers

can support their students to read (a)gender and (a)sexuality through a queer lens, rework social and classroom norms where all bodies are legitimated and made legible, and “support classroom students toward personal, educational, and social legitimacy through understanding the value of (a)gender and (a)sexuality self-determination and (a)gender and (a)sexuality justice” (Miller, 2015, p. 37). Miller seeks to set forth a classroom reality that not only addresses gender and sexuality, but includes a continuum for the possibility of (a)gendered and (a)sexuality complexity that students embody. QLF is a “strategy for literacy teachers to reinscribe, instate, and affirm differential bodied realities and give voice to those who experience illegibility and delegitimization” (Miller, 2015, pp. 40-41).

Teachers who employ a Queer Literacy Framework never presume their students to be a particular sexual orientation or gender, commit to classroom activities that push back against gender constructs, support students’ various and multiple performances of gender, purposefully create classroom discourse acknowledging the fluidity of gender, and allow students to self-define and/or reject a gender, sexual orientation, name, and/or pronoun (Miller, 2015). QLF further acknowledges that we “are living in a time we never made” and “gender and sexuality norms predate our existence” (p. 41). Thus, children’s self-determination has been taken away from them early when gender and sexuality are inscribed onto them. It becomes the task of adults, specifically educators, to ensure children have the rights to their own (a)gender and (a)sexuality legibility, thus ensuring that all humans have agency and that “life should be livable for all” (Miller, 2015, p. 41).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Teachers possess an incredible opportunity and responsibility to ensure their students find themselves represented in the texts they read (Bishop, 1994; Letts & Sears, 1999; DePalma & Atkinson, 2008). In addition, teachers should intentionally pursue curriculum and literature that allow students to discover and learn about others unlike themselves, providing students with a more complete picture of the world in which we all live (Bishop, 1994; Blackburn, 2012; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Wolf, 2004). Until recently, the number of diverse children's books including LGBTQ characters or themes were limited to only picturebooks focused on early childhood aged children or more mature novels appropriate for adolescents and young adults. While the number of LGBTQ-inclusive books are still extremely small, publishers are beginning to produce books for children at the upper-elementary level (ages 8-12) (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2016).

Some research exists on the classroom use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature with early childhood aged students (DePalma & Atkinson, 2008). An even more robust amount of work exists with adolescent readers (Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Parks, 2012). Little work specifically addresses upper-elementary students and the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature in the classroom. With the increase in publication in this specific genre (Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2016), work regarding its use in classrooms is now much needed and timely.

Not only are the numbers of LGBTQ-inclusive books small, especially books targeted for upper-elementary students, but even more critical is the extremely small number of teachers willing to use such literature in a classroom setting, especially in more conservative parts of the United States (Flores, 2012; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Thein, 2013). The determining factor in the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature does not lie solely with the authors and publishers, but with the teachers (and administrators) and their willingness to use children's literature that confronts issues of gender and sexuality, help promote democratic values of equality for all, and address issues of homophobia and heteronormativity.

Research Questions

In response to the problem presented above, I designed this study to answer the following grand tour question:

What are the teachers' queering practices emerging throughout the process of using LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with upper elementary students?

These three subquestions unpack different aspects of the grand question:

- Why do teachers choose to use LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in the upper elementary classroom?
- How do teachers use LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature and how do they describe their pedagogical practices with upper elementary students?
- How do teachers reflect on their pedagogical practices and accomplishments with the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature?

Using a constructionist epistemology, I designed this study to explore how teachers of upper-elementary students use LGBTQ-inclusive literature in their classrooms and to what extent teachers queer their teaching and curriculum. I sought information about the interplay between the textual reading of a book and how teachers incorporate it into an English Language Arts

(ELA) curriculum designed for student growth and learning. A constructionist epistemology best suits this line of research as I work to understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and understandings of the classroom teachers enacted through their pedagogical practices.

Theoretical Framework

Queer theory, specifically a queer literacy framework (Miller, 2016), and critical literacy offer a dual approach of data analysis and understanding for this study. This critical queer literacy lens often enacted in educational settings under the notion of multiculturalism allows educators to critically queer their curriculum under the umbrella of multicultural literacy, a much less controversial term.

This theoretical foundation provides the lens through which the interpretation of data and the construction of knowledge becomes salient (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). I assert queer theory can be, and should be, used as a theoretical lens when investigating a phenomenon such as the use of LGBTQ children's literature in the classroom (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). It serves to unsettle, challenge, and address issues of homophobia and heteronormativity among children (Blackburn, Clark, & Martino, 2016; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016). It has educational and pedagogical implications while ensuring the advancement of democratic values and equality for all (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015; Gerouki, 2010; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016). Much of the theorizing related to children's place in queer theory sprouts largely from analyses of popular children's literature (Blaise, 2010; Bond-Stockton, 2009). I propose the fit between the use of queer theory as a theoretical lens and the use of children's literature to help queer instructional practices to allow students to question normative gendered practices and dismantle categorical notions (Blaise, 2010; Wimberly, 2015). Furthermore, queer theory allows for an approach by which this work can deconstruct traditional gender and sex categories and gendered, heteronormative pedagogies,

while working against homophobic attitudes and conceptualizations (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Wimberly, 2015).

More specifically, queer literacy (Miller, 2016) outlines a means for teachers to guide and enable students to “understand the multiplicity of interpretations and experiences” while rebutting the school’s institutional environment that traditionally stresses “the right way to be, think, and act” (Miller, 2016, p. vii-viii). Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2015) follow Miller’s framework of queer literacy by asserting that...

When teachers make use of teachable moments about sexuality and gender in all books, students have opportunities to explore how these identities are not relegated to only LGBT people, but are parts of how every human moves in the world. Because it stems from ideas in queer theory, we call this reading through a ‘queer lens’ (p. 438).

The use of a queer literacy framework thereby draws attention to not only LGBTQ people and issues, but opens dialogue for addressing the treatment of -- and equality for -- all marginalized groups (Miller, 2016).

Critical literacy (Banks, 2009; Edelsky, 2006; Leland & Harste, 2000) as a theoretical framework interrogates the notion of power and how it is negotiated. This theory offers a lens to better understand the dynamic factors involved with the inclusion of LGBTQ topics into the curriculum and with parent and administrative issues encountered by teachers attempting to engage in anti-homophobic and counter-heterosexist work. Critical literacy also helps address issues of power related to the silencing of multiple discourses.

Multiple Case Study Design

Qualitative case study, as a methodology, seeks “to study the experience of real cases operating in real situations” (Stake, 2006, p. 3). The methodology used for this project is a multiple-case study (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006) in which five upper-elementary teachers

participated in multiple, semi-structured interviews regarding the use of an LGBTQ-inclusive book(s) they are using, or have recently used, with their students. Multiple case study methods require the in-depth understanding of several individual cases and the ability to apply the understanding of each individual case to the larger target or umbrella process or phenomenon, or what Stake (2006) refers to as the “quintain” (p. 6). Through the process of multiple case study, the quintain, which is the focus of study, can only be understood through the adequate understanding and analysis of each individual case or manifestation. In this study, the individual teacher constitutes the case to be studied in regard to how he/she/they use LGBTQ-inclusive literature with their students.

Throughout the analysis process, the specific cases and the collective quintain both offer epistemological worth. The specific and the collective will require individual and joint analysis resulting in knowledge that is more concerned with particularization than generalization (Stake, 2006). The particulars of each case study contribute to the quintain and offer particulars found across cases. This line of inquiry is particularly appropriate when seeking to identify particular strategies or occurrences related specifically to the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature across multiple teachers. The tension that exists between cases and the quintain lead to increased insight to multi-case relationships identified throughout the project (Stake, 2006).

Throughout the data collection process, I utilized qualitative interpretive analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006), described in more detail in subsequent sections, to analyze data. During and immediately following the collection of data for each participant, I analyzed each case individually through the use of field notes, memos, close readings of transcripts, and coding, when appropriate. Analysis commenced after the first interview and continued to be refined and expanded as additional subjects were interviewed, integrating the data collection and data analysis stages as a cohesive process. Analysis was not delayed until after all interviews were completed.

Preliminary Investigation

During the summer of 2016, I conducted interviews (with separate IRB approval) with four upper-elementary teachers regarding their attitudes and perceptions of the use of LGBT-inclusive literature. The initial focus of my project was to better understand the attitudes of teachers as to their willingness to use LGBTQ-inclusive literature in their classrooms. Of the four teachers interviewed, three were willing to use such literature in their classrooms with students. However, only one of the four had ever read a book with students that included any mention of queer people or relationships, which happened to be in the context of the Holocaust and the treatment of LGBTQ people. One of the four teachers adamantly opposed the use of such literature, considering it inappropriate to discuss with her students and citing community values as the main reason.

It became apparent from the preliminary study that discussing teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of LGBT-inclusive children's literature was largely hypothetical, since only one had any legitimate experience with this topic. Qualitative inquiry, by definition, is the investigation of lived experiences. Since very few of the teachers interviewed had lived these experiences, I altered the study to include only participants with experiences using LGBT-inclusive literature and refocused my study on the teachers and their actual use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature in their classroom.

Selection of Cases/Participants

For multiple case analysis, Stake (2006) recommends the identification of at least four cases, but not to exceed 10 participants. After receiving IRB approval, I was able to identify 5 participants willing to participate in multiple interviews and observations, offering a sufficient number of participants for analysis.

I chose participants based on their status as an elementary teacher in grades three through six who use LGBTQ-inclusive children’s literature with their students. I recruited participants using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. A call for participants was posted to multiple educational social media groups such as *LGBTQIAS-Badass Teachers Association*, *We Need Diverse Books*, and *Teachers for Social Justice*. Additionally, I reached out to Alex Gino, the author of one of the most recently published LGBTQ-inclusive books asking for assistance identifying schools or teachers using their book in the classroom. Gino was very gracious to forward my contact information to several librarians and school administrators in which they had done book talks and speeches on their most recent book *George* (2015). Two of the participants were secured through social media posts. The other three were obtained with snowball sampling. All participant names and schools are pseudonyms (Table 1).

Table 1

Overview of participants and data sources

Participant	Interview process	Grade taught	Data Sources
Michael	In-Person (in classroom; local library)	6 th	observation/field notes mid-unit interview final summative interview discussion guides school website
Kimberly	Phone & E-mail	3 rd	pre-unit interview mid-unit interview (via e-mail) final summative interview school website
Sarah	Phone	6 th	pre-unit interview mid-unit interview final summative interview parent letter text selection chart article on school website

			article published in School Library Journal
Carrie	Phone	3 rd & 4 th	pre-unit interview final summative interview school website
Amber	In-Person (in classroom)	3 rd	field notes school website pre-unit interview mid/final summative interview student work samples (<i>The Sissy Duckling</i>)

Data Collection Methods and Interview Structure

Data for this study primarily include a series of interviews (see Appendix A for interview questions) with each participant since “some of the most in-depth and rich discussions of LGBTQ issues come from interviews” (Wimberly, 2015, p. 14). Ideally, the interview process consisted of three interviews; one before using the text, one during the implementations of the lessons, and a final interview after the conclusion of the text. The initial interview was designed to gain as much information as possible about the participants’ background and experiences in teaching, their understanding and pedagogical practices concerning the teaching of reading and English Language Arts to upper-elementary students, and their detailed plans and expectations prior to using an LGBTQ-inclusive text in a classroom setting. Questions were open-ended and allowed participants as much freedom to answer and guide the conversation as desired. Initial interview questions focused on the planning stages of the implementation of the LGBTQ-inclusive book(s) into the teacher’s curriculum. A few of the questions asked were:

1. How are you planning to use this LGBTQ-inclusive book in your teaching?
2. What subject/content area(s) are you planning to incorporate with the use of this text?
What specific objectives are you seeking to target?
3. What are your expectations from the students academically?

4. What are your expectations from the students in regard to the subject matter involved with this book?

My first participant had already begun using the LGBTQ-inclusive book with his class before I could conduct a pre-unit interview. The mid-unit interview and lesson observation, lasting about one hour, was sufficient to interrogate his planning stage and implementation of the book.

I also interviewed participants once mid-way through their use of the text, when possible. Two of the teachers chose to use picturebooks because of time constraints with their daily schedule. Teachers' who used picturebooks did not necessitate three distinct interviews since they used picturebooks in a single day, or over the span of a couple of days, making a mid-way interview impractical. I used the mid-way interview as a check-in to seek a rich description of student engagement and learn about the process by which the teachers were implementing the book(s). Interviews with teachers during their process of using LGBTQ-inclusive literature focused on gathering specific, detailed classroom experiences in regard to their pedagogical practices, lesson design, class conversations, and student-teacher interactions.

Interviews conducted after the conclusion of the use of the text focused on additional classroom experiences and pedagogical practices, as well as the teacher's reflection on the process of using LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with his/her/their students. Teachers were also able to share anecdotes about students' reactions and learning throughout the book study experience, as well as their own professional growth. Depending on the text chosen by the teacher, the availability of the teacher, and other factors out of my control, three distinct interviews were not always possible (See Table 2). For instance, my first participant had already begun using an LGBTQ-inclusive book with his class before I could conduct a pre-unit interview. The mid-unit interview and lesson observation was sufficient to interrogate his planning stage and implementation of the book. The entire interview process, regardless of whether or not I was able

to perform all three interviews, allowed me “to ask specific questions about issues and probe for in-depth information about the subjects’ feelings, attitudes, interests, concerns, and values” which offered a rich understanding of the teachers’ practices, pedagogy, and outcomes using LGBTQ-inclusive literature (Wimberly, 2015, p. 14).

Table 2

Interviews conducted for each participant

Participant	Interview before use of LGBTQ-inclusive book	Interview mid-way through use of LGBTQ-inclusive book	Final summative interview after completion of LGBTQ-inclusive book
Michael		X	X
Kimberly	X	X	X
Sarah	X	X	X
Carrie	X		X
Amber	X	X	

Two of the interviews for this study were conducted face-to-face in a quiet location, either in the participant’s classroom or at a library. In three instances the participants were outside of driving distance requiring me to conduct interviews using audio recorded phone conversations. Participants represented a wide array of geographical locations from across the Midwest United States. Thus, physical observation of lessons was not possible with four of the five participants.

Each interview, most lasting approximately one hour, was audio-recorded and I transcribed each. Since most interviews took place over the phone, verbal consent was obtained prior to beginning the interviews, as allowed by the IRB (see script for verbal consent in Appendix I). At the beginning of the initial interview, I spent time outlining the focus of my study, which I had also explained during the participant selection process. The initial interview

was also used to establish trust with the participant, and I assured them I was not critiquing or evaluating their ability to teach or their lessons, but was looking at how they were using the literature and their process in doing so. The semi-structured interviews followed the IRB approved questions as closely as possible. Often the participant would begin answering a specific question and the conversation would naturally lead to other topics or points of interest and include answers to subsequent questions. Field notes and summative case study memos were written on each case after the interviews and/or observation. Data analysis began following the first interview using the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser, 2000), as well as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gee, 2015; Glaser, 2000; Saldana, 2013).

Teachers were asked to provide any other documents they were willing to share, such as worksheets, discussion guides, work samples, etcetera used during the teaching of the LGBT-inclusive literature. (Most of these documents are included in the case write-ups in Chapter 4. Otherwise, they can be found in the appendix section.) No participants provided lesson plans. One participant provided anonymized work samples from her students. Several participants provided various other documents including newsletters sent to parents, discussion guides used with students, school websites, and published articles.

Due to location and timing, a direct observation of the lessons was not possible except with one participant. For the in-person observation, I took copious amounts of field notes including anything directly seen or heard during the lesson and personal reflections on the observations. I then augmented my field notes with teacher and student artifacts, such as posters, class assignments, anonymized student work, or any other written or visual material I could gather (Wimberly, 2015). The focus of the study remains the teachers' use of the literature and the manner in which the teachers were able to confront issues of gender and sexuality; therefore, the observations were solely of the teacher and his/her/their teaching practices. No analysis occurred of the student(s) input or dialogue during the lesson.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted of complementary approaches, specifically attention to each case through qualitative interpretive analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Qualitative Interpretive Analysis

Qualitative interpretive analysis provided the approach to analyze the data collected from each individual case (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Qualitative interpretive analysis offers a means of blending formal coding and analysis of data with the ability of the researcher to constantly redesign and reintegrate theoretical notions through the use of memo writing while formulating categories, themes, and patterns. Data analysis for this study followed five steps:

1. Open and axial coding of case 1

At the completion of the first participant's semi-structured interviews and observations, I analyzed *within* the single case, open coding and summarizing all available data sources, as applicable. I then wrote a summary constructing the case based on all interviews, observations, and data sources, including my understanding and interpretation of the individual case. Appendix F shows an example of my coding process, both literal and inductive, as well as summarizing statements for Sarah. This same process was completed for all participants.

2. Open and axial coding of cases 2-5

After each subsequent interview, open coding and summarization occurred *within* the individual cases, using open coding and expanding on the categories identified within the previous interviews.

3. **Look for key issues and recurring categories**

After subsequent interviews, I compared *between* interviews searching for similarities and differences among interviews. Within each case categories and themes emerged from the data.

4. **Provide incidents of categories under exploration**

Within each case I provided rich detail with examples and data quotes. Through the process of writing the case narratives important features emerged and became salient.

5. **Member checks were conducted and cases expanded**

After all available data was synthesized within each case, I emailed each teacher participant his/her case write-up asking for feedback. Participants were asked to check my understanding of their pedagogical and curricular practice. If there were areas within the case that lacked detail or examples, participants were asked to provide additional information.

Qualitative interpretive analysis offered a guide by which to understand each individual case study. Chapter 4 will present each individual case in narrative fashion to show the complexities and relationships among the actions and components each teacher demonstrated.

The categories and themes established in each case required an additional, yet complementary, process for cross-case analysis. Thematic analysis as articulated by Braun & Clark (2006) offered further analytical methods in regard to both the interviews and the additional documents, observations, field notes, and work samples I was able to collect between and across all cases.

Thematic Analysis

Interview transcripts, observations, field notes, correspondence from participants, and all other documents were manually analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). The interview transcripts provide the bulk of the data. However, I accumulated various other data in

the form of field notes, handouts, student work samples, discussion guides, and publications. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing [sic] and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). This accessible analytical method “does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 81). Unlike other methods that seek themes across an entire data set, thematic analysis focuses more on locating themes within a data item, which works well with the multiple-case study methodology of this project. Thematic analysis provided a means to integrate other data into each interview, providing a richer more detailed case.

Braun and Clark (2006) argue because of the flexible nature of thematic analysis, and qualitative research in general, there is no hard-and-fast formula or rule regarding the number of times a theme occurs in the data. It then becomes the task of the researcher to offer rich and descriptive accounts of the data to justify asserted themes. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), involves six specific phases.

Phase 1: Become familiar with available data

I familiarized myself with the data. I personally transcribed the interviews, read and re-read the transcripts and documents, and began noting initial ideas.

Phase 2: Open and axial coding

I then began generating initial codes through open coding. I coded interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and collated data relevant to each code.

In addition to the open and axial coding of the interview transcripts as mentioned above under the Constant Comparative Method, field notes and all other documents were open-coded and/or summarized based on the research questions and theoretical perspective of the study. The code tables (see Appendix F as an example) were expanded.

Phase 3: **Develop themes**

I then began searching for themes, collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. Searching across all codes and summary statements, I manually began to group similar codes and ideas from across cases together, expanding on the cross-case analysis developed during the constant comparative method of analysis.

Phase 4: **Thematic mapping of all data**

I then reviewed themes; checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set and generated a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis (Appendices B-E). Adding to the charts produced qualitative interpretive analysis, I continued to develop the themes/assertions with data from the additional documents.

Phase 5: **Refine and define theme(s)**

I then defined and named themes: this was an ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, by generating clear definitions and names for each theme. Themes were used to form findings in the form of cross-case assertions (Erickson, 1986; Stake, 2006).

Phase 6: **Produce final report**

Finally, the writing of the cross-case analysis (see final chapter) afforded the final opportunity for analysis and included the selection of vivid, compelling extract examples. The final chapter includes extracted quotes and data from across all data sources, as well as discussion of how it supports or adds to already existing scholarship on the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children’s literature.

Validity and Credibility

According to Patton (2002), the credibility of any qualitative research project “depends on three distinct but related inquiry elements” (p. 552). The research must employ rigorous research methods during both the data collection and analysis stages. Systematic analysis of data occurs while always staying attuned to issues of credibility. The credibility of the researcher remains at the heart of all qualitative research regarding training, experience, and presentation of self (Patton, 2002). Finally, the philosophical belief in the value of the nature and promise of qualitative research must be present in order for the research to hold credibility.

For this current study, the maintenance of rigor remains of the utmost importance. All methods associated with multiple case studies are clearly articulated based on methods asserted by Stake (2006), Patton (2002), and Gee (2015). The validity, or meaningfulness, of qualitative inquiry emanates from the “richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher” (Patton, 2002, p. 245).

Triangulation of data sources, specifically multiple subjects and multiple interviews with each subject, occurred through the use of multiple interview participants from a variety of backgrounds, sharing differing perspectives, and from diverse geographical areas. Multiple interviews with each participant provided another layer of triangulation. Each participant was interviewed multiple times providing instances to check for consistency among each teacher’s story. Various data sources were also used, whenever available, consisting of the participants’ documents such as discussion guides, worksheets, anonymous student work samples, and parent letters related to the subject under investigation. As themes emerged across cases multiple data sources among multiple participants were compiled to substantiate my findings. Negative cases and alternative explanations were sought to avoid notions of bias and increase researcher credibility. For instance, my final participant offered a different level of experience than the other teacher participants necessitating a wider view during cross-case analysis.

Multiple theory triangulation occurs using multiple theoretical lenses applied to the data to construct findings and examine “how competing theoretical perspectives inform a particular analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 248). The use of queer theory in tandem with critical literacy offer multiple lenses to interpret the available data.

Finally, I conducted member checks. Participants observed and interviewed had the opportunity to review the transcripts to confirm the language used was indeed what they meant. Participants were also given the opportunity to conduct a member-check on the final case write-up. The participants were able to offer comments and feedback regarding the “accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity” of the data analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 560). To complete the member check, each participant was e-mailed their case write-up. I included follow-up questions, noting where I felt the description was not as rich as possible, or where I needed further examples. When important details were considered missing from the interviews, the member-check offered a means by which I could interrogate for further information or meaning from the participants. All five teachers participated in the member checks. The first four participants provided complimentary feedback of their case as well as offering substantial details to parts of their narratives I had highlighted as needing elaboration. The final participant read her final case write-up and agreed with its accuracy. However, she did not provide any additional details to further supplement her narrative. It remains my goal to represent the thoughts and understandings of the teacher participants accurately and clearly. However, the final interpretations and findings are my interpretations and analysis of what I observed and theorized throughout the research process.

Throughout the study I was fortunate to be a part of an active writing group of fellow doctoral students who were always willing to read and offer feedback at each stage of the process. Bi-weekly meetings, whether in person or via video conferencing, provided an opportunity to discuss theory, talk through data analysis, and offer motivation. In addition to my writing group, I

sought out a retired professor knowledgeable in qualitative research methods as a dissertation coach and mentor.

Study Limitations

As with most qualitative research, a limited number of participants offer only a limited number of lived experiences for analysis. This study seeks to develop theory regarding the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with upper-elementary students. This study is limited to the views of the participants, all of which willingly chose to include LGBTQ-inclusive literature into their curriculum and pedagogical practice. The geographical and social environments in which the participants teach affect their pedagogical practice through the influence of community values, beliefs, and attitudes, which in turn affects the types of experiences they encountered when using LGBTQ-inclusive literature. Participants were chosen based on their ability to offer rich and diverse experiences to achieve maximum information and redundancy, thus adding to increased credibility. A more diverse sample of schools, representing a wider array of the United States, both geographically and culturally could better illuminate the tie between community attitudes and points of view and the extent to which schools and teachers are able to enact queering practices.

Not all participants were able to participate in all three planned interviews. Teachers using picturebooks as part of a single lesson did not warrant the need for a midway interview due to timing restrictions. Geography limited the amount of direct observations I could perform. I preferred to observe each teacher within their classroom setting use the inclusive text, but that was not possible. Observing each teacher would have provided a more complete case. While an additional interview or observations would undoubtedly have yielded more data, I feel confident I was still able to capture an accurate story of how each teacher queered their curriculum and pedagogy.

Summary

The use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with upper-elementary grade students deserves rigorous investigation. The use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with upper-elementary students has been largely absent from the American educational system and consequently from educational research. This qualitative research fills a necessary gap investigating the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature by interviewing a sampling of the pioneers who have, or are just beginning to tackle this often controversial, yet extremely important, feat.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the individual case narratives of five experienced teachers who used LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in their classrooms with students ranging from 3rd-6th grades. Their stories, comprised primarily from interviews, observations, and supplemented with auxiliary documents provided by the participants, seek to answer the following question:

What are the teachers' queering practices emerging throughout the process of using LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature with upper elementary students?

This overarching question is broken down with the following three sub-questions:

- Why do teachers choose to use LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in the upper elementary classroom?
- How do teachers use LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature? How do they describe their pedagogical practices with upper elementary students?
- How do teachers reflect on their pedagogical practices and accomplishments with the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature?

I answer the subquestions in this chapter as I tell how each teacher queered their teaching through their text selections and pedagogical moves. I tell the story of how each teacher participant used books and texts geared toward the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals and/or to confront and disrupt

topics related to gender and sexuality. I began each case with a section outlining the school context in which the teacher worked to provide the necessary foundational background information. The bulk of each case comprises each teacher participant’s motivations, pedagogical moves, and reflections on practice, which I use to answer the subquestions noted above. I organize each case with three main sections; the school’s context in which the teacher works, the teacher’s background information, and the teacher’s queering practices through the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature. The section outlining how teacher’s queer their pedagogy and curriculum is divided into sections denoting the teacher’s motivations, pedagogical moves, and reflections on practice. Tables and figures throughout each case show general participant information, data sources, and synopses of the LGBTQ-inclusive books in a concise format. Following the cases, I share the themes that emerged through the data and analysis process in a final summary. These themes guide the assertions I will make in Chapter 5.

Case Study #1: Michael

You have to know what you’re talking about, right? If you’re just, “Oh I want to do this, but I don’t know why.” You need to at least kind of know why you want to do something...so you can explain it to other people that might not have that luxury (Michael, Interview 1).

Table 3

Overview of case #1

Name	Gender	Years of Exp.	Grade Level	Book(s) Used	Type of School
Michael	Male	2 years at Woodriver; 16 years additional experience in common and higher education	6th grade	<i>George</i> by Alex Gino	Independent school



Michael's School Context

Woodriver's campus is nestled within a wooded area giving the illusion of being in the country, though just minutes from the bustle of a large city. The school's campus, with its beautifully maintained buildings and playgrounds is also home to a multitude of animals. Michael's 6th grade classroom is part of the school's middle-school program and utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning. He works closely with other teachers as he plans lessons, often developing units which incorporate social justice issues, such as gender and sexuality, racial discrimination, and hate crimes. The school is relatively small with about 33 students at each grade level, and most class sizes are approximately 10-12 students. I observed his 1st hour ELA class, which consisted of 11 6th grade students. Throughout my observations, and confirmed in his interview, it was apparent the students and teachers share a great deal of informal interactions and conversations demonstrated in the comfort with each other both in and out of the classroom setting. Michael's classroom lacked the formal hand-raising and protocols typically seen in many classrooms in which students wait their turn to speak when called upon. Students interrupted and injected viewpoints and often talked over each other in natural dialogue.

The school's mission includes a commitment to provide a family-oriented atmosphere in which students will learn and develop in a diverse environment. The mission asserts they prepare the whole student as a responsible and confident learner, ready for future success. While not articulated explicitly in the mission or philosophy statement of the school, Woodriver Middle School is a progressive school in which social justice and diversity issues are often at the forefront of the curriculum. Throughout the school, posters and past projects were displayed evidencing student work surrounding social justice issues. One project displayed included a map of the city in which known "hate groups" had been identified and researched. I counted the word "Diversity" prominently displayed at least three times throughout Michael's classroom on posters and books. Social justice was clearly at the heart of the school and his classroom teaching. The philosophy of the school revolves around the idea of making success a habit within their students. Beyond the mastering of facts and skills, students should become strong readers, problem solvers, and critical thinkers. Woodriver has several openly gay, lesbian, and Trans* students or faculty, creating an environment in which the LGBTQ population is well represented and, according to Michael, "is not something strange or weird or out of the ordinary" for this independent school.

Michael: A Respected Teacher with a Laid Back Style

Michael is a 51-year-old, openly gay, 6th grade English Language Arts teacher at Woodriver School, an independent school in an urban city in the state of Oklahoma. Michael holds a PhD in Curriculum Studies and Social Foundations. Part of Michael's philosophy of education, as shared with the school in which he teaches, paints curriculum very broadly, including the conversations and activities his students engage in throughout the course of the school day, not just those items appearing on his lesson plan. Michael uses a "Deweyistic" style of teaching allowing students to lead their own learning as much as possible. Students are allowed input as to which books they will read and are given freedom to choose topics for various projects throughout the year.

Michael asserts he is conscientious to not push an agenda on his students. Michael approaches his teaching with an air of confidence stemming from his age, education, and wide range of life experiences, while also maintaining a humbleness in admitting, “I don’t have all the answers. This is my experience and I don’t push an agenda on students.” I tell them “you’re going to be exposed to this if you go to college, if you go to church, if you’re in this school...we have to find a way to work together.” Michael clearly stated multiple times throughout his interviews that he does not “push an agenda.” It is clear through the school’s mission statement, the focus on social justice, the manner in which he teaches, his book choice(s), and the reasoning behind his book selection that he clearly teaches with purpose in mind, as evidenced later as we look at the ways in which he purposefully seeks to queer his curriculum.

Michael is part of a relatively small faculty working closely with each other to plan cross-curricular activities whenever possible, yet also holds a great deal of autonomy within his classroom to develop lessons centered around the needs of his students. For instance, teachers throughout the school collectively and collaboratively planned and taught the unit revolving around community hate-crimes, with Michael possessing both the autonomy to choose the text(s) and approach, as well as the responsibility for the English Language Arts component of the unit specific to his students’ needs and abilities. However, he is also able to incorporate additional topics or themes, such as issues of gender with the book *George* when he chooses. Michael possessed both the freedom of choice and the use of school funds to choose books usually with “no questions asked.” On occasion when administrators asked for justification for book purchases, he offered an overview of the book(s) and how he would be using it and the administrators willingly agreed.

We found this book George, we want to order it for the class and we think it’ll be great.

They’re [administration] like, “Oh, what’s it about?” “Oh, it’s about this, “Oh, it sounds wonderful.” And just no batting of eyes.

Michael feels his credentials of having earned a PhD afford him some authority. He feels respected and admired in his role of teacher. He is obviously a revered teacher at the school by the administration, commenting that administration will often make it a point to introduce him to potential students and parents noting his PhD status. This status within the school and educational setting offers some power and authority to Michael. He is aware of this dynamic and uses it to be able to address issues within the classroom with a sense of authority. Woodriver has a supportive school culture aligned strongly in regard to gender and sexuality inclusion. Paired with Michael's credentials, this combination could enhance his ability to incorporate Trans* issues at the 6th grade level. "I do think having that ability to analyze and think critically and synthesize multiple perspectives; that is the gift that the PhD does give..." He also notes his PhD creates some conflicts when he uses his critical thinking training to question administration's use of various programs he feels does not align with the school's expressed mission. His PhD gives him the vocabulary and frameworks to consider and address issues at a more critical level. His title appears to carry clout and prestige with parents. When pressed further about his perceived level of prestige, Michael was quick to acknowledge that all faculty had their own level of expertise, strengths, and "clout" and "each used our power in different ways and [for] different purposes." Michael used both his advanced education and his years of teaching experience to respond quickly and with care to parent questions and concerns about his pedagogical decisions. Michael felt confident in his ability to address any questions or concerns when they did arise.

Michael had the complete support of his administrative team, counselors, and fellow teachers as he planned and taught LGBTQ inclusive curriculum. As previously stated, when Michael asked to purchase LGBTQ inclusive literature his requests were granted by the administration without the "batting of an eye." While he held plenty of autonomy to teach as he chose, most of his curriculum, in line with the school's philosophy, remained project-based which required the collaboration of multiple teachers, counselors, and administrators. Although the book

George was not part of a larger school-wide project, the administration and other faculty were both cognizant and supportive of his book choice. *I kinda went back and forth. I was like, ok, I probably should send out an email to parents just letting them know. Well, but then I was like, well why? Why would I? What is so different about this character?* (Michael, Interview 1).

Michael did not notify the parents about the book *George*. Before reading the book he contemplated emailing the parents of the students to give a “heads-up” for the book and content they were about to experience, but decided since he had not emailed about any other title throughout the year, doing so now was not needed and would possibly send the wrong message to parents, that this book was somehow inappropriate and needed their approval. Several times throughout his interview he mentioned to me that he questioned whether he should notify the parents. He mentioned asking the counselor and two additional parents if he should send an email to parents. Neither the counselor nor the two parents encouraged him to email all the parents. However, the fact he continued to ask people gives reason to believe he felt as though he should do so. He obviously had some doubts regarding parent permission; this is a prominent theme I will address in the following chapter.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Book Chosen

Figure 2

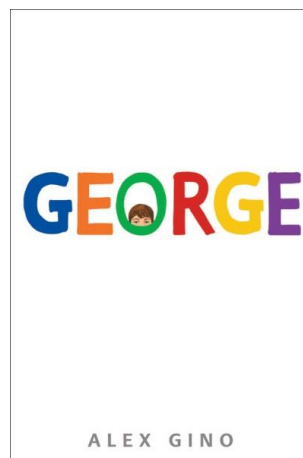


Table 4

Synopsis of the book “George”

Title: <i>George</i>	Author: Alex Gino	Copyright: 2017
Synopsis: BE WHO YOU ARE. When people look at George, they see a boy. But George knows she’s a girl. George thinks she’ll have to keep this a secret forever. Then her teacher announces that their class play is going to be <i>Charlotte’s Web</i> . George really, really, REALLY wants to play Charlotte. But the teacher says she can’t even try out for the part ... because she’s a boy. With the help of her best friend Kelly, George comes up with a plan. Not just so she can be Charlotte – but so everyone can know who she is, once and for all. GEORGE is a candid, genuine, and heartwarming middle grade about a transgender girl who is, to use Charlotte’s word, R-A-D-I-A-N-T! Source: http://www.alexgino.com/george/		

Queering the Curriculum with LGBTQ Literature

Michael’s Motivations

Michael’s 6th graders were finishing up a unit on the book *George* by Alex Gino meant to spark discussions regarding Trans* issues and the ability to be yourself and accept others for being themselves. Michael’s based his decision to use the book *George* on a couple of different factors. The school had used the book with 8th graders the previous year but found the reading

level to be more suitable for their 5th or 6th graders. The 8th graders who had read the book the previous year recommended the book for use with the 6th graders (which gives credence to the philosophy of student's involvement in the guiding of the curriculum). Michael offered the students two choices before they read the book, *George* by Gino or *The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugees* by Don Brown. The students chose to read the book *George* because of the content and the fact the book contained a topic different and new to them.

George was chosen because of the social justice content of the book and because it was expected to create lively discussion. At least for this unit, it did not appear specific literacy or comprehension skills were the driving force behind its choosing. Michael and this independent school do not follow state standards or yearly state testing. While comprehension strategies such as theme, making inferences, and point of view were included in a holistic and embedded manner within the discussions, according to Michael, the teaching of individual skills was not the driving force behind his lesson preparation. Michael focused, in line with his school's mission, more on critical thinking and pushing students to think deeper and more globally. Michael noted when adults discuss books with other adults they focus on themes, feelings, and ideas, not on isolated comprehension strategies.

Michael's Pedagogical Moves

Michael allowed students, in pairs or alone, to read the book in multiple configurations during class time. Students participated in oral reading with a small group or were allowed to find a quiet place within the common areas of the school to read independently, some students even opted to go outside and find a comfortable place to read. Following his "Deweyistic philosophy" Michael allowed quite a range of student choice and decision-making in their reading of the book. He did not assign homework, unless students needed extra time to finish reading.

As a pre-reading activity to *George*, Michael showed a video of Jazz Jennings, a Trans* girl and outspoken Trans* activist with her own television show and children's picturebook. Michael used this video to scaffold the vocabulary the students were about to face during the reading of the book, specifically the word transgender. The video introduced a living Trans* female and her real-life story, providing background knowledge students were able to extrapolate to the fictional story of *George*.

Need for Explicit Addressing of Gender and Sexuality Issues.

Michael thought it important to explicitly address the topics of gender and sexuality with his students. As previously stated, Woodriver does have a population of openly LGBTQ students and faculty. Michael thought it important to create a situation in which topics related to the LGBTQ community could be openly and explicitly discussed with the students through the use of literature.

There are fewer Trans students or fewer gay students than there are hetero students, but it's certainly something, it's not something out of the ordinary at [my school]. So I felt it was important to at least have that discussion because you know, we always think they got it, there's Trans* people or gay people, and students these days are hip or they're into it, but I really wanted to get to that and overcoming the obstacles (Michael, Interview 2).*

Teachers assume the students “get it” because gay students are present and often visible within the educational environment. Michael was concerned since we assume “students these days [are] hip or they're into it” we risk assuming that students fully understand topics as important as gender and sexuality. Although LGBTQ students are present and accepted within the Woodriver community, Michael acknowledged obstacles for these students to overcome still exist, as there are for all students, and he could use this book and topic to address the needs of all students

through the theme of overcoming obstacles. Thus, this pedagogical move provides windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) for all students through focusing on self-examination and self-study.

Novelty of Text, Student Engagement, and Critical Thinking.

The use of a book with a Trans* main character provided a novelty for the students, since none of the students had read a book with a Trans* character before.

I would say there was more engagement with this book than with any book that we've read over the course of the semester.

Students did feel that it was different than other books by having a trans character, because they've read about boy heroes and girls as heroes, and they have never read about a Trans student that they could openly root for and share their thoughts and opinions for (Interview 2).*

Because the book was different from anything they had ever read before, they were able “to openly root for” and develop connections with a Trans* character. They specifically chose this book because of the topic and that they had not read such a book before. One of his most reticent boy readers, who performed at a minimal level in English Language Arts classes, came up to Michael one day and expressed how this was the most favorite book he's read so far because “it's about a Trans* kid and we've never read about that before.” This newness, according to Michael, created more engagement with both the reading of the book and the discussion that followed.

Being an independent school, Woodriver in general, and Michael specifically, is not overly concerned with state standards, focusing more on critical thinking and pushing students to think deeper and more globally. Michael noted at least a couple of students were challenged in their thinking based on their religious beliefs and their church's teachings.

I'm not sure that I would say that I challenged religious beliefs or church teachings directly. Having grown up in a few different Christian churches as well as having lived in majority Native American, Buddhist, and Muslim cultures, I was aware of differing interpretations of how religious texts may be read in ways that include and exclude. So when a student might privately say that "In the Bible, it says this...", I could note that "It also says this"--one of my main examples was "Love thy neighbor as thyself" and "Judge ye not lest ye be judged." I would ask how are we to balance the common belief that God does not approve of LGBTQ people while asking us to love each other and not judge each other. These are questions that obviously adults struggle with. So, in my mind, I tried to create a kind of dissonance without telling students what to think. I think having reflected deeply on my religious beliefs, having experienced other cultures, and having a desire not to change, discount, or reject others while providing my own alternative readings helped me in this regard.

Throughout the entire reading of *George*, as is Michael's usual practice, all students are allowed to offer their opinions and beliefs and Michael intentionally creates and encourages a classroom space that offers room for differences of opinions and multiple interpretations of texts.

De-emotionalize the Teaching of Controversial Topics.

Another issue Michael recognized throughout his social justice work was the need to “de-emotionalize” the process of discussing topics when strong feelings and emotions are present.

They [the school] try to say, how can we make this work for everyone and how can we take the hurt and pain out of it, and still make our points and still work for social justice. And so they've been supportive of that, that is one place that I suppose an independent school like that has a little more power to do that. But I would think a public school would want to do the same.

Not only regarding gender and sexuality issues, but with other social justice issues throughout the year such as hate groups, Michael recognized the need to encourage students to have discussions with a sense of working together to solve an issue without getting mad, upset, or simply burying their heads in the sand. Michael would lead logical discussions while allowing students to express their opinions and back them up. Intertwining logic with emotion led to a sort of “de-emotionalizing” the process in which students were encouraged to work for social justice and in which students could make their ideas work for everyone, not just their belief system. Michael was conscious to acknowledge he did not have all the answers and was deliberate to “not push an agenda,” but instead to offer another angle for students to think through a situation offering multiple perspectives. In this pedagogical practice, he emphasized that all perspectives were welcome and supported, but will also be challenged.

Michael's Reflections

Maintaining Neutrality VS. Working Toward a Mission.

I have gay friends and they're like, 'Oh, being gay today is so easy.' And I'm like, 'I'm going to challenge that. I don't think it's as easy as we're led to believe or have seen. Is it different? Yes. Has it gotten better? Absolutely, cause I can remember being mortally afraid. Now I think there is less fear, but I see that same fear in students, and that same desire to be part of the group and be like other people, and struggle with these issues, and even a little of the joking about these kinds of differences, like being gay. So I don't think it's, you know, as people are saying, 'We're over it, we're done, the fight's over.' No, there is still a lot of work to be done! (Michael, Interview 2).

My goal is to promote self and other understanding without trying to destroy the other. How can we find a way to work between our differences? In what ways are differences considered bad? From my perspective, students are capable of thinking through and

wrestling with these issues when they are taught that it is okay to not have all of the answers (Interview 2).

While Michael clearly states multiple times throughout his interviews that he seeks to not push an agenda on students and wants every student's voice to be heard, he also states his job is to push them to be able to justify their beliefs, regardless of what they are, even if they differ from his. It is clear both he and the school in which he teaches does have an agenda in mind. As he clearly states, "there is work to be done" and he is choosing to do that work. Whether the topic Michael and his students address is related to gender and sexuality, politics, racism, or any other social justice topic, Michael asserts he constantly questions himself and his own beliefs. Using what he refers to as an "inquiry-based stance," he wants his students to develop a "kind of questioning and reflection" to help them "understand and respond to critiques from a variety of perspectives."

Honesty and Openness.

I can say I don't have all the answers, this is my experience and I don't push an agenda on students. This is what I say, 'I have some things I want you to think about. You're going to be exposed to this if you go to college, if you go to church, if you're in this school, some students are going to be like this, and this, and this and we have to find a way to work together.' So I'm not promoting one thing or another, and I support and challenge, you know, all perspectives in order to develop a deeper understanding (Interview 2).

Michael was not alone in his work. He worked as part of a teaching community focused on the students. When asked, "What would he have done if the administration had balked at the use of the book *George?*" he replied he would have asked for their concerns and tried to address them. He would have ultimately proceeded with the book, after addressing each concern with examples

of other books they have taught with “issues” in them. Michael encourages all teachers to anticipate the questions, challenges, and obstacles a book might pose and to prepare to address them when asked.

Michael cautioned against the use of secrecy when choosing texts for students. He started a conversation with teachers and administrators about books they were using (or intend to use) and talked through the obstacles and social/political issues. This created transparency in the teachers’ work, as well as prepared them for questions and issues with parents and students should they have arisen. Being able to state a clear purpose for a book choice and having data ready to share, shows the value and need to address a topic. Though Michael was not overly concerned with state standards, he understood the importance of knowing the state standards and how the chosen text was able to address them. All of these factors helped create the teacher’s reputation of integrity and aided to avoid any possible negative situations that may have arisen from the use of LGBTQ literature.

Case Study #2: Kimberly

Table 5

Overview of case #2

Name	Gender	Years of Exp.	Grade Level	Book(s) Used	Type of School
Kimberly	Female	11 years	3rd grade	<i>George</i> by Alex Gino	Non-profit tuition-based independent



Kimberly's School Context

We let their interests kinda dictate where we go with the curriculum (Kimberly, Interview 1).

Prairie River is a non-profit, tuition-based school following the Reggio Emilia approach. Class sizes remain small, employing a two-year looping format with students, and student interests guide the curriculum. According to the school website, the school's curriculum is integrated and experimental and follows the belief that student motivation and learning are best when students are engaged in activities they find meaningful.

This emergent and justice-focused educational environment allows Kimberly the freedom to use student interests to teach skills through relevant content. Prairie River uses national

standards such as Common Core to guide its grade-level teaching of processes, skills, and content. Kimberly further bases her curriculum on current events, paying attention to students' interests and topics she believes will be of interest. According to Prairie River's website, the school does not shy away from confronting difficult topics. Instead they ask students to think critically about their personal experiences, as well as the experiences of others.

In addition to a stringent academic curriculum, the school adopts several initiatives such as restorative justice, social justice, anti-racism, and a sexuality education program *Our Whole Lives*, which "recognizes and respects the diversity of participants with respect to sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disability status" (school website). These programs support the school's emphasis on educating the whole child while working for a world of justice. Upon inspection of the school's website, I noticed that all staff pictured in the school directory appear as women, non-binary and/or Trans*, however, mention of that did not present in the interview and does not appear on the website as an intentional aspect of the school.

Kimberly: A Responsive and Inclusive Teacher

Kimberly is a 2nd/3rd mixed-grade teacher at an independent school in a mid-sized city in southern Michigan. Kimberly has 10 years of teaching experience but has been out of the classroom for the past 12 years. This is her first year back into the classroom after taking time off to raise children. For this case study, Kimberly focused on the 3rd graders in her mixed-grade classroom. I did not ask Kimberly's race or sexual orientation, nor did she offer that information throughout the interviews.

One of Kimberly's students is the daughter of a professor and leading researcher in the use of diverse children's literature, specifically LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature. As an out lesbian, the professor serves as a resource for Kimberly in deciding what book to choose to read to the class. The professor also provides motivation for Kimberly to incorporate literature with

diverse gender and sexuality issues. Kimberly wants all of her students to see themselves included in the curriculum. Knowing she has students with same-sex parents is only part of her motivation to include LGBTQ-inclusive literature within her curriculum. Kimberly acknowledges the value of including diverse literature.

Kimberly feels the complete support of the school and its administration to incorporate diverse topics in her curriculum such as gender and sexual orientation. The school has several faculty identifying under the LGBTQ umbrella, both Trans* and gay; as well as several students who are Trans* or gay. While Kimberly has almost total control over her curriculum and pedagogical choices, the school's focus on social justice and their acceptance of both queer teachers and students allow her to incorporate diverse children's literature without fear of repercussions. However, she acknowledges, as in any school environment that places adults in charge of children, teachers need to be ready to justify pedagogical and curricular choices to the parents who place their students in our care.

When asked about her expectations from parents she stated she expected them to have an open mind and knew that because of the school's mission she would receive it.

I just want to be prepared, you know, the talking points for if this parent has concerns for any reason, that you know, I am keeping it age appropriate. So how can we frame it, so the children see that this is all just, it's all normal? It's just matter-of-fact, these are the characters, these are the character's family structures and that's it. We don't have to necessarily make a huge deal out of it every time. I guess that is what I want to do

(Kimberly, Interview 1).

During the interview, Kimberly expressed concerns over a specific parent of one of her students she anticipated would take issue with parts of the book and had a propensity to "run to the school head" over every concern. However, she did not want to avoid the book just "because of the flack I'd get from it." Instead she wanted to be prepared for the parent to question her book choice and

have answers and justifications ready. Prior to choosing or using the book *George*, Kimberly consulted the professor, who was able to offer ideas on how to approach parent concerns should they arise, making Kimberly more comfortable using the book. Kimberly knew she had the complete support of the administration. Ultimately, she received no negative comments. In fact, she only had one parent say anything about the use of the book, which was, “Oh, I love that book.”

Queering the Curriculum with LGBTQ Literature

Kimberly’s Motivation

What I do in read-alouds with the kids is I like to go pretty deep with them, so that we can have those discussions and those books for most of the kids in there wouldn’t read, due either to their reading level or interest (Kimberly, Interview 1).

During our initial interview Kimberly was trying to decide which book she wanted to use with her students. She knew she was going to be using the book as a read-aloud during lunch time. She had limited her selection to *George* (2015) by Alex Gino, or *The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher* (2015) by Dana Alison Levy. *The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher* includes a same-sex couple as parents, while *George’s* main character is a Trans* girl. Prior to making her final selection she read both books and sought the guidance of the professor, who had used the books with elementary and college-aged students. Kimberly was leaning toward using the book *George*, but was uncomfortable with a few parts in the book, specifically the part of the book referencing “dirty magazines.”

Kimberly purposefully chooses books for read-aloud that spark deep discussions, are above the students’ reading level, and offer new perspectives for her students, which she feels fills a vital component of her school’s social justice focus. While most teachers carefully choose books based on the same criteria Kimberly does, she thinks that the setting in which she reads the

book(s), over lunch in an informal manner and outside of the normal academic day, “opens the doors to these deeper discussions with the kids.” After reading the book *George*, Kimberly knew it was a story she wanted to read to her students because of its unique perspective and her students’ abilities to explore such a topic. Timing was a concern. Having just finished a book with what she considered “a pretty heavy emotional load”, she considered *The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher* because of its lighter nature, with the intention of circling back to *George* later in the school year. Ultimately, Kimberly decided to read *George*, citing the book’s perspective and inclusion of a Trans* character as the determining factor.

Kimberly’s Pedagogical Moves

Responsive Pedagogy.

Prior to the unit, and acting as a catalyst for the unit, Kimberly began to notice during morning meetings and other class conversations her students were becoming more and more judgmental of other people they experienced outside of school, often jumping to conclusions about a person without knowing the situation. For example, one day during a class conversation a student made a comment, “Oh my gosh, I think they were crazy!” regarding a person the student simply saw getting out of their car. This example, paired with others she heard about teachers, students, and complete strangers, encouraged her to address the idea of tolerance and acceptance for others because one never knows a person’s complete story. This reinforced for Kimberly the importance of offering as many stories and topics as possible to her students and allowing them to open their eyes to multiple viewpoints and perspectives. This stance fits with the school’s focus on social justice issues, and she felt *George* was an appropriate book for such a lesson.

Deep Meaningful Conversations in an Informal Setting.

The school in which Kimberly teaches does not have a lunch room and students eat lunch in the classroom. As both a means of classroom management, as well as the ability to use each part of the day to the fullest, she reads to her students while they eat.

I guess for the same reason that car rides work for broaching tough conversations with kids. You're physically close, yet don't have to maintain as much eye contact which usually feels safer. There's no "getting away," but the desire for that is lessened because of the setting. While our school is overall progressive, some of our families have more conservative viewpoints and offering up these books in a less formal setting lets each student interact with the story from their current point of view with the hope of opening the lens wider.

Not making this reading and discussion time highly academic appears to afford her students both more enjoyment and more opportunities to explore the themes of the books without concerns for grades or criticism. While the read-aloud and critical discussions happening around the book during lunch time obviously related to a strong ELA program, Kimberly does not include her lunch time read-alouds in her lesson planning and formal ELA curriculum, but views them as an integral part of her students' ELA learning, as well as meeting the mission of the school.

Throughout the read-aloud process Kimberly stops and engages students in deep, meaningful conversations. Some days reading only small sections of text that ignite conversation, other days reading complete chapters before discussing.

Specific to George, the part where she puts on girls' underwear for the first time brings giggles. So our conversation focused on how important that small detail is to George and probably to many others as they are in the transition process; those things that cisgender people take for granted might take on more significance for Trans people. And how important it is for each person's gender expression to match who they are.*

Finding her students were not actively expressing their thoughts about the story, she would stop and prompt students for their thoughts by asking, "What do you think about what's going on in the story?" This allowed students the freedom to express their viewpoints and allowed Kimberly an understanding of what the students were comprehending, or overlooking, about the story.

While the book *George* is often noted for the struggle of a Trans* girl coping with her gender identity, Kimberly's students focused on the main character's struggle to open up to others about her thoughts and feelings, and how hard it is to let people know our true selves. The students' focus speaks to both Kimberly's pedagogical choices to allow the students to lead the discussion, as well as the students' abilities to respond with higher level texts at an appropriate developmental level. With the possibility of the topic of gender identity being outside many of the students' comprehension ability, Kimberly focused more on being able to share one's thoughts and feelings. This enabled Kimberly to lead students back to appropriate conversations of gender identity as in the above example.

Kimberly did not use her read-aloud as an explicit part of her ELA curriculum; however, she viewed her use of the daily lunch-time read-aloud as a comprehension unit done completely verbally. There were no assignments or lessons associated with the read-aloud book. However, the rich conversations produced examples of learning that she saw as a companion to her ELA teaching, such as recall, summarization, main idea and supporting details, and speaking and listening.

While Kimberly wanted to specifically choose a book confronting the topic of gender or sexual diversity so her students can have discussions, she also expresses concern for wanting to balance that with seeing either of these issues as normal and not make these issues a big deal. Choosing the book *George*, she knew the Trans* issue would surface, and she was counting on it, the same as she did when choosing books to discuss homelessness, different abilities, racism, or other social justice issues. However, she was conscious to not make the topic of *George* being Trans* as anything odd, but instead just a reality of the diversity of human existence. Queering education is an act of challenging what is "normal" and opening other possibilities. Kimberly's intentional discussion of gender and sexuality issues in a manner that equalizes Trans* issues with other gender issues allows students to view Trans* individuals as they would any other human. In fact, her students expressed discomfort identifying Trans* as the "problem" of the

story since they did not view being Trans* as a “problem.” Instead, her students focused more on the issue of not being able to be someone’s authentic true self and the issues associated with letting others know who you really are. For third grade students to intentionally not problematize an issue such as transgenderism appears either a very mature decision requiring a deeper level of understanding, or an inability to appropriately confront such a topic and therefore deal with more developmentally appropriate topics such as acceptance and being yourself.

Kimberly strongly believes her students’ understanding “leans toward the mature end of the spectrum” as this is not the first encounter her students have had with transgenderism. Not only does she see her students as mature in their ability to discuss issues of gender identity but a variety of social justice issues because “children at our school are introduced to and explore many issues in the social justice realm from a very young age.” This early and repeated inclusion of important social justice issues creates a scaffolding for students to understand complex social issues at an appropriate and ever-deepening level.

Kimberly’s Reflections

Another factor Kimberly noted during the interview is her inability to know what students are thinking, but she was able to note body language of students. Throughout the reading of the book, she noted several times when students’ facial expressions changed (eyes opened wider, both eyebrows raised, still mouths) and “they just seemed to have a more thoughtful expression,” or the students would actually sit up straighter in their seats at certain parts, or stop what they were doing [eating] and listen more attentively. One specific example of this was when the main character, Melissa, tried on the different clothing and the author described how it felt on her body. Kimberly saw a noticeable change in the boys’ facial expressions she interpreted as them thinking. “I could tell wheels were spinning in their brains” when all external movement would pause and they were processing new information. Then students would respond with comments such as, “Oh, that would feel different,” something she assumes some of them

had not thought about before, as well as their ability to experience a sensation from someone else's perspective.

When asked about social or emotional learning, Kimberly feels like the 3rd graders did experience some changes in their social competence. One unique factor related to the reading of *George* is the fact the 3rd graders had a Trans* teacher last year as 2nd graders who was open with the students and explained gender and orientation to them. Kimberly states they were already “well versed and understanding the things that *George* was going through.” This prior knowledge gave students great insight into the characters as well as the social construct of gender.

The story of George came up with this year's students (kids loop for 2 years with the same teacher) several times in related discussions: when a guest teacher had changed his name, when a younger student started to tell one of his peer's transgender stories, and when an even younger student who visited our classroom once a week began to transition genders. My students who were with me last year were able to take their previous knowledge to be leaders to our younger friends in understanding, compassion, and allowing others to tell their own stories.

Already having an understanding and acceptance of Trans* individuals seemed to allow Kimberly's students to talk about other characters and their reaction to George/Melissa. They critiqued the story through multiple perspectives, not only the protagonist. Students were also able to empathize with characters such as George's mother who was not the most accepting of George, as well as friends and teachers they know in real life.

Because of the looping format her school uses, having students for two consecutive years, she plans to only use the book *George* every other year. She sees this story as important for her students to hear and understand. When asked about possible changes she would make when she uses this book again, Kimberly would like to start with some shorter picturebooks on the topic of transgender before starting the novel. She will continue to use the book as a read-aloud because

of the advanced reading level. In addition to using the book every other year for whole-class read-aloud, Kimberly uses the book with specific students as needed to address Trans* issues.

I didn't read it this school year because of the looping factor, but plan on reading it again this coming year. Though I did introduce the book to one of my students who is transgendered and able to read it independently. She loved the book, and we talked about it briefly. Her favorite part was George wanting to be Charlotte in the play. Though this student's family is opting to keep their children out of all schools this coming year [Covid-19 related], she would have been in my class again and I was thinking about how the reading of George impacts her in a classroom setting. She knew my motivations in planning to read it are not to single her out in any way, and she was thrilled for others to experience the book. My fear for her is that the other students would put the focus on her, and another Trans student who might be in the class this coming year, rather than on the story of George. She wants these discussions and experiences for her peers, and doesn't want to stand out as the example. I had started the discussion with her and her family early because I wanted their permission first. Any fears I had about reading this story again were centered on my Trans* students feeling safe.*

Kimberly keeps the social and emotional well-being of her students at the center of her decisions.

In addition to not wanting to single out students and make them examples, Kimberly remains conscious of the fact she is discussing issues with students with which she has no personal experiences, as she does not identify as a Trans* individual herself. She acknowledges using a character in a book to offer a single perspective is problematic, and when paired with a cis-gendered teacher creates a need for the teacher's careful pedagogy so as not to portray themselves as the final authority on the topic, but to simply lead the discussion in an open and accepting manner. Teaching, being a predominantly white, middle-class, female profession, is not a new issue. Many social justice issues teachers seek to address with students may be out of the realm of the teachers' personal experience (i.e., racism, ableism, poverty, homelessness, etc.).

Kimberly and the students benefited from the fact there was a Trans* teacher in the school, and some students had them as a teacher the previous year, offering more than the single story of George/Melissa.

Their name came up briefly in the manner of, "Oh, like ___!" with an affirmation from me of a simple yes. I remember asking this staff member a question during our time reading George, but I can't remember now what we talked about. I think their knowing of this Trans teacher and the open conversations the students had with them previously had opened the students to not being afraid or weirded out by the fact a person's sex, gender identity, and gender expression can all be independent of each other.*

Queering Kimberly's pedagogy goes far beyond simply adding queer texts to her curriculum. Kimberly intentionally challenges the gender binary, heteronormativity, and homophobia throughout her teaching and interactions with students. She uses gender neutral pronouns, and trains her students to do as well, when a person's pronouns are not known. She monitors free play time in the "pretend center" or playground areas gently reminding students when a child is not "allowed" by other students to choose a role not aligned with their gender reminding them "we each have the right to choose for ourselves" whichever role we would like to play. School restrooms are "loosely gendered" and she labels and refers to specific restrooms by location rather than gender, and allows all students to use all restrooms. She also uses geometrical definitions of line and line segment as a metaphor to explain gender and sexuality and a continuum rather than a closed binary. It is clear Kimberly has thought through and enacts a variety of methods to emphasize the fluid nature of gender and sexuality as well as challenge society's rigid norms that we often see school institutions perpetuate and engrain into our youth.

Case Study #3: Sarah

Table 6

Overview of Case #3

Name	Gender	Years of Exp.	Grade Level	Book(s) Used	Type of School
Sarah	Female	10	6 th grade	<i>George</i> by Alex Gino; <i>Ivy Aberdeen’s Letter to the World</i> by Ashley Herring Blake; <i>Better Nate than Ever</i> by Tim Federle	Non-profit tuition-based independent



Sarah’s School Context

We kinda have it all, they make sure we have it all. Our niche isn’t catering to the best of the best, it’s really everybody (Sarah, Interview 1).

Sarah teaches English Language Arts to 6th and 7th graders at Lincoln School, nestled in a suburban residential area in Missouri. According to the school’s website, Lincoln is a “close-knit and diverse” private school focused on educating the whole student with a mission for social competence where “each student’s strengths are known, cultivated and celebrated.” The school has an enrollment of approximately 400 students, with class sizes capped at 16-17 students.

According to Sarah, they are “over the top inclusive,” and intentionally seek out diversity of all kinds. With an annual tuition of \$26,000, Lincoln offers full scholarships for approximately one-third of their enrollment, pulling students from high poverty neighborhoods in the large metropolitan area. They also welcome students from all academic abilities, with over 20% of their enrollment having some level of learning disability or learning difference, which include students with dyslexia, ADHD, high functioning autism, dysgraphia, expressive language disorders, and processing disorders. Throughout the interviews, Sarah pointed out multiple times Lincoln does not cater to only the elite and gifted, but decidedly creates an environment reflecting a diverse society in general “where our kids actually go to school in a real-world setting.”

The school’s mission is to cultivate ethical and confident students in an innovative and collaborative community built on trust. The school intentionally places ethics at the forefront of its mission because “it matters deeply that they understand their moral obligations to self, family and community.” Teaching in a setting bonding diversity and equality to a moral and ethical obligation assists Sarah by not just granting a permission of sorts for using LGBTQ-inclusive literature but seems to implore its use.

Dozens of students at the middle and high school are “out” as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and Trans*. “We have a lot of students who are out in a really positive way,” providing younger students role models that are “successfully navigating that part of their life.” Lincoln also makes a conscious effort to be diverse in its hiring practices regarding LGBTQ individuals. They have several staff members who are openly out and in same-sex relationships.

Sarah: A Teacher Seeking and Creating an Inclusive Environment

Sarah is a first-year teacher at Lincoln moving from years of public school teaching with 6th graders to now teaching 6th and 7th grade ELA. [For the purpose of this study, we focused only on her 6th grade classes.] Her reason for moving schools based largely on her principle that public schools were not creating accepting environments for all students, and she sought to teach in a more diverse school focused on cultural competence. Cultural competence “is a big deal here.

We talk about it regularly and have lessons with the kids around identity, civil discourse, and understanding and discussing differences.” As with each participant, I did not ask Sarah’s race or sexual orientation, nor did she explicitly state them during the interviews.

Sarah is the sole ELA teacher for 6th and 7th grades at Lincoln and has a great amount of freedom to plan her curriculum. The school uses Lucy Calkins’s (2015) *Units of Study for Reading and Writing* as a framework. Sarah employs a workshop structure “that encourages choice and balances class reads, book club reads, and independent reads.” She works closely with other teachers and administrators, one of which is the school’s Director of Diversity and Inclusivity, to plan cross-curricular units and select books and texts. Vertical alignment occurs throughout the school, a part of which is ensuring diverse literature is included at all grade levels.

Sarah has included LGBTQ-inclusive literature within her curriculum for several years, serving on the curriculum development team at her previous public school, where she met some opposition by a principal at one of the schools. However, she and her team persisted in their inclusion of diverse literature and the district’s curriculum was written to include LGBTQ-inclusive literature. At Lincoln, Sarah has not encountered any obstacles in this area. “I have a lot more freedom here than I did previously.” She now benefits from a school with a very supportive administration, as well as an enthusiastic librarian encouraging and assisting her and all other staff members in the acquisition of diverse literature, creating displays during events such as National Coming Out Day, and helping with the vertical alignment between grades. In addition to supportive school heads, librarians, and fellow teachers, the school also employs a director of diversity and inclusion who assists all teachers in including diverse content into their curriculum as well as meeting with parents and stakeholders should concerns arise.

Since this is a private school with many parents paying a hefty tuition, one would expect parents to be highly involved and vocal about the curriculum and teaching taking place. However, this does not appear to grant them decision-making abilities related to curriculum. Sarah acknowledges parents are “welcome to question, they’re welcome to talk, they’re welcome to ask

me,” but “one of our expectations is that they are supportive...and positive about valuing education and trusting your kid to really stretch their wings and have a little bit of a protected struggle at times.” The school sets up a culture of pushing students to expand their independent critical thinking skills while supporting them and providing safety in their struggles.

On National Coming Out Day, Sarah book-talked (a short oral overview of a book designed to spark interest among students without giving away the ending or important details) the book *George* by Alex Gino and a parent questioned her about it. The school director addressed the parent saying “cultural competence is a big part of who we are” and he “actually supported the daughter leaving the school if that’s not the education they wanted for their kid.” The administrator further assured the parent that he knows exactly which books Sarah is using and how she is using them in the classroom, as does their director of diversity and inclusion who has read the books and supports their use. Not only are the administrators supportive of and encourage the use of diverse literature, they are well informed regarding the literature being used, understand how it is being used in the classrooms in their building, and are willing to deal with any parent concerns.

While some teachers choose to send a permission slip home before introducing LGBTQ-inclusive literature, Sarah is opposed to sending out a permission slip ahead of time, as it gives the appearance something is inappropriate in the book(s). Instead, she creates a general note that is sent home informing the parents of the upcoming book club project and that their child will be selecting their book club book soon. A list of all topics and book titles are included. Parents receive the list, regardless of which topic the student chooses to discuss and read about, and are encouraged to discuss with their child which book(s) s/he is going to be reading. The note emphasizes it is important for the student to choose a book of interest to them that they will enjoy reading.

Figure 2

Parent letter sent home

Dear Sixth Grade Families,

I am so excited to be approaching our first book club unit of the year! In book clubs, we will be reading books with the shared theme of empathy. Following the readings, students will use a hardback version of their book to create an altered book filled with their own writing inspired by the unit's theme. This unit is a great opportunity for students to learn about life through the lens of someone who may look or think differently from themselves and gives students the chance to bring their creativity into the English classroom which they seem very excited about.

It will also help us explore the following essential questions:

- How does literature reflect a culture's values and beliefs? (at the global, local, and school level)
- How do I effectively communicate who I am and what I believe?
- How do our values and beliefs shape who we are as individuals?

During this unit, students will choose one social issue from the list below. Once topics are chosen, each group will work together to choose two texts from the list to read as part of their book club.

Since this unit includes so much student choice, I have included a list of offered topics and book choices below to encourage conversations at home as students decide which book club they would like to join. I encourage you to browse the list and discuss the choices with your child. If you have any questions about any books listed or the content they include, I would love the opportunity to talk with you.

Also, you may notice when ordering these texts from the online book store that the books are being offered in hardback copies rather than paperback. While we make it a policy at Whitfield to always be as cost-effective as possible, this unit does require one book from each book club to be a hardback version because the book itself will be used as a material for the unit's altered book project. Purchasing a used, hardback version is encouraged. If purchasing used, please try to find a copy free of markings. Typical wear and tear from being read is perfectly okay. If this causes any financial concern, please reach out, and we can find a solution.

Thank you,
Samantha Alul

Figure 3

List of books offered in unit

Texts included/offered in this unit:

Whole class read aloud: *Harbor Me* by Jacqueline Woodson (This book will be read aloud in class. Students will *not* need their own copy of the text.)

Topic	Book Choices
Ableism	<i>Fish in a Tree</i> by Linda Mullally Hunt <i>Rules</i> by Cynthia Rylant <i>Out of My Mind</i> by Sharon Creech <i>Ugly</i> by Robert Hoge
Immigration/ Refugees	<i>We Are Displaced</i> by Malala Yousafzai <i>The Circuit</i> by Francisco Jiminez Lai <i>Refugee</i> by Alan Gratz <i>Inside Out and Back Again</i> by Thanhha Lai
Racism	<i>Revolution</i> by Deborah Wiles <i>Hidden Figures (Young Reader's Edition)</i> by Margot Lee Shetterly <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> by Jacqueline Woodson
Global Access to Education	<i>The Red Pencil</i> by Andrew Davis Pinkney <i>Three Cups of Tea (Young Reader's Edition)</i> by Greg Mortison <i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (Young Reader's Edition)</i> by William Kamkwamba
Conformity in Dystopian Literature	<i>Cinder</i> by Marissa Meyers <i>The Giver</i> by Lois Lowry (All sixth graders have already read this book in S.S. but are welcome to use it in their final project and discussions.) <i>Uglies</i> by Scott Westerfeld
LGBTQ+	<i>George</i> by Alex Gino <i>Better Nate than Never</i> by Tim Federly <i>Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World</i> by Ashley Herring Blake

LGBTQ-Inclusive Books Chosen

Figure 4

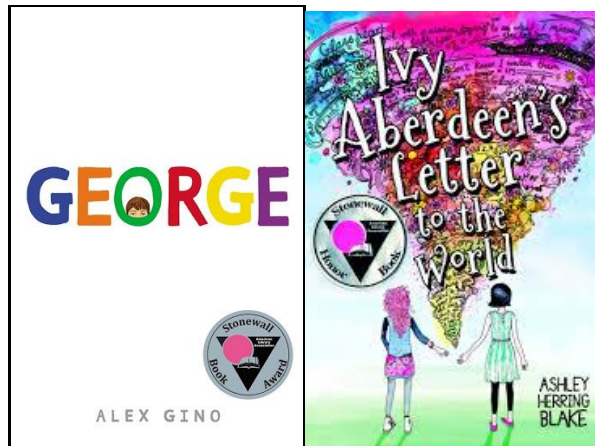
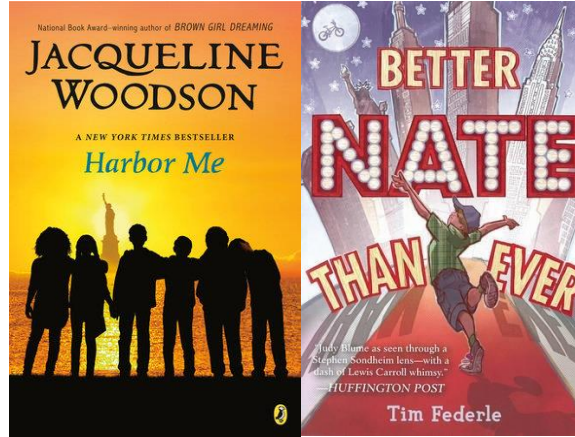


Table 7

Synopsis of Harbor Me

Title: <i>Harbor Me</i>	Author: Jacqueline Woodson	Copyright: 2018
Synopsis: A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER!		

Jacqueline Woodson's first middle-grade novel since National Book Award winner *Brown Girl Dreaming* celebrates the healing that can occur when a group of students share their stories.

It all starts when six kids have to meet for a weekly chat--by themselves, with no adults to listen in. There, in the room they soon dub the ARTT Room (short for "A Room to Talk"), they discover it's safe to talk about what's bothering them--everything from Esteban's father's deportation and Haley's father's incarceration to Amari's fears of racial profiling and Ashton's adjustment to his changing family fortunes. When the six are together, they can express the feelings and fears they have to hide from the rest of the world. And together, they can grow braver and more ready for the rest of their lives.

Source: www.amazon.com/Harbor-Me-Jacqueline-Woodson/dp/0399252525

Table 8

Synopsis of Better Nate than Ever

Title: <i>Better Nate than Ever</i>	Author: Tim Federle	Copyright: 2015; Reissue 2018
<p>Synopsis:</p> <p>A small-town boy hops a bus to New York City to crash an audition for <i>E.T.: The Musical</i> in this winning middle grade novel that <i>The New York Times</i> called “inspired and inspiring.”</p> <p>Nate Foster has big dreams. His whole life, he’s wanted to star in a Broadway show. (Heck, he’d settle for <i>seeing</i> a Broadway show.) But how is Nate supposed to make his dreams come true when he’s stuck in Jankburg, Pennsylvania, where no one (except his best pal Libby) appreciates a good show tune? With Libby’s help, Nate plans a daring overnight escape to New York. There’s an open casting call for <i>E.T.: The Musical</i>, and Nate knows this could be the difference between small-town blues and big-time stardom.</p> <p>Tim Federle’s “hilarious and heartwarming debut novel” (<i>Publishers Weekly</i>) is full of broken curfews, second chances, and the adventure of growing up—because sometimes you have to get four hundred miles from your backyard to finally feel at home.</p> <p>Source: https://www.amazon.com/Better-Nate-Than-Ever-Federle/dp/1534429131/</p>		

Table 9

Synopsis of book Ivy Aberdeen’s Letter to the World

Title: <i>Ivy Aberdeen’s Letter to the World</i>	Author: Ashley Herring Blake	Copyright: 2018
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Synopsis:

In the wake of a destructive tornado, one girl develops feelings for another in this stunning, tender novel about emerging identity, perfect for fans of *The Thing About Jellyfish*.

When a tornado rips through town, twelve-year-old Ivy Aberdeen's house is destroyed and her family of five is displaced. Ivy feels invisible and ignored in the aftermath of the storm--and what's worse, her notebook filled with secret drawings of girls holding hands has gone missing.

Mysteriously, Ivy's drawings begin to reappear in her locker with notes from someone telling her to open up about her identity. Ivy thinks--and hopes--that this someone might be her classmate, another girl for whom Ivy has begun to develop a crush. Will Ivy find the strength and courage to follow her true feelings?

Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World exquisitely enriches the rare category of female middle-grade characters who like girls--and children's literature at large.

Source: www.amazon.com/Aberdeens-Letter-World-Ashley-Herring/dp/0316515477/

Table 10

Synopsis of book George

Title: <i>George</i>	Author: Alex Gino	Copyright: 2017
<p>Synopsis:</p> <p>BE WHO YOU ARE.</p> <p>When people look at George, they see a boy. But George knows she's a girl.</p> <p>George thinks she'll have to keep this a secret forever. Then her teacher announces that their class play is going to be <i>Charlotte's Web</i>. George really, really, REALLY wants to play Charlotte. But the teacher says she can't even try out for the part ... because she's a boy.</p> <p>With the help of her best friend Kelly, George comes up with a plan. Not just so she can be Charlotte – but so everyone can know who she is, once and for all.</p> <p>GEORGE is a candid, genuine, and heartwarming middle grade about a transgender girl who is, to use Charlotte's word, R-A-D-I-A-N-T!</p> <p>Source: http://www.alexgino.com/george/</p>		

Queering the Curriculum with LGBTQ Literature

Sarah's Motivations

We're not talking about books, we're talking about life (Interview 2).

Sarah strongly believes that stories are powerful. Sarah uses a wide variety of diverse literature with her students, as well as with her own children, one of which identifies as Trans*. She has included LGBTQ literature into her curriculum for several years and continues to see the advantages her students experience, especially in the areas of empathy and cultural-competence. She believes in giving students the power to make choices about their learning offers a level of authenticity by providing real world experiences through literature.

Sarah's Pedagogical Moves

Sarah chose to incorporate LGBTQ-inclusive books into her curriculum through book clubs in which all students participated. Students received a list of social issues with corresponding book titles addressing the issues in various ways. She conducted a "book tasting" event in which she book-talked each book, giving students an idea of the issues it would address. The topics included racism, refugee experiences, ableism, global access to education, conformity in dystopian literature, and LGBTQ+ issues. The entire class participated in a whole class read aloud using *Harbor Me* by Jacqueline Woodson. This book was chosen by Sarah for its ability to address a variety of social issues while setting the tone for each book club group to follow in which she expected students to share their feelings, perspectives, and stories, much like in the book. Each student then chose a social issue s/he wanted to further interrogate. Groups formed based on topic choice, and assigned a book(s) the group would read together. As an additional requirement, each student choose one additional book about his or her topic. Each group member had the freedom to each choose a different book or choose to all read the same book for their second choice. Throughout the process students were in control of choosing the books they wanted to read (from the list of highly scrutinized, high-quality titles).

In addition to their Book Club meetings, students met in Diversity Groups. Within their Book Club groups students were all reading the same title. The Diversity Group was essentially a jigsaw approach, arranged so that one student from each Book Club met to discuss her/his book and topic with other students reading different books and focusing on different social issues. This created a heterogeneous grouping of students each studying a different social issue and thus bringing multiple perspectives to the discussion, not about the books but about the social topics. This allowed for several things to happen. 1) Each student then had the benefit of each of the books, even if they were not individually reading those books, and 2) each student was held accountable for completing their reading and assuring s/he were comprehending the text since s/he would have to share in the Diversity Group, and 3) most importantly to Sarah, the mixture of social issues addressed by multiple titles moved the conversation away from the specifics of the books into a conversation about life in general. The conversations during this unit, spanning all topics addressed by the differing books, ultimately focused on individuality and everyone's roles as citizens and community members. Each student was then expected to use her/his book and character(s) to think more globally in her/his Diversity Group. Sarah credits the use of the Diversity Groups for "really help[ing] with theme analysis and articulation."

Focus on Listening.

One procedure Sarah described developing with her students over the course of the year, and specifically through the use of her book clubs and diversity groups, was the ability to have and hold a meaningful discussion. Students were explicitly taught how to have conversations, emphasizing the importance of listening to your peers rather than making your own point. Sarah had previously observed many of her students planning what they were going to say to ensure they expressed their point of view during the groups. Thus, the conversations often appeared as nothing more than a conglomerate of individual ideas instead of a back-and-forth conversation in which students were able to truly hear and respond to each other's ideas and then discuss them respectfully. Sarah had students create rubrics as a class deciding what makes a good

conversation. She then recorded the book club and diversity groups and later rewatched them collaboratively with the rubric in hand, pausing to talk through things they did well and brainstorm and set goals for ways to improve their discussions, at both the individual and group levels. Through the use of the book clubs and diversity groups, students became much more adept at holding genuine conversations in which they listened to others and responded accordingly, not just making their own point(s). Sarah reported authentic dialogue in which students truly heard what the other students were saying and then replied to the statement to push the conversation along in a meaningful direction.

Allyship and Privilege.

There's a lot of places where they're treated with tolerance, instead of accepted, where it's probably allowed in the building but it's not celebrated in the building.

Lincoln is definitely an environment where diversity is not only accepted but also celebrated. The school supports an active Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) as well as several other affinity groups (Jewish Student Union, Black Student Union, etc.), employs a Director of Diversity and Inclusivity, maintains social justice and cultural competence as their mission, consciously integrates diversity into the curriculum at all grade levels, and facilitates civil discourse schoolwide. The use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature is not something new to this school; it is a topic addressed and discussed often. However, because of the very diverse make-up of the student body, several topics surfaced that Sarah had not anticipated. Based on their book club readings and diversity group conversations, the students were able to acknowledge their own privilege. Sarah was impressed at the interesting and mature conversations the students were able to navigate around the concepts of privilege and allyship. Being careful to neither instigate these conversations, nor overly direct the conversations, she was “very careful about that stuff coming from me” for fear of something being misinterpreted, especially with the LGBTQ topic. As the teacher, she strove to create an environment in which students learned how to have thoughtful and

articulate conversations, encouraged to speak their truths, and think critically about larger social issues. She was amazed at how her students were able to cite and use texts they were currently reading in their book clubs, as well as pull from other texts they had previously read to connect to the topics currently under study. Excited students read, not just the two books required for the project, but all the books for their topic. After finishing their topic requirements students eagerly sought out books they had heard discussed in their diversity groups.

Sarah relayed one great example of the students' ability to push their thinking beyond the characters in the books and to their own lived experiences, what Sims Bishop (1990) would call the "sliding glass door," when students referenced Maya Angelo's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The students interpreted the poem as containing two different birds, one free (the one with privilege) and one caged. They noted the absence of voice from the free bird, seeing the free bird as remaining silent and not using its voice, extrapolating to their own situations of privilege and reflecting on whether or not they are using their voices to work against imbalances of power. Students further questioned whether power should be demonized, recognizing that power, which they see themselves as possessing, can be used to do good and a call to action. These are obviously mature and important discussions for 6th grade students, which they were able to maneuver with a system Sarah expertly put in place that facilitated such powerful discussions with multiple texts scaffolding their understanding and pushing their thinking.

Sarah's Reflections

Motivation and Engagement through Student Empowerment.

They don't hate reading, they just hate really bad books (Interview 3).

As per my research protocol, I contacted Sarah midway through her unit. I could not believe the excitement in her voice: "I can't keep up with them. It's been insane! They've been reading them as fast as I can get them shipped." What teacher does not want a class of students devouring books cover-to-cover as fast as they become available? Student engagement with their

books was palpable from the start. The morning after the main book-club book was distributed, Sarah and other teachers noted an obvious change in student behavior during their morning grade-level meeting. They...

came in and they were just so loud, which is really, it's just not like this group, you know they're normally so with it and so on top of things that they take things seriously, they would not stop talking. So we started listening and picking up the conversation and stuff and they were actually arguing over their books, um, they were mad because somebody was actually ahead of them in the book. And it was not even just ahead, one kid, someone was on page 100 and someone else read to page 170.

Overnight students were captivated by the books, especially the LGBTQ group and the group dealing with the refugee experience. One student reading an LGBTQ-inclusive book, *Gracefully Grayson* (2016) by Ami Polonsky, provided Sarah with what she characterized as “the weirdest ten minutes of my teaching career I swear” when she came up to her apologizing for not having her homework done because “I couldn’t put it down. I was up all night reading and my mom made me go to bed. I’m really sorry.” The student further added, “Can I please finish the book before I do [my homework], cause I only have four pages left?” Sarah then commented at how out of character this was for this student who always had her homework completed on time, took her academics extremely seriously, and had a near perfect grade in the course. Throughout the interviews, other stories of great motivation and engagement with the book clubs, especially the LGBTQ inclusive books, surfaced. Staff members were starting to ask to borrow the books from students because the students “won’t shut up about them.”

When pressed as to the reason Sarah thought the LGBTQ and refugee groups were noticeably more engaged than the other groups, she reflected on the fact topics such as racism are widely held in today’s society as something almost everyone agrees is wrong. Topics such as immigration and LGBTQ issues still have a sense of divide among more of the population. With

these two topics, students are actually broadening their perspectives and they realize the power they have to effect change.

I really feel it comes from the divide, you know, in realizing that this is something that right now adults don't even have figured out yet, and I think that makes them feel powerful and actually are playing a part in change.

Sarah credits the wide array of beliefs among adults and the current social climate related to controversial topics that allow students (or anyone) to believe their efforts can change things for marginalized populations.

Plans to Continue and Expand.

When asked where she was going from here, Sarah noted:

We're working to build a climate that would allow us to successfully launch more whole-class reads with LGBTQ lit, and our book collection is certainly growing as more is published. We've had more middle schoolers feel comfortable coming out in the past couple of years which is amazing, and we have expanded our GSA to include a middle school leader.

While students continue to come out as LGBTQ at younger ages, it is imperative teachers such as Sarah continue to make space in the curriculum so not only can all students feel comfortable at school, but students may flourish academically, as Sarah attests her students are clearly doing.

Case Study #4- Carrie

Table 11

Overview of case #4

Name	Gender	Years of Exp.	Grade Level	Book(s) Used	Type of School
Carrie	Female	17 years	3 rd & 4 th grades	<i>The Bravest Knight Who Ever Lived</i> by D. Errico & S. Penfield, et. al.; <i>Sewing the Rainbow: A Story About Gilbert Baker</i> by G. E. Pitman & H. Clifton-Brown	Public school



Carrie’s School Context

City Schools is a large urban district serving 50,000 individuals at over 100 school sites. The elementary site where Carrie teaches has an enrollment of approximately 350 students with 100% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Demographics include 35% African American, 25% Hispanic, 25% white, and 15% multicultural, with a large ESL population (approximately 25%). Approximately 25% in her school also qualify for some level of IEP services. State test scores are improving, having recently moved out of “priority status,” denoting low performing schools according to test data. Carrie describes her school’s surroundings as such:

The neighborhood is one that is not generally perceived positively by outsiders. However, not far from the school, part of the community is being gentrified. The neighborhood is one where there is a significant amount of crime and drug use. It is one of the neighborhoods with the highest levels of all types of crime in the city, making it a hard place to be a kid (Carrie, member check).

The district's mission and vision statements focus primarily on academic learning in a safe, student-centered climate, with a stated goal on the district's website to be the valuing of "community engagement and empowerment, as well as equity and diversity." Unlike many large urban schools adopting a more scripted curriculum, Carrie's school has maintained a good amount of teacher autonomy in curriculum development. "We don't have any required texts. We don't have a literature book or a structured program. We are a balanced literacy school. Our goal is to get kids to read and to read widely." However, the district does not employ certified librarians at any of the elementary schools; instead, an instructional assistant works under a certified librarian from a middle school. Carrie was also eager to point out her district has a "you can't censor for anyone else's child" policy, meaning parents cannot work to force their beliefs related to curriculum content beyond how it affects their own child.

Carrie: A Teacher Supporting Global Citizenship

Carrie, a self-proclaimed "book lover" and "literacy and social justice advocate," according to her twitter header, teaches a diverse population with a 3rd/4th grade combination class, as well as departmentalizes with several other 4th grade teachers to teach ELA to all sections. Carrie strongly feels it is her job as a teacher, as well as being closely aligned with her school's mission, to create global citizens. Knowing students cannot become global citizens without experiencing a broader worldview than they would have been exposed to in their own school and community, Carrie deliberately ensures her students encounter a wide range of people through the choices she makes in children's literature.

I am also very focused on my own ability to be an anti-racist educator and disruptor of problematic systems. For example, refusing to use the texts within the newly purchased curriculum due to a significant lack of diversity.

She describes working hard to ensure each student she sees throughout the school year is able to see themselves represented in at least one text they read, as well as seeing their family structure represented. Including LGBTQ literature in her diverse literature is important to Carrie. She makes sure such books are available in the library, as part of her read alouds, and as part of the curriculum. “Actually, I’m kinda known in the building. If you need a book recommendation, I’m the one to come ask!” Carrie is passionate about keeping up with newly published, diverse literature and prides herself as being a constant resource to her fellow teachers when they are looking for books related to specific themes or issues.

Some of her core principles for teaching revolve around the principles of community, making sure diverse perspectives and collective thinking integrate into her lessons to increase everyone’s understanding. Influenced by literacy researchers Brian Edmiston and Peter Johnston, Carrie believes “learning is an active process, and when we can stand up and be physically inside the world of the story, we can explore possibilities in new ways.” Carrie did not divulge her race or sexual orientation during the interviews.

When asked about administrative support, she reports her administration is very supportive. “I do have 100% administrator support.” Throughout the interviews Carrie had nothing but positive comments about her administrative team and expected and received no pushback of any kind.

When I let her know I read specific book titles, taught about Banned Books week, introduced Shakespeare which involved some swear words, or had students exploring maps related to the Green Book or voting rights of convicted felons in Social Studies, she saw the educational value alongside the ways students were being prepared and scaffolded to understand the world around them.

Carrie accredits her principal's support to come through her guiding question, "Is it good for kids?" If the principal can answer, "Yes," then she will try to make it happen whenever possible.

When asked about parent feedback or issues, she had nothing but positivity to report. She has not received any negative parent pushback in over a decade of teaching. If she were to receive negative parent feedback, she asserts the following:

I wouldn't back down. I wouldn't back down for sure. They can't tell me you can't read it. They can pull their kid if they so desire, I guess. I teach in a large urban district so these things are probably a bit easier to address. Not using that as an excuse, but they're seeing things differently than I am.

The politics of the urban city in which she teaches remains largely liberal, which she acknowledges would be different in other smaller communities. Her school is set in a city that has a "sizable LGBTQ population, a well-known drag community, and a large city wide Pride celebration each year." The culture of the city appears to permeate the parents' attitudes toward their child's education, allowing for the natural integration of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Book Chosen

Figure 5

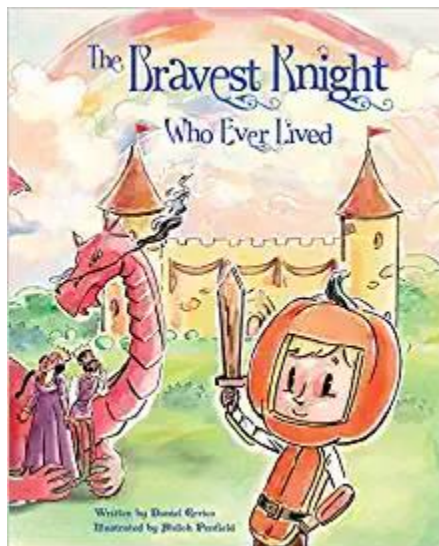


Table 12

Synopsis of The Bravest Knight Who Ever Lived

Title: <i>The Bravest Knight Who Ever Lived</i>	Author: Daniel Errico	Copyright: 2019
Synopsis: Knights, dragons, and princesses are the things all good fairytales are made of, but what happens when the tale has an LGBTQ ending? Follow Cedric on his journey from his days on a humble pumpkin farm to the adventures that lead him to become a full-fledged knight. Once a knight, discover how he uses his cleverness and courage to vanquish a fire-breathing dragon and rescue a beautiful prince and princess. It is only then does Sir Cedric face his most difficult challenge. Will he follow his heart, and prove that sometimes the bravest thing you can do is choose for yourself how your fairy tale ends? Source: https://www.amazon.com/Bravest-Knight-Who-Ever-Lived		

Queering the Curriculum with LGBTQ Literature

Carrie's Motivations

Since her school is departmentalized (separated instruction by subject area and teacher) at 4th grade, Carrie relies heavily on picturebooks with the 4th graders instead of chapter books because of time factors and scheduling limitations. She does not think a chapter book fits her strict schedule as it would for a self-contained classroom that has more flexibility with the daily schedule. She typically reads one picturebook each day to each of her ELA sections. Throughout the year, she incorporates books with LGBTQ-inclusive themes. Such books are not taught as a unit, but rather spread throughout the year and integrated throughout her regular curriculum, with the exception of a few books that she reads at specific times, such as *I Am Jazz* (Herthel,

Jennings, et.al., 2014) for Trans* Awareness Day at the end of March. Sometimes Carrie's book choices are made based on specific occurrences in the classroom. When students are overheard being unkind, bullying, or using homophobic slurs, Carrie will address the issue with discussions as well as using well-chosen children's literature to teach a point, such as the book *The Bravest Knight That Ever Lived* (2019), which she uses to teach bravery in being who you are and loving who you love.

Carrie's Pedagogical Moves

Uses LGBTQ-Inclusive Books Throughout the School Year.

As an intro into LGBTQ-themed books, Carrie uses *And Tango Makes Three* (2015), by Richardson, Parnell, et.al., which is a book about a pair of male penguins at the New York City Zoo their zookeeper identified as a couple. This book is among the most requested books to be "banned" and removed from classrooms and libraries nation-wide according to the American Library Association's list of most challenged books (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>). She uses this book during Banned Book Week, which is typically early in the school year at the end of September. This book is used to initiate the conversation identifying why it is important to have books like that in her classroom.

I also share the list with them and we look at the reasons why books are challenged. They quickly see the pattern of one group of texts being more targeted than others, which leads to a lot of great discussion about access to stories and whose stories count as being worthy of holding space on library or classroom shelves.

Carrie shares that at first her students are often giggly and a little shocked they are reading and talking about such a topic in school, but through her guided conversations about diversity and being able to see themselves and other people represented in the books they will read throughout the year, they quickly realize this will be a part of their regular reading routine. Students come to

expect that such topics might show up in one of their books at any time throughout the year, or the following year since she loops with her students. She notes sometimes just saying something out loud can make a huge difference. Early in the year her students respond, “Are we really talking about this at school? What’s happening here?” but “Once we are past that hump, it’s just normalized.” From early in the year Carrie deliberately builds a lexicon among her students, including vocabulary such as *gay*, *Trans**, *equality*, etc., but creates a climate in which students knowingly possess both the ability and expectation to discuss these and other issues in mature and meaningful ways. Carrie often has students she had the previous year take initiative and “do the talking for and/or with me [to the other students] about why these books matter and they need to be a part of our learning.” Each year she has students find space within her classroom to share and discuss about their own family structures, with students each year bringing up their family members who are part of the LGBTQ community. Carrie attributes this to students’ implicit understanding that they will be accepted and respected by her and their peers. Carrie deliberately shapes her practice:

[I] teach my students about the work of Rudine Sims Bishop and the language of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors... I also want them to see me citing thinkers and perhaps more specifically, thinkers and scholars who are not all white and male.

Her advanced knowledge of children’s literature and scholarship continues to become more evident in her ability to address LGBTQ and other social issues with third and fourth graders.

Stays Current with Diverse Children’s Literature.

Carrie is well versed in books available for a variety of diverse topics, not only LGBTQ-themed books. When asked how she gains access to her books, some of which are very recently published, she shared that she monitors her local public library’s website often, searching for recently added picturebooks. This allows her to stay apprised of what is available. She also follows many authors on social media, as well as uses her school librarian as a resource. It is

obvious she actively seeks out books she thinks are useful to teach an array of social justice issues.

After reading to her 3rd and 4th grade students, Carrie notes they are always eager to share the books with their younger kindergarten “Reading Buddies” they read to each week. Reading Buddies is a program in which her students are matched with students from a kindergarten class in the building for weekly read-alouds. Her students practice their oral reading fluency, while the younger students benefit from older students modeling the importance of reading. Carrie often witnesses her students taking it upon themselves to spread the stories they are using in class. They want other students to also know about the penguins in *And Tango Makes Three*, for instance. She believes her passion for social justice carries through from her students to others throughout the school. Without being prompted or encouraged, her students adopt the drive and passion to not only read to the younger students but to engage them in conversations and teach them about issues they view as meaningful.

Carrie varies the manner in which she integrates diverse literature. Sometimes she uses LGBTQ-themed books as a read aloud for the sole purpose of discussing the social issues presented in the book. Other times the books are used as a mentor text or for a specific skill objective, such as identifying themes. Using books dealing with gender and/or sexuality throughout her teaching in multiple ways creates an environment in which such topics become just a normal part of dialogue. The “giggly” response quickly subsides and 8-10 year old students are able to have mature, honest conversations about such topics, when expertly guided by a caring teacher.

Carrie’s Reflection

Choosing Text: An Ethical Decision-Making Process.

Avoidance doesn’t help anything, it allows people to stay close-minded (Interview 2).

Carrie acknowledges that “our goal is to produce citizens” and questions how close-minded individuals can be a part of a global society. “They are not going to be able to do that if they are left in their bubble and only know their bubble.” This statement led Carrie to reflect on what brought her to my study to begin with. I had posted in a social media group seeking elementary teachers who use LGBTQ-inclusive books in their classrooms, as I had done several times throughout the participant seeking process. This post received several responses by teachers adamantly opposed to the inclusion of such literature by this age group of students. Carrie couldn’t stay quiet and told a co-teacher, “I have to send him a message.” She said, “Just reading people’s comments and I couldn’t take it!” “Here were people [teachers] who can’t... like, can’t even be kind [on social media]. Who’s allowed to be in it and who’s allowed to be out? They [teachers] see themselves as gatekeepers.” Carrie understands choosing one book means you don’t have time for others. This process too, which she didn’t acknowledge in these terms, makes herself a gatekeeper.

When you choose one book, you don’t have time for another one. Not because I didn’t love it, but because I thought this one was important. It’s tough, I understand you have to do that, but you have to open your minds.

When asked to follow-up with this concept of gatekeeper, she replied that social justice is the agenda:

This really is a central tenet of how I choose what to read. For me, I think the tenuous balance of gatekeeping means being intentional about opening the gate as wide as I can. I know I can read around 180 picturebooks with students - I am thoughtful to represent a lot of identities. I cannot in good conscience continue the use of the elementary canon of authors. I often try to think about what I am being given to do (ex: in district purchased curriculum) and what quality texts I can replace their options with. I know I can't possibly do as much work as there is to be done, but if I can help them see more possibilities and intersections in the world, I have done the work.

A Social Justice Warrior Who Does Not Back Down.

Carrie further urges teachers to know your community and anticipate what type of support you're going to get: "Not so that you can avoid it" but so that you "know what you're going to say about why you chose that book." She encourages teachers to cite the fact the book was on an award-winning book list, such as Stonewall, or that if they are seeing a social or emotional issue arising among students that they need to address, such as name-calling or bullying. Carrie is not opposed to using what she acknowledges to be "edgy" texts because to avoid such texts will not produce the global citizens we desire.

Throughout the interviews Carrie returned to the vision she obviously shares with her school, that of producing global citizens. Never once did she allude to the need or idea of normalizing queer identities or transgenderism but held to the idea that because queer people do exist in our world, they need to be depicted in humane and empowering ways within the curriculum, reading materials, and discussions in her classroom. She even took on the curriculum company during district professional development:

I asked about the inclusion of texts that center LGBTQ identities and was told this was not present. I asked if the company or district rep in the Zoom meeting found this problematic. Silence. My response was to tell them thank you for giving me more reason to veer from what you're asking me to do, which is silencing and erasure, which I am not willing to participate in. I am glad I asked but am frustrated that I can control what goes on in my own classroom bubble, but there are other places in the district where the materials will be followed without question.

Carrie exudes the experience and confidence of a true social justice warrior, always willing to stand up for what she feels is the right thing to do for her students and community.

Case Study #5: Amber

Table 13

Overview of case #5

Name	Gender	Years of Exp.	Grade Level	Book(s) Used	Type of School
Amber	Female	4	3 rd grade	<i>The Sissy Duckling</i> by Fierstein & Cole; <i>The Boy Who Cried Fabulous</i> by Newman & Ferguson	Public school



Amber's School Context

Brookside Elementary was a pre-K through 5th grade elementary school in suburban Oklahoma. The school had an enrollment of approximately 300 students. There were two sections of each grade level, except PreK in which there was only one class. Brookside Elementary was a smaller neighborhood school with a changing demographic, both in ethnic diversity and a growing poverty rate. Brookside held a positive reputation within the community, always having to turn away inter-district transfers from parents wanting to enroll their child(ren) at the school.

The school maintained a Great Expectations Model School status and had for almost two decades,

which focused the school on maintaining a positive school climate and a high character education emphasis. The school's stated vision was to provide creative learning opportunities in order to ignite a passion for learning, encourage students to value others, develop innovative solutions, and embrace diversity. Even though diversity remains a part of the school vision statement, the school resides in a conservative city and state. The school had adopted a comprehensive basal reading series, but afforded teachers much autonomy to plan their own lessons using supplemental materials. The school provided curriculum includes little diversity beyond the bland multicultural stories mostly based on famous historical figures and are in no way controversial.

Amber: A Young and Energetic Teacher Eager to Make a Difference

This is Amber's first year at Brookside. She came to Brookside from a large urban district with three years of teaching experience and near completion of her master's degree in literacy (reading specialist). Amber's classroom is bright and cheerful with lots of flexible seating options for her students, rather than desks and chairs in straight rows with students sitting quietly. Instead, students sit on bean bag chairs, milk crates, or exercise balls allowing for more mobility. She is young and energetic and contributes to the positive school-wide culture by organizing student and staff activities throughout the year to build and maintain a sense of community. Amber identifies as heterosexual. I did not ask her racial background.

Amber had never read LGBTQ themed literature with her students throughout her teaching career. I provided a stack of books I thought might interest her and her 3rd grade students, but offered no other opinions or suggestions since my research is focused on how the teachers are implementing such literature and I did not want to persuade her decision making process. A few days later, she had chosen several books she wanted to use with her students.

Amber felt completely supported by her principal and knew she had autonomy to plan ELA lessons not part of the school-adopted basal reading series. While the principal did not know the books she was using contained characters who challenged gender stereotypes and appeared on

LGBTQ-friendly reading lists, she felt confident, should a parent complain or question her book choices, she could defend her choices and the principal would support her with the parent(s).

Amber received no feedback, either positive or negative, from parents. The books she chose, *The Sissy Duckling* (2005) and *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* (2007), were not overtly LGBTQ, but they did present queer characters (one boy and one male animal) that did not conform to typical masculine stereotypes.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Books Chosen

Figure 6

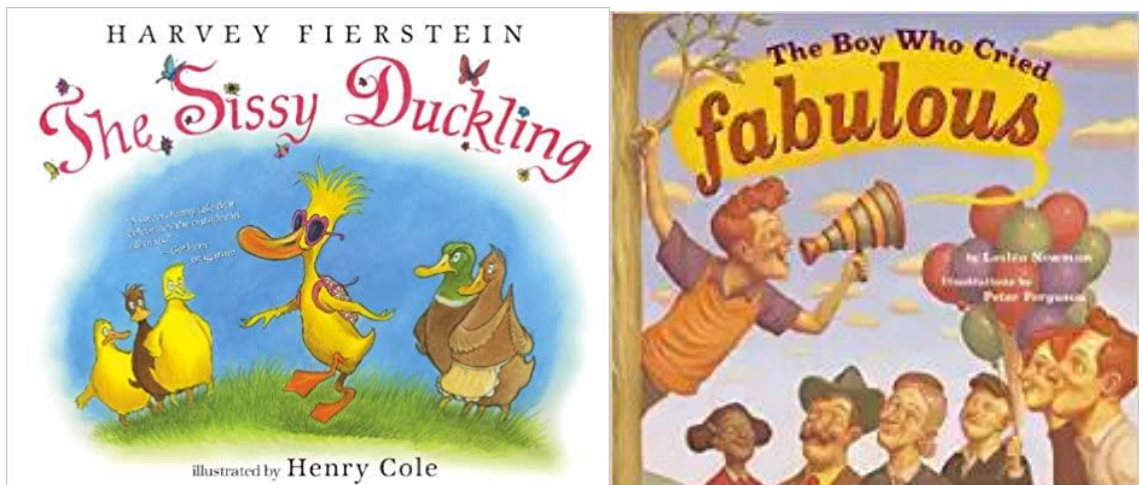


Table 14

Synopsis of *The Sissy Duckling*

Title: <i>The Sissy Duckling</i>	Author: Harvey Fierstein	Copyright: 2005
<p>Synopsis: Elmer is not like the other boy ducklings. While they like to build forts, he loves to bake cakes. While they like to play baseball, he wants to put on the halftime show. Elmer is a great big sissy. But when his father is wounded by a hunter's shot, Elmer proves that the biggest sissy can also be the greatest hero. Source: https://www.amazon.com/Sissy-Duckling-Harvey-Fierstein</p>		

Table 15

Synopsis of The Boy Who Cried Fabulous

Title: <i>The Boy Who Cried Fabulous</i>	Author: Leslea Newman	Copyright: 2007
Synopsis: <p>The only thing Roger likes better than exploring the world around him is describing it. And Roger describes most things as fabulous! But his parents have a different view. They want Roger to see things the way they do, so they ban "fabulous" from his vocabulary. Fabulously illustrated by Peter Ferguson, this cheerful tale will have children rejoicing along with Roger at all the fabulous--no, marvelous! no, dazzling!--things that await him when he steps outside.</p> <p>Source: https://www.amazon.com/Boy-Who-Cried-Fabulous/</p>		

Queering the Curriculum with LGBTQ Literature

Amber's Motivations

Amber was new to the inclusion of LGBTQ-inclusive literature and had limited knowledge of available inclusive books. I provided Amber a stack of grade-appropriate books for her to peruse. Amber chose to integrate three of the LGBTQ-themed books into her curriculum. When asked, Amber's primary justifications for choosing each book revolved around either an emotional/behavioral issue (bullying/name-calling) she noticed among her students, or an academic skill (use of adjectives in writing) with which she felt the book aligned. Once Amber had discovered inclusive books, she was excited to integrate LGBTQ-inclusive literature into her curriculum. However, her expressed justifications for each book choice remained based on factors other than the deliberate confronting of queer issues with students. In her final interview, Amber expressed a sense of accomplishment in her ability to include diverse books with her students and encourages other teachers to not be scared of "how other teachers will react." This statement

offers a possible glimpse into a fear of judgement from peers for including LGBTQ literature. As a first experience with inclusive literature, she appears tentative in her resolve to queer her curriculum, but offers an example to others for taking a first step into queering their curriculum.

Amber's Pedagogical Moves

Using Literature to Respond to Students' Needs.

The first book Amber chose to read was *The Sissy Duckling* (2005) by Fierstein and Cole based on issues she was observing in the classroom. This book is about a duckling who does not act in a dominant, socially-constructed masculine manner like his male siblings or like his papa expects of him. Therefore, he is bullied about his behavior. Over the course of the book, the “sissy duckling” uses his strengths and talents to ultimately become the hero of the story by saving his papa. Amber chose this book in order to “have a discussion about how it is okay to be different and being able to use your strengths that lie within that difference.”

Amber had noticed students “constantly bickering with each other” and their intolerance of others’ differences. She also noted some of her more “gaming” students (students who play a lot of video games) were more closely aligned with the sissy duckling and could probably relate to this character, being less interested in sports and other outdoor activities. She chose this book to address a specific socioemotional issue within the classroom. Amber’s choice for the use of this book reflects Bishop’s (1990) idea of mirrors and windows, providing her gaming students a chance to see themselves represented in the text, as well as her other students a window by which they can look into the life of another person different from themselves. Amber then explicitly compared the bullying and name calling she had observed to the actions of the antagonists in the book. While Amber was not addressing the queer nature of the duckling directly, she confronted social and emotional issues that surfaced because the duckling did not fit the normal and culturally-defined behaviors expected of him.

To extend this learning, she had her students write letters to the sissy duckling. Students wrote personal notes to the sissy duckling, many expressing how they had been treated unfairly because of things out of their control, much like the sissy duckling. When asked what she would have done differently, she commented that next time she would like to take this lesson a step further and have students make connections to the classroom or school setting, instead of just writing letters to the duck character, thus allowing students to make personal connections.

When asked if she would use this book again, Amber responded,

Yes, the Sissy Duckling was very effective in that moment. I think it really helped some of my students learn that it's okay to be different, because they're still important. They can still do great things because they're different. Sometimes our difference is what helps them do great things.

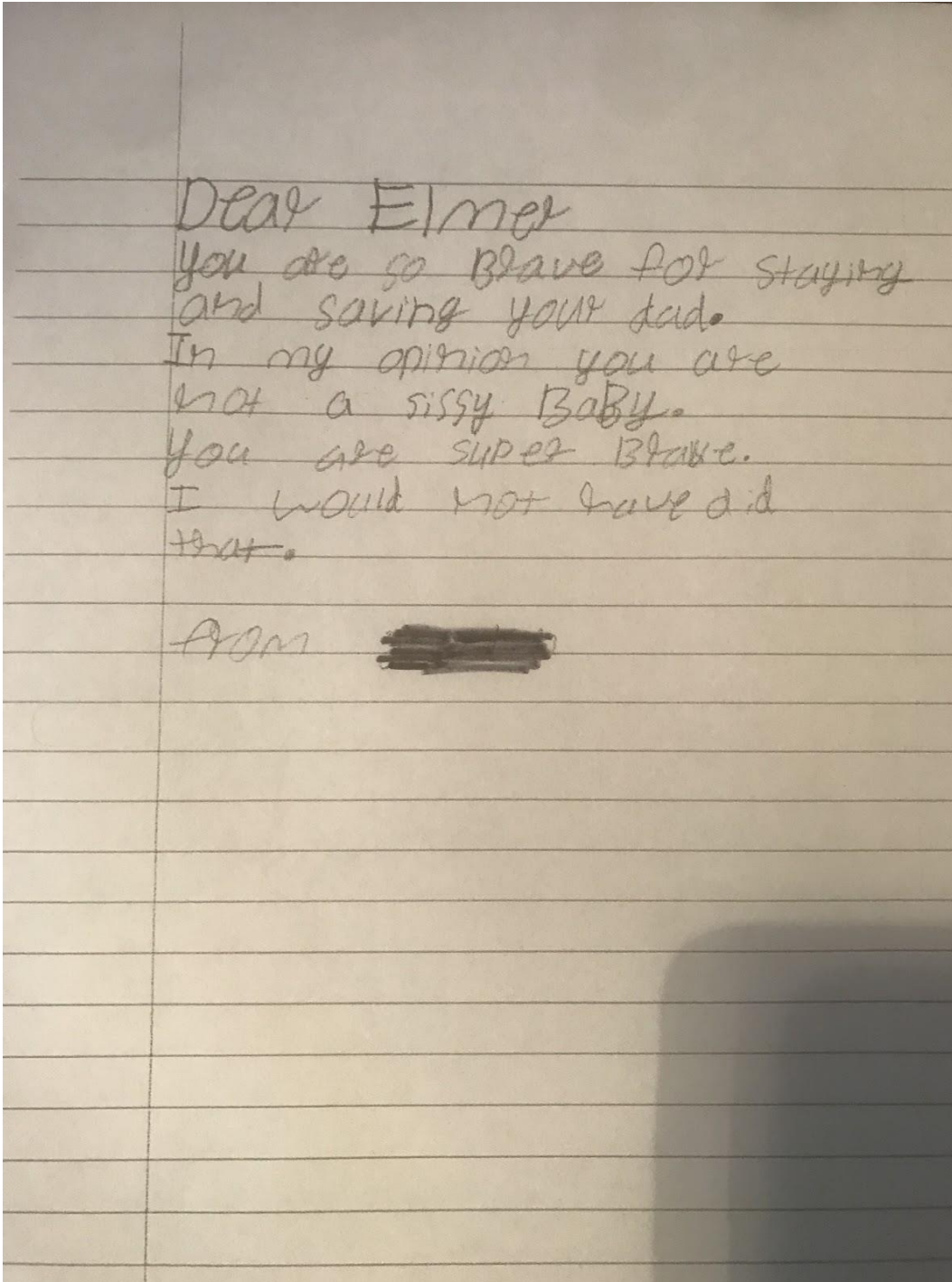
Amber's use of the *Sissy Duckling* book, provided a first step for her in queering her curriculum.

Toe-Wetting: Creating an Entry Point for Queering Pedagogy.

While the focus of her discussion with students surrounding the book did not dwell on the queer nature of the protagonist, the duckling's "gender transgressions" are clearly evidenced throughout the book, even without his sexuality coming into discussion (DePalma & Atkinson, 2008). This conflation of gender and queerness allowed Amber to queer her pedagogy by attempting to "create conflict and ruptures in thinking" (Blackburn & Clark, 2011, p. 247) among her students. Amber was prepared for a class discussion about the queerness of the duckling, but followed the lead of the students and their understanding of the book, focusing primarily on the topic of being yourself, using the exemplar of a gender-nonconforming duck. Did Amber play it safe, or did she push the boundaries as much as she possibly could? Although she did not broach the subject of gender directly, she explored the notion of pigeonholing individuals based on socially and culturally constructed identities, a crucial part of queering one's pedagogy (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015).

Figure 7

Example of student writing to The Sissy Duckling

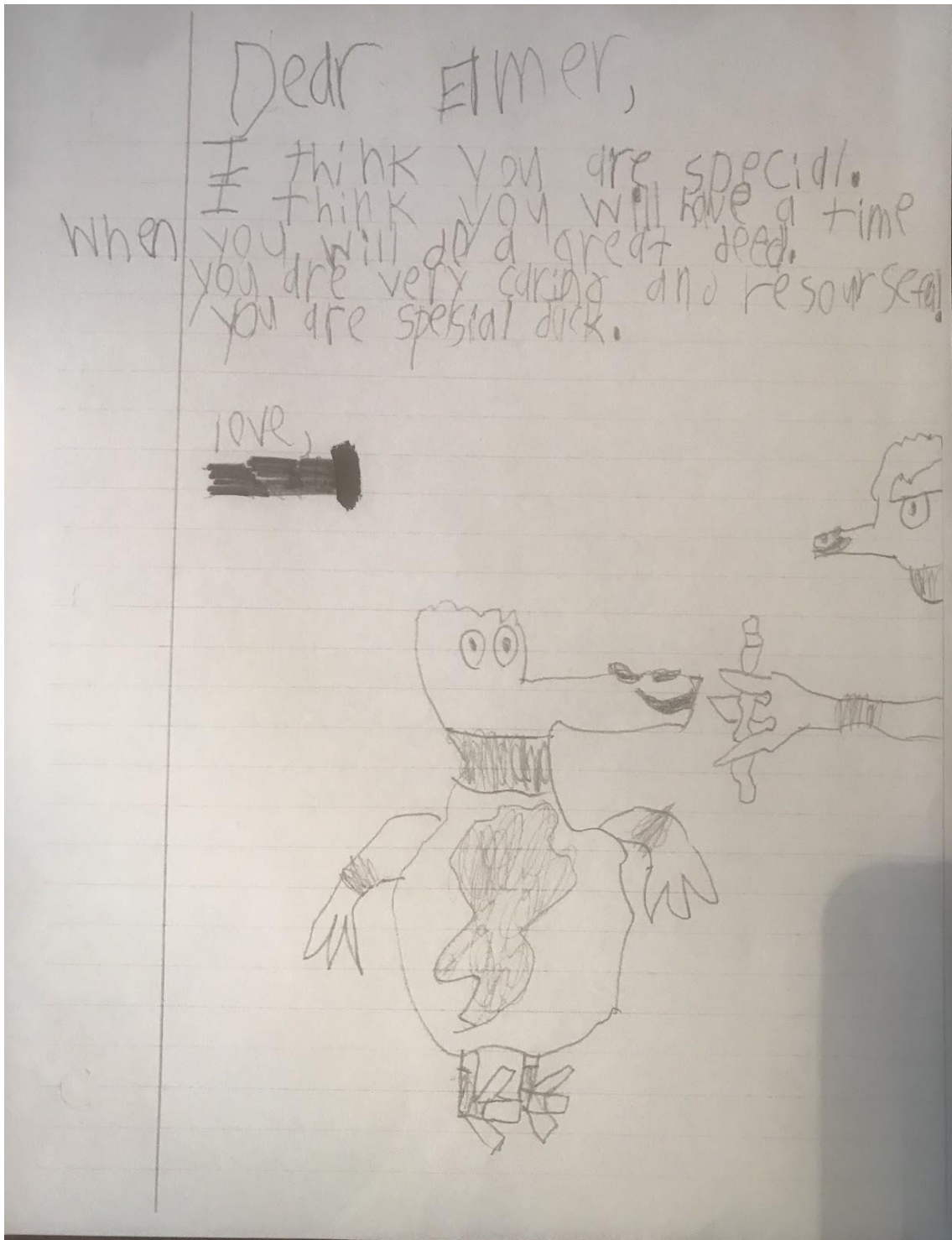


Dear Elmer
You are so brave for staying
and saving your dad.
In my opinion you are
not a sissy baby.
You are super brave.
I would not have did
that.

From ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Figure 9

Example of student writing to The Sissy Duckling



Skill-Based Instruction with Inclusive Mentor Text.

The second book Amber chose was *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* (2007) by Newman and Ferguson. She chose this book for a specific academic purpose, as a mentor text for the use of adjectives in the students' writing. *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* is about a boy who overuses the word "fabulous" for everything. This book is often listed as an LGBTQ book because the use/overuse of the word "fabulous" by the boy, when paired with the illustrations, can be seen/read as a feminine or gender non-conforming character. Her use of this book was primarily for academic reasons. While this book is often tagged as LGBTQ, none of her students seemed to pick up on that aspect, nor did she explicitly acknowledge the character to be queer. Only one student commented that the character was "weird" during her oral read-aloud of the book. At the time of the interview, Amber had not completed any other longer writing assignments since the use of the book and could not comment as to whether or not this lesson on word usage would carry over into their actual writing assignments. This book, similar to the *Sissy Duckling*, provided her students another glimpse into the suspension of socially and culturally constructed contexts related to identity (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015).

Queering Explicitly VS Implicitly

The third book Amber chose was *The Accidental Adventures of India McAllister* (Agell, 2010). She chose this book as a read aloud because it was a chapter book and was short enough to finish before the end of the school year. At least that was the plan. This book is about a girl and her adventures, many of which occur with her dad and his new boyfriend, after mom and dad's separation. Unfortunately, she did not finish the book before the end of the school year, due to flooding that cancelled school. Therefore, I'm choosing to not include this book in the discussion, and will focus only on the two books she was able to complete and discuss with me in interviews. Although, she did note when she got to the part of the story where it started to become evident the dad's friend was "more than a friend" the students weren't yet making that connection. She said, "If they're understanding what that means, they aren't showing any reaction to it." This statement

reinforces the fact that Amber had not explicitly, at least not yet, confronted the topic of the same-sex couple with her students. Unfortunately, she was unable to finish the book before the end of the year, and we will never know what the students' reactions would have been, or if she would have explicitly discussed the dad and his boyfriend with her 3rd graders.

Being the first time Amber had used any literature deemed LGBTQ-inclusive, she offers a unique perspective from the other case study participants who are much more seasoned and knowledgeable with this type of literature. Amber works in a public school in a politically conservative state. Her principal, while supportive of her teachers, is also conservative. Social justice issues are not an explicit part of the school's curriculum beyond the limited and sterile topics the basal reading series covers, usually focused around racial or multi-cultural issues that are in no way controversial. This case may seem less impactful than the other cases explored so far, but it offers a glimpse into a toe-wetting of sorts into the inclusion of LGBTQ-inclusive literature by a novice teacher just beginning to explore expanding her use of diverse literature. While she may have been tentative in her ability to directly confront issues of gender and sexuality with her students, her inclusion of stories that challenged stereotypes and cultural norms is indeed a significant step in queering one's pedagogy and curriculum.

Amber's Reflections

When asked what she had learned about her own pedagogy, she was highly motivated to continue to seek out diverse literature and incorporate it into her curriculum in the future.

I really need to start exploring more books instead of just using the same things I use over and over again. I'd never heard of either of these books before, "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" or the "Sissy Duckling", but I absolutely love them!

It's also important to note, just as the other participants, Amber received no parental or administrative feedback about her use of the books. Even though neither the *Sissy Duckling* or *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* were overtly LGBTQ-focused, they opened a space for Amber to

queer her curriculum by challenging what is viewed as normal, challenging hegemonic masculinity, and providing a classroom culture in which differences are valued and all students are allowed to be unapologetically themselves.

Conclusion

Each teacher, in her/his own ways, integrated topics of gender and/or sexual orientation into her/his pedagogical practice. Further, each teacher was influenced by her/his varied backgrounds and years of experience along with the uniqueness of their school settings. Throughout the five case studies several themes surfaced through the process of using of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature.

Responsiveness to Needs of Students and Stakeholders

Teacher participants used LGBTQ-inclusive literature to respond to the needs of their students. Kimberly, in response to a student with same-sex parents, chose to include diverse books into her curriculum. Amber identified socioemotional issues occurring between students in the form of bullying and name calling, so she purposefully addressed the issues through the use of queer literature. Michael, Sarah, and Carrie also used inclusive children's literature to respond to issues of social justice and to intentionally teach cultural competence with their students. They used queer literature as they did any other book. Teachers chose books based on the needs of their students; whether academic, social, or emotional. Teachers knew queer topics could potentially cause push-back from parents and/or administrators so they prepared and anticipated justifications for each book or topic they chose to share with students.

Intentionality in Mission and Decision-Making Processes

Another theme that surfaced among the more experienced teachers was the intentionality they exhibited in their inclusiveness of all students. Sarah's unit with book clubs and diversity groups exemplifies each of the experienced teachers' deep-seated desires to explicitly teach about diversity and confront head-on topics related to gender and sexuality with upper elementary

students. Even when this age group of children is often sheltered from discussions involving Trans* issues or same-sex couples, the experienced teachers directly broached these topics. The intentionality of the schools in cases 1-5 wholly supported the teachers' inclusion of queer topics. Schools or districts intentionally using queer-inclusive literature appear critical to the successful queering a teacher's pedagogy. We saw in each case the effects a supportive school culture had on the degree to which teachers could queer their pedagogy and curriculum.

Treats LGBTQ-Inclusion as another Aspect of Diversity

All teachers interviewed and observed used LGBTQ-inclusive literature as they did all other books and texts they had used throughout the year. Additionally, they treated the queer topics and characters as any other aspect of diversity, while also valuing the differences of each queer individual.

Individually, each case, to varying degrees, courageously confronted issues of gender and sexual diversity with upper elementary students queering both their pedagogical practices and curriculum by challenging students' thinking about queer individuals and issues. Collectively, however, these individual stories converged towards a more clear vision of the terrain teachers may need to be prepared to navigate in order to introduce students to this important and timely topic of social justice. In the final chapter of the study that follows, I share this terrain through the cross-case findings common across all five teachers, leading to the successful queering of their curriculum.

CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to understand how five upper elementary classroom teachers queered their pedagogy through the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature. Using a constructionist research lens, I developed these insights through multiple interviews with these teachers and other supporting documents they provided. I told the individual stories of these five teachers in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I share the cross-case findings, comprising the quintain (Stake, 2006): three noteworthy assertions (Erickson, 1986) and the subsequent implications for practice, to address my grand tour question seeking the queering practices of upper elementary teachers.

The following assertions (Erickson, 1986) continue to answer my research questions about teachers' queering practices throughout the process of using LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature. Each assertion statement flows from multiple cases resulting in the following three themes and patterns:

- Responsiveness to needs of students and stakeholders
- Intentionality in mission and decision-making processes
- Treats LGBTQ inclusion as another aspect of diversity

These three themes guided the development of the assertions and subsequent discussions and implications for practice.

Throughout the individual cases patterns of responsiveness, patterns of intentionality, and the ability for teachers to use queer literature in the same manner they use other books and texts surfaced. A discussion follows each assertion placing my findings alongside queer theory and Miller's (2015) Queer Literacy Framework (QLF) to deepen the conversation. Each assertion and discussion culminate with a series of possible implications for practice. Implications, geared primarily for upper elementary teachers, develop from both my findings and my decades of teaching experience at the upper elementary level.

I conclude this chapter by discussing the implications for future research that my study suggests and by sharing my final reflections as a researcher through my personal epilogue.

Assertion #1

Teachers treated LGBTQ issues and/or issues related to gender and sexual equality as they would with any other topic. They anticipated and prepared for parent and/or administrative reactions with resolve to persist in their desire to integrate LGBTQ topics into their teaching.

Contrary to the frequently held teacher belief that it is necessary to obtain advanced parental notification to deter negative parental reactions (Chng & Wong, 1998; Flores, 2014; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2018), the participants' narratives demonstrated that parents did not need prior notification for the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature, unless the teacher had already established a precedent of notifying parents of all books used throughout the year. None of the participants interviewed required a signed parent/guardian notification or letter seeking permission for the student to participate in the unit of study or to read the LGBTQ-inclusive literature. While one teacher, Sarah, did include the book titles and themes in a newsletter prior to starting a unit of study, the note was informational in nature and a normal part of the classroom

routine before any major unit of study. Sarah provided parents a list of possible books their child could read and encouraged parents to discuss with the child which book(s) they would like to read. She felt affording parents the option to research the books, should they choose to do so, was sufficient so “parents could feel involved in the decision making process.” One nervous mother related a conversation she had with her daughter about the book selection process to Sarah during a parent/teacher conference. The daughter was considering participating in the LGBTQ book club.

The mom asked her daughter, “I don’t know, are you sure you’re ready to read about these [this topic]? Are you ready to think about this?”

The nervous mom told Sarah: “You know what, I guess I didn’t realize up to that point just how much we really did shelter her. I guess I’ve been trying to keep her a little girl, but I’m proud of how much she’s really thinking about these things, and thinking about these topics, and about how one of these can impact each other.”

Sarah said, “That was a really positive response. [The mom] was like, “Well, I guess she [her daughter] really was ready,” which was the goal.

The parent letter encouraged concerned parents to guide their child in their book choice. This technique provided a method similar to an “opt out” option for students and parents (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). No parents responded to any of the teacher participants, based on the newsletters, requesting their child not participate in the reading of the book(s). Sarah thought notification of parents about the upcoming unit provided the needed transparency, but “so far we haven’t had a single parent even ask a question.” Throughout Michael’s interviews, he mentioned a few times about his decision of whether or not to notify parents about the book *George*, even asking a couple parents for advice, but ultimately decided that since he had not done so previously with other books, doing so was unnecessary.

The research on LGBTQ-inclusive literature mentions multiple times about notifying parents as a means to safe-guard employment status and/or avoid parent and administrative issues (Chng & Wong, 1998; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Flores, 2014; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2018). In contradiction, some of the research encourages handling the inclusion of LGBTQ issues as one would any other discussion or topic addressed in the classroom (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). Encouraging teachers to utilize a matter-of-fact discourse to seamlessly introduce, reiterate, and sustain discussions of sexuality and gender differences as “just an ordinary part of the diversity of everyday lived experience[s]” compliments Miller’s (2015) Queer Literacy Framework (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016, p. 821; Miller, 2015). It stands to reason notifying parents may steer off complaints or concerns, but participants thought it may also give parents permission to make their unwelcome, queerphobic wishes and opinions heard that otherwise would not have been voiced, walking a thin line between hiding their work and enacting a normalizing practice.

All participants were aware of administrative support and/or concerns prior to using LGBTQ-inclusive literature. Protecting employment appeared to carry little concern with the participants since each participant already felt confident in their administrative support and/or their ability to justify the use of the chosen literature. Each participant successfully chose to carry on as normal and not give LGBTQ-inclusive literature the subaltern state (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007) a heads-up to parents would enact. Most importantly, all participants reported they received no negative parental concerns about reading the literature. Positive comments were common among all teacher participants. However, this is not to imply that they will not encounter pushback from parents in the future, or that other teachers will not be met with obstacles in less supportive and less inclusive-focused contexts. This research does offer hope and examples of teachers who are queering their curriculum. Each teacher participant, with the possible exception of Amber, clearly stated they would not back down to parent pushback, and expressed a clear resolve to challenge current gender and sexuality norms. To do otherwise would make them “co-

conspirators in not only reproducing current understandings of gender and sexuality but also in reproducing rationales that can lead to gendered and sexual violence” (Miller, 2015, p. 41), something each participant would undoubtedly not support.

Each teacher was able to queer their curriculum in regard to allowing students to experience characters in books that most of the students had not experienced in literature previously. The intentional and unapologetic choice to include queer literature without identifying it as unusual, risqué, or controversial is the epitome of queering the curriculum and challenging the notion of difference (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015). Normalizing all genders, gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations through the unobstructed and direct discussion of such was a primary aim of all participants and represented their ability to successfully challenge the “othering” of LGBTQ populations. However, the teachers, in line with Martino (1999), pushed back against the presentation of queer characters as *normal* and like everyone else. The more experienced teachers were able to put “complementary and competing discourses in conversation with each other around diverse contexts and in complex contexts” (Blackburn & Clark, 2001, p. 247). Michael’s example of requiring his students to think critically and consider multiple viewpoints regarding Trans* issues offered one example of his pedagogical move to create tension and rupture students’ thinking about a topic.

Implications for Practice

Based on the above assertion, I offer several implications for queering one’s practice. These practices can present as either subversive or normalizing acts on the part of the teacher, depending on the context in which they teach. Queering one’s teaching does not exist as a secretive practice, but as unapologetically ensuring representation of all students within the curriculum.

- Teachers should be prepared to justify their use of LGBTQ-inclusive texts, to parents, teachers, and administration, if questioned

- Teachers can establish routines to inform parents about all texts students will read. The inclusion of LGBTQ literature into the curriculum should not be treated differently from other literature topics, otherwise it could be viewed as potentially controversial material.
- Reading about and discussing important issues, such as LGBTQ equality, gives students authentic purposes for reading and writing.

These implications are more easily achieved when teachers are working within schools aligned with their goals.

Assertion #2

Intentionally queering the curriculum with LGBTQ-inclusive books and issues extends beyond the individual classroom and ties to school climate and culture. Specifically, successfully queering curriculum and teachers' pedagogy occurs when educators teach within schools aligned with their convictions.

This finding extends Blackburn and Pascoe's (2015) work on finding a symbiotic relationship between climate and curriculum related to LGBTQ issues. In all five schools, the school's culture was fundamental to the teacher's ability to address LGBTQ issues with students. With the exception of Amber, all teachers clearly knew they had the support, and even encouragement, from administration and stakeholders to include LGBTQ issues in the curriculum. Amber did not have the same clear go-ahead from her principal, but she did have a strong feeling the principal would support her and trusted her curricular decisions in general.

All three independent schools had clear mission statements revolving around the ideas of cultural competence, social justice, and equality. Both public schools also had a commitment to diversity clearly stated in their vision and/or mission statements. All schools had staff members in teaching positions that openly identified as LGBTQ. The three independent schools clearly provided my teacher participants a safe-zone in which to advance their social justice ideologies. The two public schools were not as focused on social justice issues at a site level, but still allowed

teachers autonomy to work within their individual classrooms to integrate LGBTQ-inclusive literature.

Four of the five teachers actively worked to counter the pervasive heteronormative and queerphobic framework of the educational system (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Watson & Russell, 2015), both individually or as part of a school-wide mission. Amber, though just beginning her inclusion of LGBTQ curriculum into her teaching, had not previously been encouraged at a site or district level to do so in her classroom. The determining factor here seems to be the school's culture set by the leadership and stakeholders to both encourage and free teachers to include queer identified characters and themes into their curriculum thereby creating a more inclusive and safe environment for all students (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008; Kosciw, et al, 2012; Watson & Russell, 2015).

The teachers felt confident in their ability to address topics related to LGBTQ identities and gender expression in their classrooms, not because they knew all the answers but because the school climate was conducive to the possibility or had a blatant expectation of having such discussions. Furthermore, the teachers knew it was worth their effort. Should a challenge arise, each participant expressed confidence in their ability to justify their decisions, and were willing to stick with their convictions. Four of the five participants had experience with using diverse literature, which could have been the source of their confidence. Amber, though inexperienced with LGBTQ-inclusive literature, expressed confidence in her ability to justify her pedagogical decisions. As with all books used in the classroom, not just LGBTQ-inclusive books, teachers should be able to justify the choice(s) made by articulating how the texts fit within the curricular objectives and age or cultural appropriateness. Several of the participants expressed completing a mental self-analysis of their reasons for using the literature. Kimberly even sought out a mentor to bounce around her ideas and thinking before delving into unfamiliar territory. Analyzing any foreseeable issues beforehand will assist teachers in justifying their curriculum, especially with the use of what may be viewed as controversial material.

They all had thought out justifications ready for their use of literature and worked from a point of social justice and cultural competence as goals, not simply LGBTQ, but fighting for all marginalized people and groups. Kimberly, like all of the participants, said, “I just want to be prepared, you know, have the talking points for it if this parent has concerns for any reason, that you know, I am keeping it age appropriate.” Carrie urges teachers to...

know your community...not so that you can avoid it [parent questioning], but just know what you're going to say about why you chose this book. Avoidance doesn't help anything. It allows people to stay closed-minded, our goal is to produce citizens. How are we going to be a part of a global society? They are not going to be able to do that if they are left in their bubble and only know their bubble. I think there's going to be pushback. Ok. Try it! There might be, and if there is you already know what you're going to say.

Avoidance of the topic counters Miller's (2015) Queer Literacy Framework by shielding students from understanding the flexible nature of gender and sexuality and does not engage students to critique how gender norms are reinforced throughout the educational process. Each teacher understood parents could question their choices, but were prepared, seeking advice from administrators, teachers, and fellow professionals such as the college professor Kimberly consulted to prepare her rebuttal should she have had a parent question her teaching.

Another aspect related to school climate evidenced in each teacher's case shows a positive role of mentorship existed within each school and/or district. Kimberly and Amber both worked with other teachers more experienced in the field of LGBTQ-inclusive literature. The other three participants clearly worked as mentors and helped facilitate the use of inclusive literature within their school by leading discussions and curriculum planning meetings across grades and content areas for the advancement of their school's call to social justice and cultural competence.

Implications for practice

I offer the following implications for practice related to teachers intentionally working to queer their pedagogy and develop an inclusive school culture and climate:

- Avoid secrecy in the use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature. Teachers should consider intentionally and unapologetically creating an inclusive classroom climate.
- Teachers must know what they believe in order to work for social justice and teach cultural competency. Furthermore, they should be prepared to justify their position and curricular and pedagogical decisions to all stakeholders.
- This assertion has implications for teacher preparation institutions as they continue to educate future teachers on issues of diversity. Teacher preparation programs should strive to place interns with supervising teachers that model teaching practices that not only effectively teach standards but also teach for social equity and inclusiveness.
- New teachers need guidance into carefully considering their job site. With the exception of the final participant who had only been at that school a short time and beginning to explore using LGBTQ literature, all of the participants were clearly working within school sites matching their own personal convictions and teaching philosophies. At least two of the teachers had left schools based at least partly on their previous school's unwillingness to be accepting of all students, allow teachers autonomy in their curriculum and pedagogy, and/or allow the introduction of inclusive curriculum.
- Seek mentors that share their zeal for social justice and have experience effectively implementing LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. Mentors can aid in forming justifications should parents or administrators object to a book.

The importance of a teacher working within a school culture aligned to his/her own philosophy and convictions appears paramount to the inclusion of LGBTQ literature.

Assertion #3

The teaching of LGBTQ literature facilitates both a personalization and depersonalization spectrum needed to meet the needs of each student. Teachers craftily queered their pedagogy through literature to respond to needs they noticed within their students, classrooms, or society.

Several of the participating teachers teach in schools with a relative prevalence of LGBTQ individuals, including both students and faculty. However, all teacher participants recognized the need to continue to address issues whether or not students were already familiar with LGBTQ individuals and issues. Michael asserted:

I felt it was important to at least have that discussion because, you know, we always think they got it, there's Trans people or gay people, students these days they're hip or they're into it, but I really wanted to get to that and overcoming the obstacles.*

Teachers cannot make assumptions about student understanding simply because students were interacting with teachers and fellow students that identified as part of the LGBTQ community. The use of inclusive literature exposed students to yet another representation, countering the single-story dilemma (Adichie, 2009; Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor, 2014) prevalent with this topic and allowed the teachers to have meaningful conversations with students about gender and sexuality, not simply assuming students “get it” because they know someone gay and/or Trans*. Students in schools that did not have an openly identifiable LGBTQ student population received an opportunity to make a personal connection with a character. Alternatively, students in schools with a large presence of LGBTQ faculty and students acquired an opportunity to discuss issues regarding the LGBTQ community on a less personal basis through literary characters. Teachers guided discussions to occur about a fictional character instead of referencing actual members of their classroom/school community. The teacher participants were able to capitalize on this facet to have meaningful conversations at both a personal level and a

depersonalized level, being able to make connections to people they actually know as well as fictional characters.

For example, Sarah had a student in class who was reluctant to “even make it look like she was reading” a book with Trans* issues or individuals, because her sibling is Trans* and was dealing with quite a bit of judgement and bullying. Therefore, it was too personal and embarrassing to expose details of her own family. Throughout the “book tasting” event before students chose their book for the book club, the student initially distanced herself from the topic, but through the use of the fictional character paired with hearing her peers have meaningful conversations displaying empathy and compassion, “you could just physically see her relax in that moment as she’s hearing all her peers talk about this transgender child.” Through this process, the student gradually became more comfortable with her group, eventually able to discuss her personal situation after using the fictional character as a buffer to feel out her group’s feelings and beliefs. Once she identified her group as allies, she was able to speak freely in the group without fear of judgement on a much more personal level. Sarah further explains:

She just came out of her shell, and she wasn’t afraid to talk, necessarily, but she wouldn’t be afraid to talk about Lily & Dunkin and George. It’s a really good way for the kids to not have to open the conversation about themselves, but see that they really do have some pretty accepting peers. It’s neat.

While some students may be out, teachers do not possess the ability to pick out beforehand which students are, or will be, queer (Blaise, 2010; McAndrews & Warne, 2012; McDonough, 2007; Miller, 2015). Therefore, teachers should offer “alternative models of identity” to all students as they develop their individual gender and sexual identities (McDonough, 2007, p. 798; Miller, 2015). Coupling this with the staggering fact from GLSEN that only 16.8% of students report having any positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events in their school curriculum (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Kosciw, et al, 2012), this anti-homophobic and counter-heteronormative work clearly needs to be addressed within the school

curriculum and addressed by teachers (Miller, 2015). Teachers are guiding students through a process of realizing that a character in a book dealing with racism, dyslexia, or any other topic are “all just really wanting to be who they are...and to feel valued and important for who they are” (Sarah). This provides for a rupturing and reworking of social and classroom norms where all bodies are legitimated and made legible, a tenet of Miller’s Queer Literacy Framework (Miller, 2015).

This notion of personalization and de-personalization extends Bishop’s (1994) windows and mirrors analogy inasmuch as with the windows and mirrors students use fictional or historical characters to see themselves reflected in the characters or use book characters to experience others different from themselves. Queer literature can resonate with students with queer identities and allow them to see themselves in the literature. The teacher participants interviewed noted the use of inclusive literature made the issues more real and personal through empathy for the book characters. On the other hand, it offered an opportunity to depersonalize the topic for students experiencing LGBTQ identity development issues themselves or in their family. More so, this notion supports Miller’s (2015) QLF by believing “that students who identify on a continuum of gender and sexual minorities (GMS) deserve to learn in environments free of bullying and harassment” as well as having space “for students to self-define” their (a)gender, (a)sexuality, or (a)pronouns (p. 42). When queering one’s pedagogy and curriculum, teachers are aware and support the premise that students possess agency for their own identities (Miller, 2015).

Implications for Practice

I offer the following implications for practice:

- With the personalizing/ de-personalizing spectrum teachers work to navigate between assisting students to make meaningful connections to real life and using text to confront issues that may be better dealt with via fictional characters or situations, serving as a safeguard to deflect discussions away from self.

- The use of LGBTQ-inclusive literature provides a safe means for students to work through issues of gender and sexual orientation.
- Know your students and choose books accordingly.

Teachers will gain proficiency in balancing the dichotomy of personalizing/de-personalizing their pedagogy with experience using LGBTQ-inclusive literature. It is through this experience that will also help develop a teacher's reputation in regard to tackling diverse topics with students.

Future research possibilities

Upon review of the existing literature, a limited amount of study on upper elementary teachers and their use of inclusive literature was apparent. Upon completion of this study, further interrogation remains within the span of 3rd-6th grades, as well as involving parents and students. A study focused on administrators would also be timely, since administrators seemed to play an important role in supporting the teachers as well as the establishment of a school climate and culture conducive to queering a teacher's pedagogy and curriculum. The wide array of pedagogical and curricular practices my teacher participants experienced was due, at least in part, to the age of the students. My participants were split in the manner in which they utilized the LGBTQ-inclusive books. The 3rd and 4th grade teachers opted to read the books aloud to the students and lead the discussions that followed. The two 6th grade teachers had students read the books independently and incorporated the book(s) much more thoroughly into their curriculum. Interrogating the method of delivery, read aloud, book study, literature circle, etc., would offer a more focused look at the varying ways diverse books could be incorporated into classroom use.

As mentioned earlier, teaching within a school whose mission matches one's convictions and personal philosophies appears extremely important for teachers to incorporate issues related to LGBTQ, gender, and/or sexuality. Three of the schools were independent/private institutions whose philosophical stance rested firmly on principles of social justice and cultural competency. Although it was not impossible, it was more difficult to locate teachers using LGBTQ-inclusive

literature at public institutions. Further study of public schools and their inclusion of issues related to gender and sexual diversity remains needed.

The geographic locations of my participants comprised schools within the middle part of the United States and states considered predominantly conservative, though most taught in larger cities that were more progressive than the rest of their state. Extending my sampling to include a more diverse sampling geographically, including the east and west coasts, as well as more rural schools could yield differing results.

This study focused exclusively on the teachers' use of LGBTQ-inclusive books. Extending this line of research, it is imperative to include students and their learning regarding issues related to gender and sexual orientation based on the literature they read. Including the parents' role in the inclusion of diverse literature into the curriculum with this age group of students could also provide a much needed perspective. Continuing to use a queer framework and interrogate how we, as the educational community, can work against heteronormative and homophobic views with our students is of great importance.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, teaching queerly is not a specific pedagogical practice, but rather a “disrupting, troubling, questioning, and never resting” stance to teaching (DePalma & Atkinson, 2008, p. 136). Each teacher interviewed queered their curriculum and pedagogical practices in their own unique way. Continuing to use Letts and Sears (1999) definition of queering, each teacher participant embodied an educator “who model[s] honesty, civility, authenticity, integrity, fairness, and respect” (p. 4), as all educators should. They created classrooms “that challenge categorical thinking, promote interpersonal intelligence, and foster critical consciousness” (Letts & Sears, 1999, p. 5). No “definitive lesson plans or supremely queer books” currently exist, nor will they ever (DePalma & Atkinson, 2008, p. 136). Instead, teachers teach queerly by challenging students' categorical ways of thinking about gender, sex, and sexual orientation.

If the aim is to “queer” the curriculum by introducing LGBTQ-inclusive literature, with the goal of LGBTQ-inclusive literature being anti-normative, countering heteronormative practices prevalent in our educational system, and encouraging all students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, teachers should work against the notion of normalizing LGBTQ and other sexual minorities. It then becomes a two-edged sword to enact practices that treat LGBTQ individuals as *normal*, while also acknowledging their differences and uniqueness. As LGBTQ-identified characters continue to appear more often in children’s literature, it stands to reason that it will become common and therefore more accepted and less controversial. For many in the LGBTQ community, it is their goal to be accepted and seen as a “normal” part of society. For others, being different is a source of great pride. All are correct. Teachers have a profound role in this process and through the increased use of children’s literature including ALL types of individuals, families, and relationships can endeavor to queer their pedagogy. The participants in this study give great hope for the use of LGBTQ-inclusive children’s literature. However, there remains only a small number of teachers currently doing such work, with many teachers and administrators opposed to such inclusion (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). Much work remains at all levels of the education system, from policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, and administrators, to make this literature an important part of the curriculum for all students.

Epilogue

This research process has been a daunting and lonely task at times. Hindsight is surely 20/20. Reflecting back I learned several lessons I will carry forward in my new role as a researcher. First, I felt guilty asking participants for their time. Each of the teacher participants was more than willing to share their stories and spend time discussing the amazing things happening in their classrooms. Moving forward I will be more assertive in requesting data from participants to create as strong a study as possible. Had time and finances allowed, observing, in

person, all of my participants teaching LGBTQ-inclusive lessons would have allowed me to get to know the teachers better and ensured greater depth in each case. Furthermore, I look forward to collaborating with other researchers in the future, continuing to refine my skills.

As the writing process nears the end, the emergent nature of qualitative research has transitioned from textbook knowledge to authentic understanding. My qualitative writing ability has grown in much the same manner. Months ago my methods and case studies were dry and lacked life, reading more like a textbook than a story. (My apologies to my committee members, writing group, and mentors who had to read them and offer feedback!) It is my hope the current iteration of each case brings not only an accurate portrayal of each teacher and their use of LGBTQ literature, but paints a picture of real life teachers engaging in meaningful work.

Through this process it has advanced my personal mission to fight for social justice issues, including, of course, LGBTQ equality with elementary students. I'm optimistic to hear stories, such as Sarah's anecdote about her students flabbergasted that LGBTQ books would possibly need approved by administration prior to being allowed in the classroom, asking "Why wouldn't anybody want this book? Why wouldn't anybody read this book?" Dealing with my fourth grade students on a daily basis continues to offer hope and reiterate the fact society is changing in regard to LGBTQ issues. Within the last year I have had parents during parent-teacher conferences bring up issues regarding their child's sexual orientation.

While I still have not had a student to my knowledge come out, according to parents I have had several students questioning their sexual orientation. These students, ages 9 and 10, are comfortable enough to discuss these issues with their parents, something that never seemed a possibility for me during my childhood. This only reinforces my conviction for the need to make sure issues related to LGBTQ individuals occur in my curriculum and becomes a frequent part of the classroom dialogue and treated as simply another representation of human behavior. I will make sure my elementary students are able to see themselves represented in curriculum and know

they are all valued and given equal treatment. Future plans also include transitioning higher education working with teacher preparation programs in which future teachers will learn, not only how to teach students to read and write, but to use their voices and influence to work toward social justice and ideals of democracy.

As I near the end of this study, I must say I do so with a feeling of optimism. I feel blessed to have found such amazing teachers willing to share how they have endeavored to work for social justice across many differing issues; not just LGBTQ inclusivity, but how they work tirelessly to educate their students about the effects of racism, homelessness, refugees and immigration, to name just a few. The inclusion of LGBTQ issues is but a part of a much larger focus for each of these teachers and schools. However, I am also somewhat fearful of our current political climate in which the withdrawal and repression of LGBTQ rights remains a possibility.

Representation matters! Throughout the time I have been working on this study, this motto has become common rhetoric by many. Whether mentioned as part of racial disparity during the Black Lives Matter movement, the push for more women serving in elected government positions, or the increased portrayal of LGBTQ individuals in popular media, including children's books, repressed groups deserve to see themselves represented as legitimate, contributing members of society. I leave this study with a quote that has guided my thinking since the inception of this study. Adrienne Rich, American poet and feminist,

When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.

All of our students deserve to see themselves represented in our classrooms. Representation really does matter.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

List of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature used throughout study

Agell, C. (2010). *The accidental adventures of India McAllister*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Blake, A. H. (2018). *Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Errico, D. (2019). *The bravest knight who ever lived*. Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Kids Publishing.

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Gino, A. (2015). *George*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Howe, J. (2001). *The misfits*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Newman, L. & Ferguson, P. (2007). *The boy who cried fabulous*. Berkeley: Tricycle Press.

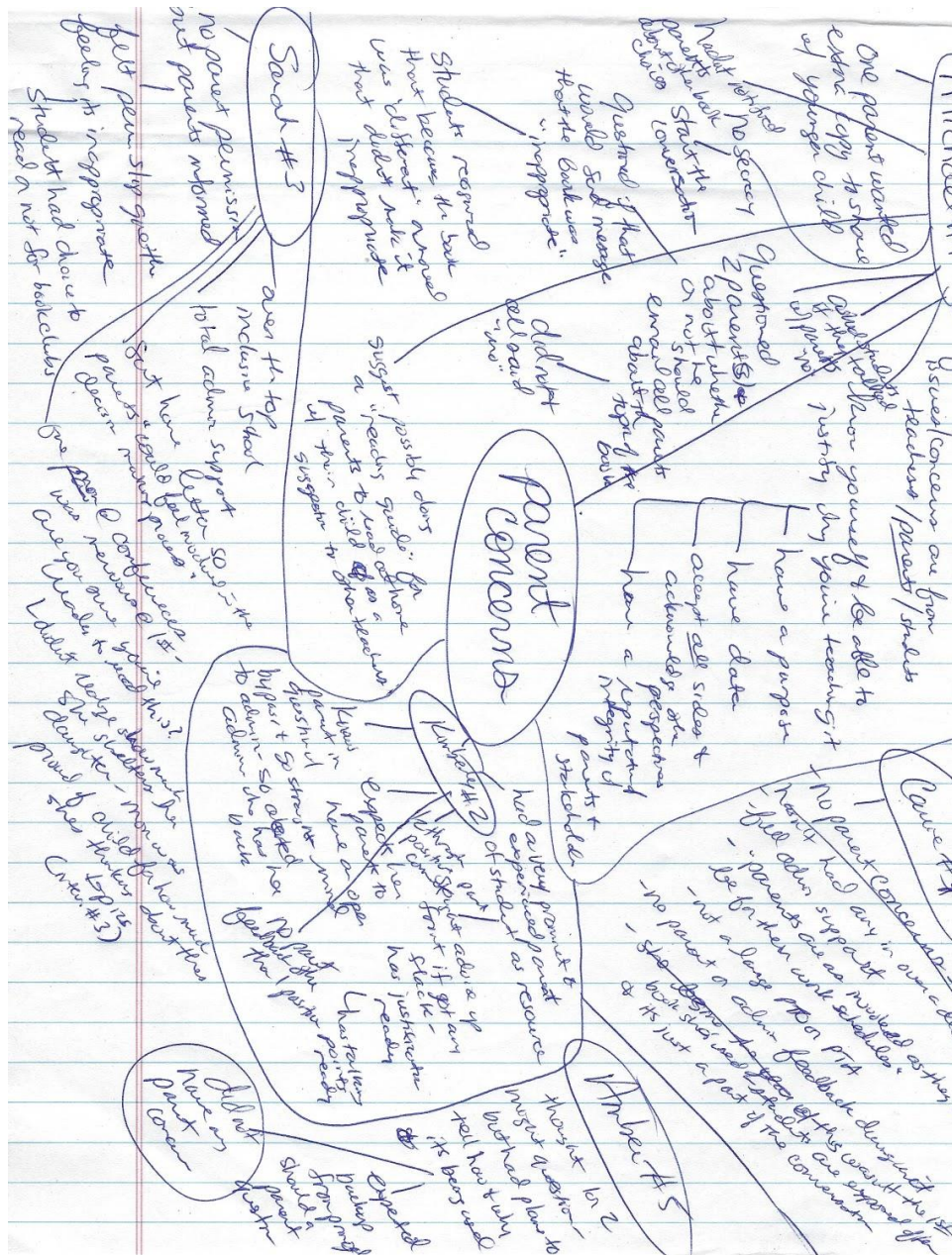
Pitman, G. E. (2018). *Sewing the rainbow: A story about Gilbert Baker*. Washington DC: Magination Press

Polonsky, A. (2014). *Gracefully Grayson*. New York: Hyperion.

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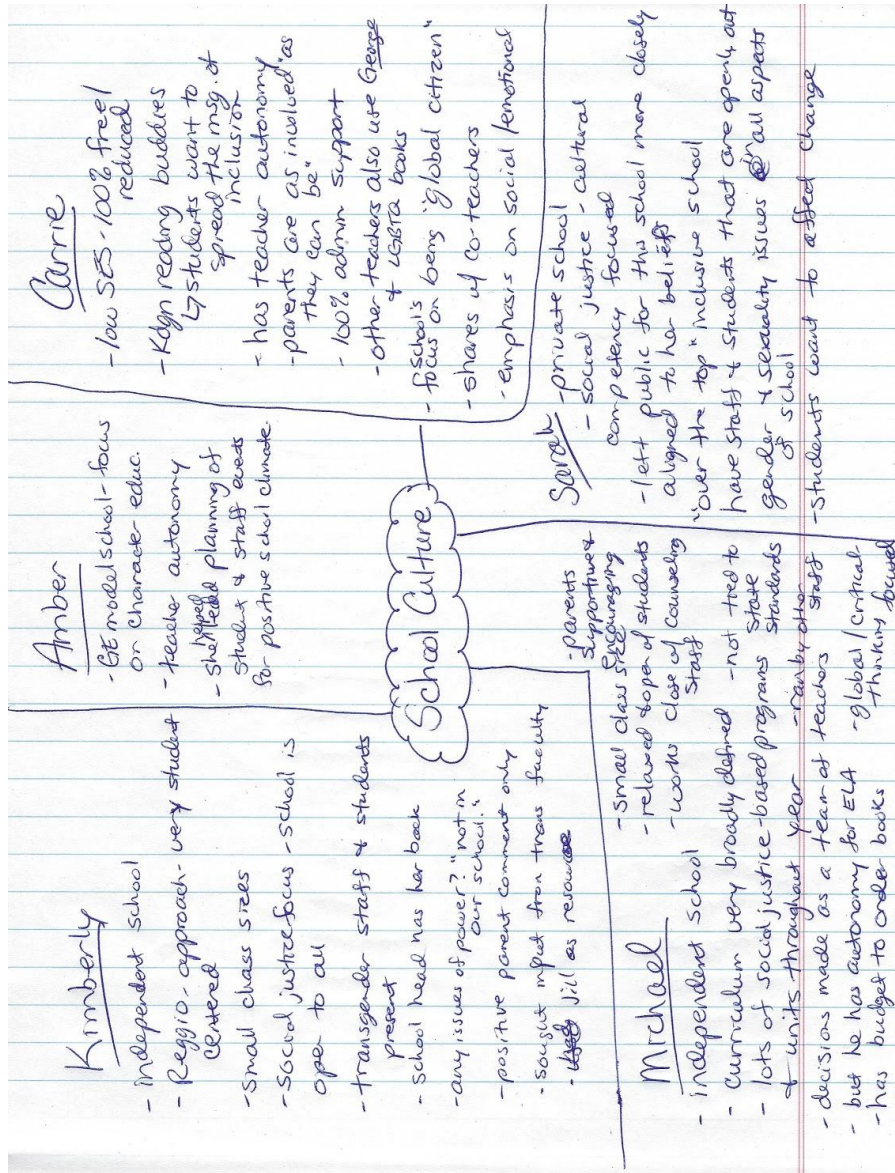
Appendix B

Cross-case thematic analysis: Parental concerns



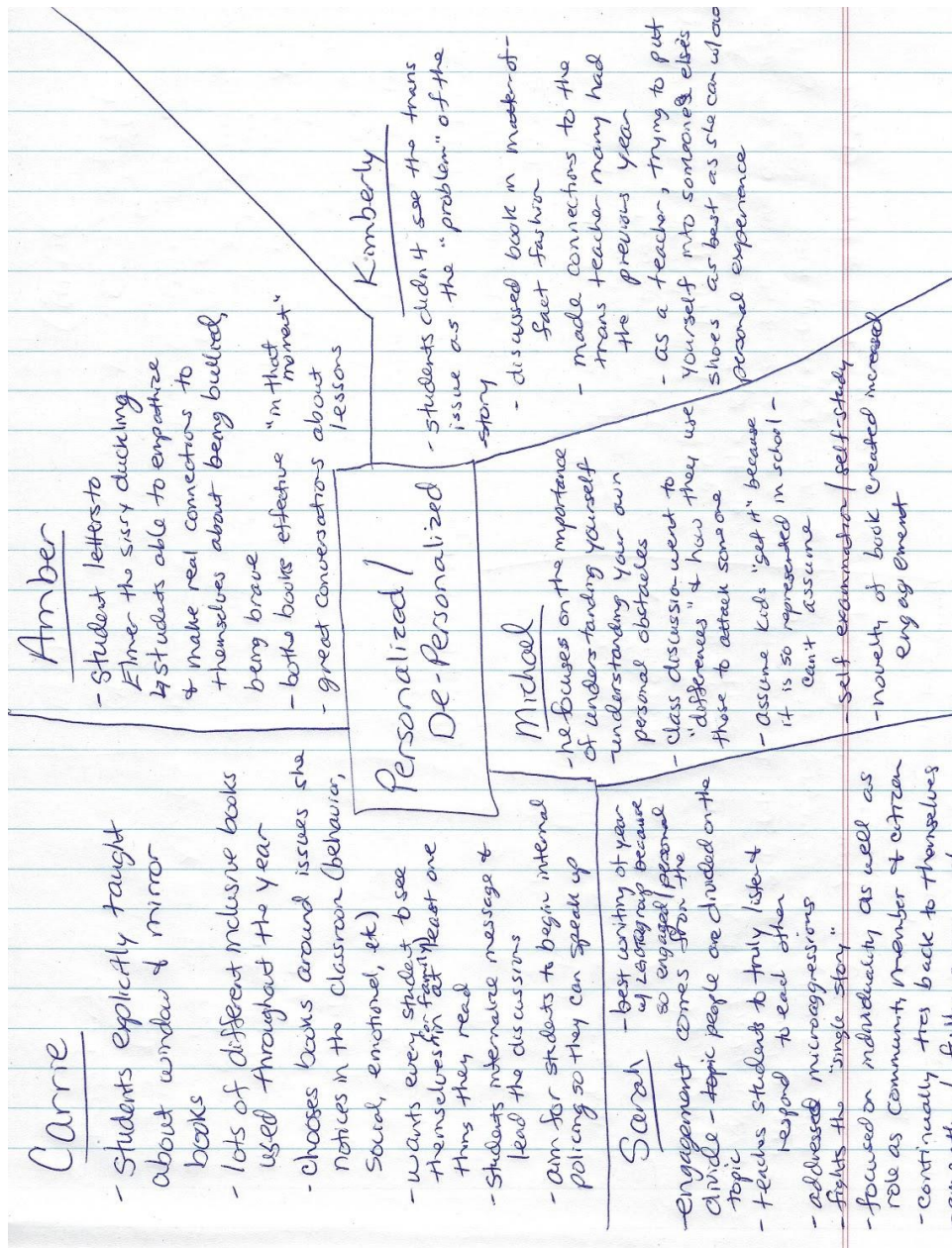
Appendix C

Cross-case thematic analysis: School climate and culture



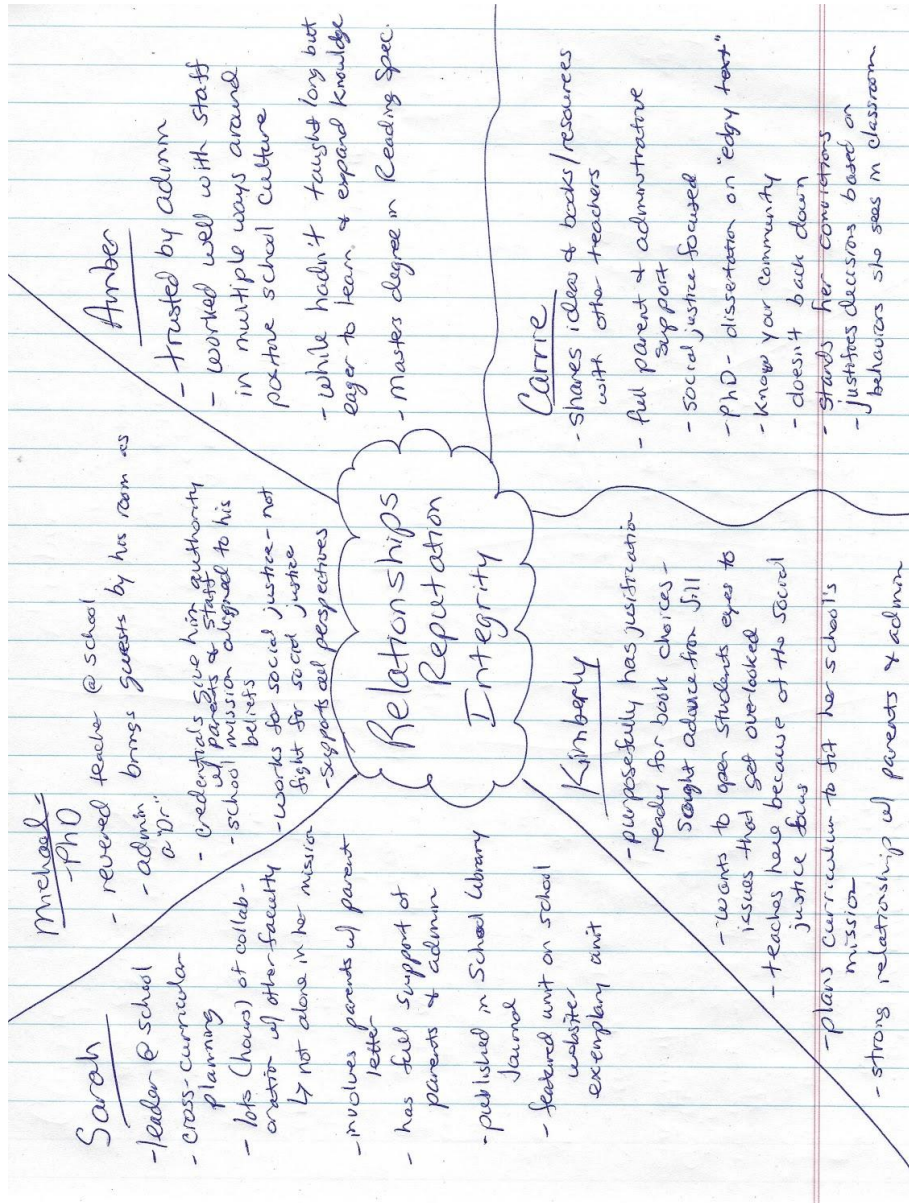
Appendix D

Cross-case thematic analysis: Personalization/De-Personalization



Appendix E

Cross-case thematic analysis: Relationships/Reputation



Appendix F

Example of a code sheet and data notes: Kimberly's codes/notes

Kimberly	Participant #2	
Interview 1	Interview 2 (via e-mail)	Interview 3
Kazoo School: Kalamazoo, MI	students enjoying book half way through	had to break up the book over winter break
Non-profit independent school	discussed the "problem" in George as not being the fact that she was Trans* as a problem, but that the problem was that she couldn't keep to her true self and her struggles with letting others know	8 year olds more engaged than the 7 year olds
2nd/3rd grade mixed grade	half way through, one parent made a positive comment, no other parent comments or concerns	might have been above even their read aloud level but they still responded to it
focus on 3rd graders	School Head said "oh well" if there is to be parent concerns, they have complete support from the school admin	she would instigate discussion by "What do you think about what's going on in the story?"
Reggio-Amillio approach	students weren't quite as engaged as she thought they would be	boys reacted to the trying on of girl clothes and the way those clothes felt
class sizes kept small and student interests used to dictate curriculum	time of the year, Christmas time was probably not the best choice for when to read this book; wouldn't read during a naturally exciting time of year again	some of the 3rd graders had a Trans* teacher the year before so they had already worked through some of those issues
has Jill Hermann-Wilmarth's daughter in class	sought input from a Trans* faculty member making sure her use of terms and definitions was correct	through the book an opportunity to define differences between anatomy, body, and gender

taught 10 years, took 12 years off, first year back in the classroom	banter between students about gender was one of her deciding factors to use the book George, to dive deeper into the emotions of someone struggling with their gender	acknowledges that it takes more than one book, more than one story, and more than one encounter to really understand
considered George & Misadventures of the Family Fletcher	purposely seeking to use this type of lit that presents all people and relationships as matter of factly as cis-gender and heteronormative people and relationships	since they had a Trans* teacher the year before, when they were asked about characters feelings, they seemed more able to understand
likes George, but acknowledges the age of the characters are older than her students	discuss it as normal also	changes? start with shorter picturebooks and stories
doesn't not want to do a book for fear of the flack she would get; considered leaving parts of the book out but doesn't want to do that		NO parent feedback, even the one parent she thought would, except the one who loved that book
talked with Jill for advice		parts of the story about underwear or bathtubs got a reaction from the students, lessened as the story went on
wants to be prepared for any flack she would get		she kept the discussion neutral and explained everything as to how it was important to the telling of the story
foresees one parent in particular that would have a problem with these books		same issues as racial discrimination, found it hard to talk about this issue without firsthand experience.
acknowledges that dirty magazines aren't a topic she would normally bring up with 7-8 year olds as a consideration of whether or not to use this book George		as a teacher, trying to put yourself into someone else's shoes as best as she can in order to explain it to students
wondering if Family Fletcher book is "too lighthearted"		increased importance in using this type of lit since using this book

reads both books before making a decision of which to use		it is possible for them to understand each other more
wants to open their eyes to perspectives of people that get overlooked		advice- Dive into it.
expose kids to different perspectives they might not have otherwise, but yet, to normalize it		If you have questions, reach out to somebody who has had similar experiences
as many different stories that open these lens for them- also without making a big deal of it		her goal is to "go pretty deep with them" so they can have meaningful discussions
school big on social justice; school is open to all		chooses to use books for read aloud that most students in the room wouldn't read, due either to reading level or interest
transgender staff members and students		acknowledges there aren't many books available that touch on this topic
being able to talk about the transgender issues; sees the need for students to be able to talk about issues		
finding similarities among people		
read aloud part of curriculum; because of wide range of reading levels to touch on most social justice issues has to be done as read aloud		
during their lunch time, they eat in room, she reads partly as a means of classroom management		
informal nature of her read aloud during lunch; students are more open to share their experiences and stories when in this format than a more formal lesson		

considers it part of her ELA ; fits their social justice curriculum/framework		
lot of recall, summarizing, discussions		
no specific lessons taught around this book		
authentic reading and responding		
enjoying a book on a very natural level		
wants parents to have an open mind; feels supported to have Jill to back her up, since Jill is also a parent in the class		
has talking points if parent has concerns		
"so the children see that this is all just, it's all normal"		
discuss it just matter of fact and question how the author frames things; defers back to author- "It's just a matter of fact, these are the characters, these are the character's family structures and that's it. We don't have to necessarily make a huge deal out of it every time.		
these are the character's family structures and that's it		
knows the parent she wonders about the most will bypass her and go straight to the Head of School		
the school head has her back		
wants to learn how to navigate student questions and comments in a way that is age appropriate and doesn't diminish from the topic or from the lens		

finding a balance between being age appropriate and keeping it truthful and honest		
any issues of power, "not in our school"		

APPENDIX G

IRB approval letter

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, January 24, 2018
IRB Application No ED17156
Proposal Title: The use of LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature at the upper-elementary level
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 1/23/2021

Principal

Investigator(s):

Henry Brian Thompson 504 W 36 Sand Springs, OK 74063	Lucy Bailey 215 Willard Hall Stillwater, OK 74078	Jennifer Sanders 252 Willard Stillwater, OK 74078
Sheri Vasinda 251 Willard Stillwater, OK 74078	Qiuying Wang 256 Willard Stillwater, OK 74078	

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Appendix H

Scripts for recruitment

Script for Recruitment

H. Brian Thompson

Re: IRB # ED-17-156

Script to be posted on various social media sites in which elementary teachers and principals, university faculty in literacy, and/or LGBTQ scholars are likely to see this:

I could use some help from my fellow [insert Facebook group]. I'm searching for any 3rd-6th grade teachers that have used, are currently using, or plan to use any LGBTQ-inclusive children's literature in their curriculum. I'm working on a dissertation on this topic and would love to interview any upper-elementary teachers that have had some experiences in this area. Please message or comment if you would be willing to share your experiences with me. Also, feel free to pass this along to others as well. Thanks so much!



Appendix I

Scripts for informed consent

Script for Informed Consent

H. Brian Thompson

Re: IRB # ED-17-156

Script for initial interview:

As you know, I am a literacy doctoral student from Oklahoma State University. I am conducting a study on the use of LGBTQ inclusive children's literature with upper elementary students, and I would like to ask you some questions about that. I would like to audio record (or video record) our conversation, so that I can get your words accurately. If at any time during our talk you feel uncomfortable answering a question please let me know, and you don't have to answer it. Or, if you want to answer a question but do not want it tape recorded, please let me know and I will turn off the machine. Because of the nature of this study you may have relevant stories to share about your students. To protect your students' privacy, please do not share their actual names with me. If at any time you want to withdraw from this study please tell me and I will erase the tape of our conversation, otherwise the audio (or video) tapes will be kept in confidence indefinitely on my password protected computer. I will not reveal the content of our conversation beyond myself and other faculty members at Oklahoma State University whom I trust to maintain your confidentiality. I will do everything I can to protect your privacy, but there is always a slight chance that someone could find out about our conversation. Now I would like to ask you if you agree to voluntarily, without compensation, participate in this study, and to talk to me about your use of LGBTQ inclusive literature as a teacher. Do you agree to participate, and to allow me to audio record (or video record) our conversation? [Participant responds] Thank you. If you ever need to reach me you may contact me at 918-809-6936 or e-mail me at thomphb@okstate.edu. I will also e-mail/direct message you my contact information. If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about research or your rights as a participant, please contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to speak to someone independent of the research team at (405)-744-3377 or send an email to irb@okstate.edu.

Script for subsequent interviews:

Before we begin I would like to remind you that I am audio (or video) recording our conversation. If at any time during our talk you feel uncomfortable answering a question please let me know, and you don't have to answer it. Or, if you want to answer a question but do not want it tape recorded, please let me know and I will turn off the machine. Because of the nature



of this study you may have relevant stories to share about your students. To protect your students' privacy, please do not share their actual names with me. If at any time you want to withdraw from this study please tell me and I will erase the tape of our conversation, otherwise the audio (or video) recordings will be kept indefinitely on my password protected computer. I will not reveal the content of our conversation beyond myself and other faculty members at Oklahoma State University whom I trust to maintain your confidentiality. I will do everything I can to protect your privacy, but there is always a slight chance that someone could find out about our conversation. Now I would like to ask you if you agree to voluntarily, without compensation, participate in this study, and to talk to me about your use of LGBTQ inclusive literature as a teacher. Do you agree to participate, and to allow me to audio record (or video record) our conversation? [Participant responds] Thank you. If you ever need to reach me you may contact me at 918-809-6936 or e-mail me at thomphb@okstate.edu. I will also e-mail/direct message you my contact information. If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about research or your rights as a participant, please contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to speak to someone independent of the research team at (405)-744-3377 or send an email to irb@okstate.edu.



VITA

Henry Brian Thompson

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY EXPLORING TEACHERS' QUEERING OF LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN UPPER ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

Major Field: Education: Language, Literacy, and Culture

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Language, Literacy, and Culture at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2020.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2003.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 1995.

Experience: Limestone Elementary, Sand Springs Public Schools, 1995-Present
Oklahoma State University, literacy department adjunct faculty

Professional Memberships: International Literacy Association
Oklahoma Literacy Association
Tulsa County Literacy Council
Professional Oklahoma Educators