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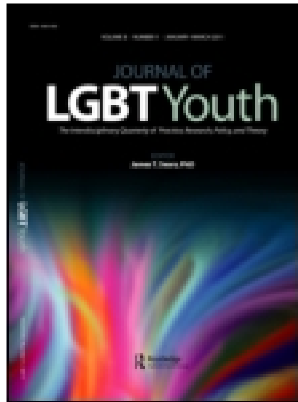

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The Pink Lesson Plan: Addressing the Emotional Needs of Gay and Lesbian Students in Canadian Teacher Education Programs

Christine Bellini [a]

[a] Department of Theory and Policy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
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The Pink Lesson Plan: Addressing the Emotional Needs of Gay and Lesbian Students in Canadian Teacher Education Programs

CHRISTINE BELLINI
Department of Theory and Policy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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The history of civil rights in Canada illustrates a growing trend by the government to support the physical, emotional, mental, legal, and financial needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered citizens. However, the education system presents a slightly different climate. Despite numerous policies and initiatives, gay and lesbian students continue to report incidents of homophobia and an overall lack of emotional support by educators and administration. This article examines current research on gay and lesbian students' emotional needs, polices that address them, and the vital role that teacher training plays in setting the stage for equitable practices in education.

KEYWORDS *Canada, education, educational policy, gay and lesbian students, gay history, homophobia, teacher education*

According to the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2010), the Accord on Teacher Education states, "An effective, initial teacher education program promotes diversity, inclusion, understanding, acceptance and social responsibility." For the past six years I have questioned how effective most formal teacher education training programs are in preparing educators to work with gay and lesbian students. Even though many formal education training programs (such as preservice/in-service programming and professional development) address diversity and discrimination, those who work in those programs often view gay and lesbian issues through a political lens and fail to address how educators can support gay and lesbian students

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Address correspondence to Christine Bellini, 43 Seventh Street, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada M8V 3B3. E-mail: christine.bellini@utoronto.ca

emotionally (Britzman, 2010). There are informal training programs such as conferences, workshops, or other academic disciplines (such as psychology, social work, or counseling programs) that focus on support of gay and lesbian students. However, teachers must seek them out on their own time and initiative.

Historically, training and education on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth in Canadian school boards has been inconsistent and sporadic. The real tragedy in this gap is gay and lesbian teens who fall through the cracks with alarming statistics of suicide attempts, depression, drug usage, and school dropout throughout North America (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [CAMH], 2004; Russell & Joyner, 2001). The Canadian educational system tells gay teens that they are treated with the same respect as everyone else, but data on homophobia and bullying in schools reveal a very different reality (Egale Canada, 2010). The daily life of many gay teenagers is filled with a lack of support, acknowledgement, and/or respect which eventually can erode one's mental and emotional health (Tremblay, 1995). As a psychotherapist and teacher, I contend that pathologizing gay and lesbian teens would never happen if educators were competent and comfortable in simply supporting them. Generally, this has not been the case.

I first identified this lack of emotional support for gay teens when I started a gay–straight alliance (GSA) in my school as a teacher. Even though some of conversations with students centered on discrimination, many were stories of first crushes, disaster dates, or books and movies by gay writers and actors. It became clear that many teachers did not feel comfortable, have the knowledge, or feel it necessary to talk to gay students about being gay.

My professional and academic understanding of this topic stems from many years of questioning and thinking about LGBTQ issues, in general. At university, I studied humanities, fine arts, and psychology, three disciplines that often integrate gender and sexuality. After completing university, I worked at Planned Parenthood as a sexuality counselor and eventually opened a private practice as a psychotherapist. At age 40, I entered a teacher education program. I was surprised that LGBTQ youth were not addressed in classes that claimed to view students through a social justice lens. During my placement in schools, I was even more astonished by the amount of homophobia and heterosexism I witnessed not only with educators but with students as well. Had it changed at all since the 1970s when my brother, who is gay, had been bullied in our high school? The discrimination and lack of support in the education system fueled my need to be an ally, with the hopes that one day inclusion and respect will be meaningful and sincere words. Still, I needed to explore my assumptions and produce my research on this topic before I could really challenge what I believe to be systemic homophobia and heterosexism in schools.

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PURPOSES OF STUDY

The purposes of this study are to examine whether gay and lesbian students are receiving support in the public education system and how educators are trained to give this support.

There already existed substantial documentation on the voices of gay and lesbian students by national organizations in North America (Gay Lesbian Straight Educators Network [GLSEN], 2007; Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere [EGALE Canada], 2000. A critical analysis of educational policies from public schools and universities, I believed, would likely reveal shortcomings in the climate that currently exists in education. Interviews with educators who have professional knowledge and experience working with gay and lesbian teens would reveal their formal and informal training experiences. The main research question that I sought to address was this: Did these educators receive any training in preservice or in-service programs and professional development that adequately trained them to address the emotional needs of gay and lesbian students?

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There is extensive literature on discrimination toward gays and lesbians in Canada that chronicles a history both painful and triumphant. In 1969, Bill C-150 was passed in the Canadian House of Commons (Price, 2009). Then-minister of justice Pierre Elliot Trudeau initiated the decriminalization of homosexual acts from the Canadian Criminal Code in his controversial Omnibus Bill (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 1967). Along with legalizing abortion and contraception, Trudeau calmly stated on public television, "There is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation" (CBC, 1967). It is difficult to know if it was Trudeau's magnetic and confident personality that made Canadians listen or what is often referred to as our general complacency with most issues. Trudeau's comment and gesture may have been powerful in terms of advancing gay civil rights, but it did not mean that the path for gays and lesbians in Canada was to be trouble-free.

One of the first and largest LGBTQ neighborhoods developed in the city of Toronto (Nash, 2005). Through the 1970s and early 1980s the Toronto Morality Squad and police force conducted numerous raids on gay bathhouses and laid charges against the *Body Politic Magazine* for what was seen as immoral content (Nash, 2005). Removing homosexual acts from the Criminal Code seemed to enrage the police working in the streets of Toronto's gay ghetto rather than foster a climate of acceptance. In 1979, almost ten years after Bill C-150 was implemented, Toronto police sergeant Tom Moclair stated in an interview that homosexuals were "weirdoes, fruits,

and fags" and that Canadian society might as well "condone murder, assault, and rape" (Nash, 2005).

Emerging political and social organizations such as the Community Homophile Association of Toronto and the Right to Privacy Committee (RTPC) mobilized to address the growing tension between the Metro Toronto Police Force and the LGBTQ community (Nash, 2005). In 1979, the Working Group on Police Minority Relations was established to resolve some of the tension between marginalized groups in the city (Nash, 2005). However, the situation only worsened when the Metropolitan Toronto Police Commission appointed Cardinal Carter, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Toronto and an opponent of homosexuality, to make recommendations on improving community relations between the police and minority groups. *The Report to the Authorities of Metropolitan Toronto and Its Citizens* (1979), written by Carter, did not acknowledge LGBTQ persons as part of a community. All the recommendations to improve relations referred only to visible minority groups. Even though LGBTQ activists were extremely angered over the denial of their existence, the tension between the gay community and the legal system was soon overshadowed by the AIDS crisis of the late 1980s. The LBGTQ community had no choice but to turn its attention and energy into the fight against HIV/AIDS. It was not until the 1990s that the community took on the legal system.

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Four very famous legal battles revolutionized gay and lesbian rights in Canada beginning with James Egan and John Norris Nesbitt. Egan and Nesbitt were a common-law gay couple for 36 years who resided in British Columbia. In 1994, Egan applied for a retirement income supplement, assuming Nesbitt would be able to receive a spousal allowance. However, the couple was informed that the Old Age Security Act did not apply to same-sex couples and their benefits were denied. Egan took the federal government to the Supreme Court of Canada, citing a violation of section 15 of the charter. It states:

> Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982)

However, at that time, the charter did not include sexual orientation. One of the landmark decisions of *Egan v. Canada* was the decision to read sexual orientation into section 15 of the charter (Badari, 2010).

At the same time Egan was challenging the Supreme Court from British Columbia, Delwin Vriend, a chemistry lab instructor at King's College Christian School in Edmonton was fired based on his sexual orientation (*Vriend v. Alberta*, 1998). Vriend filed a discrimination complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission in 1991 but was denied a case because sexual

orientation was not protected under its code. Vriend sued the government of Alberta and its Human Rights Commission for failing to uphold the Canadian Charter. Though he initially won his case, the government of Alberta filed an appeal that then went to the Supreme Court of Canada, which ruled, in 1998, that provinces must uphold the Charter and could not exclude sexual orientation from human rights legislation (*Vriend v. Alberta*, 1998 1 S.C.R. 493).

In 2002, Marc Hall, an openly gay student at a Durham Catholic high school in southern Ontario, was refused the right to take his boyfriend to the prom since Catholic doctrine did not support homosexuality. Hall and his parents sued the school board, stating its decision violated the Ontario Education Act. Judge Robert McKinnon ruled in favor of Hall attending the prom with his partner, which they did (Grace & Wells, 2005).

What appears significant in *Hall v. DCDSB* was the board's attempt to isolate Hall's case. Wells refers to it as the "pedagogy of negation that is meant to demean, dismiss, or fail to protect LGBTQ youth" (Grace & Wells, 2005, p. 239). Marc Hall became a symbol of activism among gay youth who refused to be silenced or hidden. His story drew the attention of many stakeholders who either supported or condemned his actions. It also further polarized the Catholic Church and the LGBTQ community in Ontario, which already had been denied an existence once before in *The Carter Report* of 1979. This denial and exclusion of a LBGTQ community, whether for teens or adults, exemplifies the power of homophobia and fear of homosexuals mobilizing.

The Hall case also illustrates the manipulation of social justice language and its many contradictory messages. In an interview with the CBC, Hall stated, "They [the trustees] promote equality except in some cases. They take Jesus' rule—do unto others as you would have them do unto you—and bend it a little bit for their liking" (Grace & Wells, 2005, p. 18).

In British Columbia, a young student, Azmi Jubran experienced a different form of homophobia. He claimed that he was repeatedly taunted, assaulted, kicked, spit on, and called a "faggot" and "homosexual" from 1993 to 1998 at Handsworth Secondary school (*Jubran v. NVSD*, 2005). In 1996, Jubran filed an appeal with the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal stating that the North Vancouver District School Board failed to protect him despite 12 documented incidents of harassment in one year alone. Furthermore, Jubran stated that he was not gay and that his peers knew this. However, he had been harassed and discriminated against based on sexual orientation.

During the proceedings, administrators from his school admitted that their progressive discipline approach had not been effective, and that they did not employ any other strategies to stop homophobic bullying in their school. The board admitted that their code of conduct did not include sexual orientation and that they had not trained any of their staff to deal with

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homophobic harassment. The court found the board negligent under article 78: "There was evidence that resources were available to the school board to assist in dealing with homophobia and heterosexism in educational setting since at least 1992." Jubran was awarded $4,500 in damages (*Jubran v. NVDSB* No. 44, 2005).

Jubran's case was not as triumphant and simple as Marc Hall's. In fact, it was quite disturbing by comparison. Handsworth Secondary School admitted there was a problem with homophobia in their school yet did little to stop it. Also, rather than take responsibility for this negligence, the North Vancouver District School Board filed an appeal based on the fact that Jubran was heterosexual and therefore this incident had nothing to do with sexual harassment. The ruling was overturned in 2003 and then overturned again in Jubran's favor in 2005 (*Jubran v. NVDSB* No. 44, 2005).

There are several significant implications to the Jubran case that are quite different from Marc Hall's situation. It brings to light systemic homophobia and heterosexism so entrenched in some school boards that they cannot or will not see the damage to their students. In an interview, Jubran stated that the North Vancouver School Board would never admit negligence or responsibility because it would open a floodgate of lawsuits for a board that had clearly been allowing homophobia to occur in its schools for a very long time (Xtra Magazine, 2005). Finally, this case demonstrates the power and damage of heterosexism. Calling someone gay, whether he or she is or not, is damaging not only to the persons involved but to an entire LGBTQ community. Its impact on nonheterosexual students is to make them feel worthless. A slur is still a slur no matter what the context.

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POLICIES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Prior to 2000, policies regarding the code of conduct for both teachers and students were covered in the Ontario Education Act. That year, the Safe Schools Act was implemented to address student behavior, but teachers were to still follow guidelines from 1990. Section 264 (1) (c) of the Education Act (1990), titled Duties of Teacher, states that they must demonstrate "respect for religion and the principles of Judeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for truth, justice, loyalty, love of country, humanity, benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, purity, temperance and all other virtues." In a country that mandates diversity and acceptance through both its national and provincial human rights acts, it is peculiar that the Education Act still upholds a Judeo-Christian ethic for teachers in Canada. Activists have challenged the political implications of a policy that still adheres to religious views of homosexuality as immoral as it ultimately rejects gay and lesbian teachers (Clarke, 1999).

By contrast, the history of policies relating to student behavior has changed dramatically since the 1990s. Prior to the implementation of the

Safe Schools Act, section 23 of the Education Act, individual school boards were responsible for the development and implementation of policies and procedures relating to student behavior. School climate shifted across Canada in the 1990s, with growing attention to violence, gangs, weapons, and drugs. One national study (Bibby & Posterski, 1992) found that 48% of teens felt gang violence was becoming a serious issue in their schools; subsequent studies documented that 35% of Canadian teenagers felt violence was increasing in their schools (Joong & Ridler, 2005).

However, it was a report by sociologist Thomas Gabor, titled *School Violence and the Zero Tolerance Alternative* (1995) and written for the solicitor general of Canada, that gained the attention of politicians. Gabor was a proponent of zero tolerance in education and did not believe that minoritized students should be treated any differently due to systematic oppression and discrimination (OHRC, 2011). Even though there was growing evidence and concern that the real victims of a zero-tolerance policy would be visible minorities and students with exceptionalities (Carter, Janzen, & Paterson, 1999; Watkinson & Epp, 1997), premier of Ontario Mike Harris included Gabor's recommendations in his 1999 election platform as part of his "Common Sense Revolution" (OHRC, 2011).

In 2000, Ontario education minister Janet Ecker introduced the Safe Schools Act. The most significant changes in policy were related to mandatory suspension and expulsion for police involvement; zero tolerance for violent acts, drugs, and weapons in schools; and more power to teachers, administrators, and school boards to suspend and expel students (OHRC, 2011). Whereas concerned parents breathed a sigh of relief that something was being done to address violence in schools, opponents of the act criticized the impact they suspected it was going to have on minority students (Bhattacharjee, 2003). One of the greatest concerns with the zero-tolerance policy for suspended students was: What happens to them after the fact?

In a report to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Consultant Ken Bhattacharjee attacked the Safe Schools Act as being discriminatory toward Blacks, Latinos, and students with special needs or disabilities. He claimed that students of color were being disproportionately suspended under this new "regime." Nowhere in his report does he mention the impact the Safe Schools Act had on LGBTQ youth. In fact, throughout all of the discussions that occurred regarding controversies surrounding the Safe Schools Act, gay and lesbian students were omitted.

Kathleen Wynne, the new Minister of Education seemed to have a completely different agenda in store for Ontario schools. In an interview with Wynne, she stated:

> We wanted a progressive disciplinary approach in the system. But beyond that, I was always intent as a backbencher and then as Minister, to reintroduce the notion of equity into the system because what I knew,

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> was that Mike Harris and his government had literally taken the word equity out of curriculum documents. And they had taken it out of government business. So, I knew that there were teachers and there were educators out in the field who were still doing work, but they were unsupported by the Ministry framework—because there was no Ministry framework. (Personal interview with Kathleen Wynne, April 8, 2011)

Her recommendation was that boards of education, the Ontario College of Teachers, Association of Canadian Deans of Education, Council of Directors of Education, and Canadian Association of Principals must provide safe schools training that included the prevention and management of homophobia. Every form of education training in Ontario was, in no uncertain terms, told to change the way it perceived and treated gay and lesbian students. This shift was significant because it acknowledged that the issue of safety was extremely complex not just for victims but for perpetrators, and that sexual-minority students could be at either end of this spectrum.

Bill 212 (Education Amendment Act: Progressive Discipline and School Safety, 2007) repealed sections 306 through 311 of the Safe Schools Act and included the following changes: a move toward progressive discipline instead of zero tolerance; a need for administrators to examine "mitigating circumstances" that may affect disciplinary measures; and the right for schools to discipline students even off school property. The most significant change in Bill 212 was not its repeal of zero tolerance, but the inclusion of one word: *bullying*. It defined bullying as "a dynamic of unhealthy interaction that can take many forms. It can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, tripping); verbal (e.g., name-calling, mocking, or making sexist, racist, or homophobic comments" (PPM, 144, p. 3). The inclusion of the word *bullying* in the Safe Schools Act meant that verbal and emotional abuse was given parity with physical violence.

Wynne introduced further amendments tothe Safe Schools Act in 2009 under Bill 157. Keeping Our Kids Safe at School focused on gender-based violence issues such as homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behavior. It did not mention gangs or weapons in schools. This time the emphasis was placed on the teachers and administrators as having a duty to respond to, report, and record all incidents of bullying in a timely manner. Failure to do so could result in liability toward a school board or action by a governing body such as Ontario College of Teachers. PPM 119 (Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools, 2009) further discussed the importance of creating a safe schools action team, antibullying groups, or a GSA. At this time, it is impossible to say what effects it will have on school climate and treatment of gay and lesbian students.

From 2000 to 2011, there was a noticeable shift in policy regarding student behavior. However, little attention was paid to teacher education, as

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teachers were still expected to behave within a Judeo-Christian framework in a climate that clearly was beyond this scope.

POLICIES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

One of the most significant roles in a school is the teacher. He or she is the lifeline between the student and everything else in between—the curriculum, policies, daily routines, tests, parents, the coach, prom, school play, and so forth. If gay and lesbian students were not being protected and emotionally supported in schools, it would only make sense to question the teacher, the person acting in loco parentis.

Unlike public education, universities and colleges are governed in Canada by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. The content of courses is not directed by curriculum documents, like those that exist from the primary to secondary level in schools. Instead, universities and colleges are scrutinized through accreditation reviews performed by professional organizations such as the Ontario College of Teachers, the Ontario Association of Midwives, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, etc. The Ontario College of Teachers grants accreditation to faculties of education that meet or exceed the standards according to regulation 347/. Regulation 347/02 (Ontario College of Teachers) states that for an educational institution to receive accreditation, it must "teach theory and foundation courses in the program including courses on human development and learning and on the legislation and government policies relating to education" (Regulation 347/02—Part III—Accreditation—Program of Professional Education, section 9 [11]). Course descriptions must be provided, along with documentation to support pedagogical theory and practices. Second, under Part IV—Program of Additional Qualification, section 24 (3), it states that for an Additional Qualification, such as Guidance Part I to receive accreditation, it must be "current, reference the Ontario curriculum, relevant legislation and government policies and represent a wide knowledge base in the program's area of study." If this is correct, then in theory, Additional Qualification courses such as Guidance Part I should discuss how to counsel gay and lesbian teens, mention current research on LGBTQ issues such as bullying and suicide data, and teach legislation and government policies relating to human rights, equity and diversity, and safe schools. However, it does not. It gives some suggestions on issues to consider when counseling exceptional students (who have been identified exceptional through the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee [IPRC] process), Native students, and English as second language students. It does not mention gay or lesbian students who could constitute up to 10% of the school's population. If preservice and in-service programs were not directly teaching teachers about the needs of gay and lesbian students, then who was?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

In addressing my research question, I reviewed 24 articles from Canada, the United States, Australia, and Britain that covered a time span from 1987 to 2010. Three themes dominated the literature: the overall effect that systemic discrimination and homophobia has on everyone in education; the importance of addressing emotional needs of gay and lesbian teens in public schools and in universities; and the lack of preparation in teacher training programs regarding LGBTQ issues.

Our Schools: The Most Homophobic Institutions in North America

According to the Alberta Teachers Association (2006), "The Surrey Teachers Association (2000) describes Canadian Schools as one of the last bastions of tolerated hatred towards LGBTQ people." It is absolutely puzzling that the one institution in charge of educating society's citizens to be responsible and respectful is one of the most homophobic. Gay and lesbian teens are up to 84% more likely to be physically and verbally harassed compared to their straight peers (DuRant, Krowchuk, & Sinai, 1998; Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Kosciw and Diaz (2006) surveyed both middle and secondary school students and reported that 91.4% stated they frequently heard the words *fag*, *dyke*, and *queer* in school, and 39.2% stated those comments came from teachers. In another survey, Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig (2009) discovered that in many schools not only gay and lesbian students were teased but often straight students were called *fag* as a put-down.

Educators have been known not only to ignore gay and lesbian teens but often to deny the fact that homophobia or heterosexism exists (Hansen, 2007; Ryan & Rivers, 2003). Mishna and colleagues (2009) reported that some gay and lesbian students described teachers witnessing verbal or physical abuse and then simply walking away. This denial was also common with some administrators who refused to document homophobic incidents in their school or minimized their severity (Hansen, 2007).

In contrast, we have known for at least two decades, based on Gonsiorek's (1988) research, that when gay and lesbian teens are given the same emotional support as their straight peers by educators, they are as mentally healthy. However, this support must come from teachers, peers, guidance counselors, and administrators. According to Gonsiorek, "The most powerful treatment for the emotional concerns of gay and lesbian youth is to normalize their experiences in adolescence" (1988, p.121).

The Emotional Needs of Gay and Lesbian Teens: A Case of Denial

When those in charge do not believe that homosexuality is normal or have little or no training in addressing queer issues what happens?

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Robert Reinert (1998) points to guidance counselors who often receive little or no education in how to counsel gay and lesbian youth. The result of not having consistent counseling, role models, or supportive teachers in schools has created many problems for these teens, including disengagement from school in the form of poor attendance or dropping out completely; psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts and actions; increased substance abuse; and queer denial (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Fontaine, 1998; Lugg, 2003; Youth Pride, 1997).

Many studies suggest that gay and lesbian teens are more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers (Bostwick, 2007; Garofalo et al., 1998; Remafredi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998; Russell & Joyner, 2001; Youth Pride, 1997). The most significant factor was not family rejection but rather the education system and the relentless victimization by fellow students. One study by Russell and Joyner (2001) further analyzed gay and lesbian teens' mental health and noted that gay men were even more likely to attempt suicide than lesbians. These researchers attributed this rise to society's harsher judgment of gay men over lesbians, particularly within the rigidly accepted roles of teenage boys. An earlier study by Reinert (1998) also mentioned that visible minority gay and lesbian youth are at an even higher risk of emotional stress for fear of being rejected by the dominant culture and by their minoritized group as well.

Denial is a very powerful tool. It means that you do not exist and that your problems are not real. One way to cope with denial is to simply agree: "I am not gay and therefore there are no problems." It seems much easier than having to fight homophobia on a daily basis. This sentiment is the same for gay and lesbian educators who often choose to remain in the closet as well. Lugg (2003) refers to this situation as the "policy paradox" that both queer teachers and students face in education. Posters, banners, and policies may claim school is a safe place for all, but for queer youth and educators their experience is quite different. This "elective invisibility," as Fontaine (1998) labels it, comes with an even higher cost: the public's perception that there really are no gay and lesbian students in schools with the exception of maybe a few here and there.

Why have policies and professional development focused on such a small group of students? Without the strength and resources to mobilize, gay and lesbian students and educators often exist in isolation, all within the same building.

Teacher Education: The Invisible Pink Lesson Plan

Teacher education is an extensive topic that deals with many different aspects of education. Preservice education refers to those who are just entering the profession and attend a faculty of education in a university. In-service education is offered to educators who are working in the field through additional qualifications or professional development. As previously stated, in

Ontario, curriculum for teacher education programs is set by the Ontario College of Teachers. The curriculum is very broad and makes general references to teaching "current and relevant issues in education" and "discussing equity and diversity issues." With these vague guidelines, faculties of education have a fair amount of control over what is to be taught in the classroom. Similarly, each province in Canada has either a governing body or is regulated by their provincial ministry of education.

Ian Macgillivray and Todd Jennings (2008) have documented that preservice programs were not addressing gay and lesbian issues. They examined teacher education textbooks and found minimal information on gay and lesbian teens. When there was mention, it was often presented within negative contexts: sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution, and drug abuse. Another way gay and lesbian teens were discussed was in terms of discrimination. They noted that very few, if any, of the books, gave examples of how to address gay and lesbian teens' emotional needs, include queer issues in their lesson plans, or just "normalize" the school experience for them.

In another study, 44.4% of elementary and 40% of secondary teacher education programs failed to include queer issues in their curriculum (Jennings & Sherwin, 2007). Several other studies confirmed the same information: that teachers felt unprepared to deal with gay and lesbian issues once they started working since it had not been covered in their training (Blackburn & Donelson, 2004; Petrovic, 1998, Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001; Sears, 1992; 2005; Unks, 1993/1994). Letts & Sears (1999) discovered that in many preservice programs the topic of discrimination only covered racism and classism, and that homophobia was not addressed. Schneider and Dimito (2008) surveyed 152 Ontario teachers and found that 82% reported little or no exposure to gay and lesbian issues in their teacher training programs. Further, once they became teachers, there were few if any professional development opportunities to learn about queer issues.

One final study (Dowling, Rodger, & Cummings, 2007) focused on teacher education and homophobia. They concluded that preservice teachers who received education on queer issues made fewer homophobic comments. An earlier study by Sears (1992) found 80% of preservice teachers to be homophobic, with one-third of them rating as "high grade homophobic" (p. 403). Both Sears (1992) and Eyre (1993) argued teacher education programs that gave preservice teachers a place to work out their discrimination produced teachers who were better equipped to work with gay and lesbian issues.

Preservice Prejudice

Robinson and Ferfolja's 2001 research revealed that many preservice teachers still view gay and lesbian issues as irrelevant to teacher training. Queer issues were not their concern but a "private" matter that should be kept within

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a family. These teachers also thought that gay and lesbian issues should be addressed only by health teachers as it was not going to be an issue in their classrooms. More important, most of them did not see a problem with celebrating Valentine's Day, school dances, or the prom—for heterosexual students. These findings on assumed compulsory heterosexuality are disconcerting in a profession that preaches equity and inclusion.

During the previous decade, Tara Goldstein (1997) recounted her experience of trying to address gay and lesbian issues in a preservice class in Ontario. Her initial thought was that equity was being addressed until someone in her class made the comment, "Why don't people say what they really think?" When Goldstein asked students to explain what this meant, some stated they were only being polite but really did not accept gays or lesbians. This completely changed Goldstein's understanding of how deep-seated homophobia was in preservice programs. She realized when she gave students the opportunity to speak freely and anonymously, feelings toward gay and lesbians were hardly accepting or polite. When she pushed the students even further to challenge their thoughts, one preservice teacher responded, "I am not used to having people *throw at me* that they are gay or lesbian" (1997, p. 4). Goldstein attempted to confront her students even further by questioning their perception that stating one's sexual orientation was an aggressive act. It was at this point she realized she could not transform all of her preservice teachers into advocates for social justice. Instead, she noticed that not one of the preservice teachers who was gay felt safe coming out to their peers in her class. This silencing of gay men and lesbians, and students in particular, is a common experience. The message is simple: You can be gay in our school as long as you are quiet.

Linda Eyre (1993), a professor in a preservice program in the Maritimes, also tried to address gay and lesbian issues through a critical lens with her teacher candidates. She noticed that preservice teachers could identify homophobia and heterosexism but very quickly felt uncomfortable with the idea of having to teach queer curriculum in any of their subject areas. Adding queer content was seen as "promoting homosexuality." Many used the excuse that they were afraid parents would revolt but could not provide evidence of this occurrence. When Eyre really began to challenge the preservice teachers, many struck back that they were "tolerating" homosexuality but, deep down, still saw it as an immoral lifestyle choice. When push came to shove, they were willing to say they supported gay and lesbian rights—but only to a certain extent. They did not see a problem in education not putting social justice theory into practice. If not praxis, then hypocrisy prevails.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"In what significant ways might the work of queering straight teachers link the institution of schooling and education (including teacher education)

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to the broader societal initiatives for gender, sexual, and social justice?" (Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007, p. xii).

My theoretical framework is based on recent developments in queer theory (Pinar, 1998; Rodriguez, 1998; Tierney, 1997), which developed in the 1990s out of the more traditional discipline of gay and lesbian studies. Some queer theorists ground the term in critical theory and postmodern ideology. Its main purpose is to question, disrupt, analyze, and create dialogue in order to change the status quo in society (Butler, 1993; Jagose, 1996; Tierney, 1997). Using this basic framework as a starting point, queer theorists apply critical thinking and postmodern thought to issues relating to homophobia and heterosexism. By questioning, critiquing, and disrupting heteronormative behavior and thought, they seek to change society on all levels (Butler, 1993; Pinar, 1998; Tierney, 1997).

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Community Mobilization

Queer theory is about building a community, mobilizing forces, creating group resistance, and fighting oppression (Tierney, 1997). This is a much more difficult task than it sounds. Homophobia is not an individual problem, although those opposed to homosexuality would likely rather see incidents remain individual—and silent—because they would cause less attention. Some of the participants interviewed discussed feelings of resistance from administrators about allowing GSAs to develop in schools and wondered if this same "fear of numbers" mentality was behind it.

A second issue Tierney (1997) discusses is invisibility. He states that queers need to come out to reclaim history, speak up for equal rights, create a collective, and fight homophobia. This sentiment was a common theme in my data collection of interviews with participants who identified as gay educators. All of them stated that educators needed to come out in schools for several reasons: gay and lesbian students need queer role models; gay and lesbian educators have to stand up to a system that states it is safe to be queer and test those boundaries; and staying in the closet only further perpetuates the myth that homosexuality is bad and something of which to be ashamed.

Praxis in Schooling

This article questions how praxis, the act of putting theory into practice, did not happen for many years in public education despite the implementation of social justice laws and policies

In *Queer Youth as Political and Pedagogical*, Nelson Rodriguez (1998) argues that educators and administrators must acknowledge several things about education: that it is not a politically neutral space; that pedagogy and

politics are always going to be intertwined; that youth are part of a subculture, and queer youth are part of a subculture; and that educating queer youth must involved a process of critical inquiry. According to Rodriquez (1998):

> The political and pedagogical practice and struggles of sub cultural groups such as youth need to be linked to the practices and struggles of other sub cultural groups, and schools and colleges of education need to provide the critical, theoretical, and pedagogical space for imagining how such coalitions might take place. (p. 176)

Praxis cannot begin in elementary or secondary schools. It must begin in faculties of education where training teachers involves questioning society and questioning their beliefs as well as assumptions about all forms of discrimination and oppression. If this critical inquiry is authentic, then there should be a disruption in preservice teachers' beliefs about hetero/homosexuality. It should effectively change how they treat all students.

According to queer theory, a second goal for teachers should be how they address queer youth. It should be with the political intent to help them question, disrupt, and redefine heteronormativity. Elizabeth Meyer (2007) both questions and criticizes educators who fail to address homophobia in schools. She believes it enforces heterosexual power and creates a climate of intolerance for gay and lesbian students. Nevertheless, queer pedagogy can transform schools and help in achieving a true and just society. There certainly is evidence of disruptions in education as noted in my interviews with educators. The common sentiment was this: There is a long way to go.

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DATA ANALYSIS

In total, I interviewed seven participants in three separate focus groups. Each interview lasted 90 to 120 minutes. The participants consisted of three men and four women, ranging in age from 28 to late 50s. Four of the participants self-identified as gay or lesbian and one as bisexual. Though not part of the research questions, all stated at some point in the interview their sexual orientation and age. All worked with gay and lesbian students as part of a GSA, but they did not necessarily work together or even know one another.

The participants held different positions within this board: two secondary school guidance counselors, two secondary-school teachers, one teaching assistant, one board employee, and one middle-school teacher. Their experience in this board varied from 6 to 25 years. Two of the educators had been employed by other schools boards in another province and one in another large urban school board in southern Ontario.

Three of the educators attended a faculty of education outside of Ontario and two in Ontario; one attended a community college, and two obtained master's degrees in social work and business management. All of the participants acquired knowledge of gay and lesbian issues outside of the field of education. Most common were university courses in women's studies, psychology, social work, or human sexuality. Many had attended workshops specific to gay and lesbian teens either through their union, school board, or professional associations. The participants who identified as gay, lesbian, and bisexual felt their knowledge was a mixture of personal experience with many years of exploring queer culture though clubs, relationships, events, and media. One of the participants stated, "I started looking for gay issues at nine years old. I remember looking up homosexuality in the encyclopedia and in the card catalog in the public library."

The other two participants who identified as straight were women of color, one with gay family members. One expressed a heightened sense of social justice issues and antioppression pedagogy because of her personal experience of being part of a minoritized group:

> My uncle is gay, but coming from a country [West Indies] where that's not accepted, he has not come out, but it is very obvious. He is living in fear because if he were found out, it would be very detrimental to his profession. He is a lawyer. . . . My cousin who is an administrator in a school in England is also gay. He's been permanently dating a woman for eighteen years to satisfy his parents.

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Acceptance and Belonging

One of the first questions asked of each participant was, "What do you think are the emotional needs of gay and lesbian students, and are these needs being addressed by the current education system?"

Feelings of "acceptance and belonging" or "the same acceptance that all other students need" were seen as a high priority for gay and lesbian teens. This acceptance meant an acknowledgment of their sexual orientation and a willingness by educators to be supportive. One participant who supervises a GSA in his school noted, "They need to be able to talk about LGBTQ issues, which some are not able to do at home. I have a lot [of students] that are silenced by their parents."

Those participants who identified as gay, lesbian, and bisexual stated they felt more sensitive about the importance of feeling wanted in school based on their personal experiences. Some described their memories of being rejected and judged by teachers in school:

> It is that sense of isolation, that sense of being—not having the resources, having to guard everything you say, not being accepted. I was a gay child

> in a small town. I was the only gay in the village, so my whole life had to be guarded. So I understand why these kids don't disclose. It is not that it is unsafe, in terms of physical safety, but it is more a sense of self-worth and value. I was never afraid to fight—physical safety was not an issue for me—but it was the sense of isolation.

All of the participants stated that the need for acceptance was not being fully addressed by the current education system, especially with regards to the curriculum. Participants noted there seems to be inconsistency in schools regarding teaching within a social justice framework. Many stated it depended on an individual teacher's acceptance of LGBTQ issues and his or her own comfort level in discussing them in class. One participant added, "There are teachers on staff who would not include LGBTQ material in their classroom because they personally feel opposed to it."

A second issue that arose with regards to teaching a truly inclusive curriculum was safety for both teachers and administrators. All of the participants agreed that if teachers were going to teach LGBTQ content in their classrooms, then it clearly needed to be supported by administrators and the board. Fear of retribution by parents and community was a common theme expressed by the participants. Another participant commented, "The board needs to make sure that they are prepared to support administrators and school staff when the community or parents raise objections to LGBTQ content in the curriculum."

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Safety

All of the educators agreed that the majority of gay and lesbian students felt physically safe in their schools, and recent incidents of violence in their schools were extremely rare. All felt that the education system had many policies in place to protect gay teens physically through the Safe Schools Act, especially since the introduction of Bill 157 in June 2010. However, all of the participants discussed the importance of emotional safety, which appears inconsistent in schools. Many felt that emotional safety depended on the efforts of individual teachers or administrators, but it was something that was not directly affected by policy. Two participants expressed concern over the impact not feeling safe in schools had on gay and lesbian teens. Both cited current research (EGALE, 2010) consistent with their perception that LGBTQ youth are affected and often will disengage in schools that ultimately do not protect them. More significant is the concern that gay and lesbian teens who do not feel safe or supported in schools will develop more extreme problems, such as depression or suicidal thoughts, or succumb to alcohol and drug addiction.

Invisibility in Teacher Education and Training

Discussion around teacher training focused on the participants' experience of preservice programs, in-service programs, professional development, and their overall comments about faculties of education and Ontario College of Teachers. There was one word that best described all of their experiences combined: invisible. All of the educators felt there was a total lack of regard given to gay and lesbian issues in preservice programs. This was consistent in their preservice programs in Ontario and in other provinces as well, ranging from 1984 to 2004. Three of the educators stated there was little or no mention of gay and lesbian students in their preservice programs at all. "To my recollection, in my preservice teacher training in the late 1980s, there was no mention of gay and lesbian teens whatsoever."

Two of the participants had openly gay professors who brought LGBTQ information and dialogue to their programs. They felt this opportunity to learn and discuss gay and lesbian issues prior to teaching were extremely valuable. Two of the participants admitted to never really questioning who regulated the curriculum in faculties of education or whether the content was consistent in all faculties in each province. Some looked back with disdain over having to be the one who initiated the topic in professional training and felt it should have been the responsibility of universities and professors to ensure gay and lesbian students were mentioned.

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Coming Out and Mentorship

An unexpected theme that emerged from four participants was the need for gay and lesbian educators to come out. All felt this was a very necessary and important step for both students and other teachers. "I believe very strongly that they [gay and lesbian students] need out role models in their schools who know what they are going through and can perhaps offer some advice or wisdom." One participant came out to her grade-eight class and stated there was talk for a few days in the staff room, and then nothing further. It surprised her that it was not more of an issue, and she has no regrets doing it. Some felt teachers who refused to come out were giving gay and lesbian students a strong message: that this is all just an act.

True Praxis

> So again we come down to—so even though it is there is [social justice] theory, it is really hard to move that into practice in a way that allows people to challenge their own assumptions and values and beliefs around this particular group of students and dealing with their own homophobia. ... There is a big gap between what exists on paper and resources of policy and law and what we are able to do in practice.

All of the educators expressed frustration over the lack of seeing social justice policies and theories put into practice. Even though all acknowledged a definite improvement in the education system in terms of addressing and acknowledging the need to support gay and lesbian students both physically and emotionally, they still felt there was far too much hesitation by both teachers and administrators: “There is so much out there right now that will help us not make mistakes, but we are still fearful of doing it. And part of that fear is the backlash because we don’t know what the parent community is going to say, we don’t know how our staff are going to react, how the students are going to react. But you know, in practical terms, how long do we have to wait?”

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CONCLUSION

The evidence from literature, scholars, organizations, and participants points to an education system that needs to address the needs of gay and lesbian students both in preservice and in-service programs and in the public education system. There is ample evidence that the needs of gay and lesbian students are not been addressed in terms of emotional support (CAMH, 2004; GLSEN, 2007; EGALE Canada, 2010). There is also enough scholarly research stating there are problems in preservice programs that do not speak of the emotional needs of gay and lesbian students and find reasons to justify their decision (Dimito & Schneider, 2008; Goldstein, 1997; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). Finally, there is a history of homophobia in the Canadian education system that cannot be ignored or assumed to be “over.”

The Ministry of Education, Ontario College of Teachers Accreditation Department, faculties of education in universities, and public boards of education all have areas that need improvement in order for gay and lesbian students to be truly supported. As stated by both a participant and Kathleen Wynne, it is time for everyone in education to “step up to the plate” and making sure that gay and lesbian teens are truly being treated, respected, and supported as equals.

The Ontario College of Teachers needs to examine their policies and practices relating to equity, diversity, and inclusivity. Both preservice and Additional Qualification guidelines need to be revised to include LGBTQ issues in all courses. It is not sufficient to use generic statements such as “equity and diversity,” “address all learners,” or “examine the effects of discrimination on minoritized students.” For whatever reason, unless direct language is used in Ontario College of Teachers documents, it seems to leave too much room for faculties of education to avoid discussing LGBTQ issues—and once again assume it is someone else’s responsibility.

The next step is addressing faculties of education in Ontario and questioning exactly where gay and lesbian students are mentioned in preservice

programs. It would greatly benefit academies to communicate with one another and not assume that someone else is teaching LGBTQ issues in some other course. This simply is not acceptable.

When I raised this issue with former minister of education Kathleen Wynne in an interview, she stated:

> So here is the challenge to academe: How about bringing together the Minister of Training Colleges and Universities and some of the Ministry of Education people and making that point? Because I am not sure if the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities thinks of OISE [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education] as a place it needs to pay attention to. But OISE could be a catalyst for that conversation. (Personal Interview, Kathleen Wynne, April 18, 2011)

Public boards of education have produced some literature and workshops on homophobia and heterosexism, but it was felt by many of the participants that these needed to be part of mandatory professional development. There no longer should be any room for teachers or administrators to make comments such as "I did not know" in a public education system that repeatedly states it respects and protects all students.

Finally, gay and lesbian issues cannot be delegated to a grade-nine mandatory sex education curriculum in secondary schools and simply forgotten afterward. One half-credit in four years of secondary education is paltry. All courses in the secondary panel should include mention of LGBTQ issues when appropriate. This needs to be clearly described in curriculum documents that currently are extremely vague and often use terms such as "cultural identity," "political factors," and "equity and diversity" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Both teachers and administrators need to move past this fear of community outrage over mentioning LGBTQ issues and realize that it is their right, responsibility, and obligation to teach within a social justice framework as dictated by our laws.

Clearly there is lack of praxis between our policies on equity and inclusion and our actions in the public education system. Even though policies have become more specific in addressing the physical and emotional needs of gay and lesbians students, schools have had difficulty putting these laws into practice. Unfortunately, policies have not been able to legislate empathy.

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CONTRIBUTOR

Christine Bellini is a doctoral student in Department of Theory and Policy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto.