

Broadening Views of Social Justice and Teacher Leadership: Addressing LGB Issues in Teacher Education

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Introduction

Teachers play a critical role in improving teaching, learning, teacher-student relationships, and school climate (Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and teacher education programs have a responsibility to prepare teachers to work with every student in their classroom. Kosciw, Diaz, and Greytak (2008) reported that, between 2001 and 2007, although library resources on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) issues have increased, over this same time period, there has been a decrease in LGB resources in classrooms, and LGB-related issues are less likely to be included in curricula. The *2007 National School Climate Survey* (Kosciw et al.) documents lowered grade point averages, poor teacher-student relations, and a hostile school climate for many LGB-identified students.

Yet, many new teachers remain resistant to addressing LGB issues; some hesitate out of fear or intimidation (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). In view of these findings, this heuristic case study asks, "What themes emerge in graduate education students' written reflections following a guest lecture on LGB-related educational issues?" Here the authors explain

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what happened during the presentation and analyze the impact of the guest lecture. Specifically, we evaluate students' reflections and draw conclusions from our analyses to heighten the potential for application to other settings (Merriam, 1998).

To become social justice advocates, we believe that teachers must actualize their leadership potential. Teacher leaders effectively working for social justice may be seen as those who keep their sense of purpose alive and who are reflective and action oriented; they know themselves and accept responsibility for student learning, and they are not silenced by those around them (Lambert, 2003). To effectively serve as advocates for their students, teacher leaders must possess knowledge of the diverse needs of their students, including those who identify as LGB.

A Cause for Concern

Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005) reported that 82% of LGB students have been verbally or physically harassed, and nearly 10% have been assaulted. Analyzing the results of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Russell, Franz, and Driscoll (2001) found that youth who reported homosexual and bisexual feelings were at greater risk of experiencing violence. Moreover, youth who stated they were attracted to both sexes were at greater risk of being assaulted and being in serious altercations.

Teachers have a responsibility to ensure that students are safe at school, and they can make significant positive differences in the lives of LGB students by becoming socioculturally-conscious practitioners (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Moreover, teachers have a responsibility to be informed and accepting of gay youth and to take steps to change discriminatory policies and practices (Thomas & Larrabee, 2002). When teachers do support LGB students, these students experience a greater sense of belonging (Murdock & Bolch, 2005), and LGB youth with positive feelings for their teachers are less likely to experience problems in school (Russell, 2005).

Providing Space for Reflection

Grant and Gillette (2006) noted that current practices and patterns of inequality around sexual orientation maintain systems of reason that limit schools' ability to achieve greater success with LGB students. The mindset of educators who created and perpetuate such inequalities may be altered if these practitioners critically reflect on their biases and dispositions, which arise from the familial, religious, and cultural lessons that they have learned. Critical reflection can thus aid educators in becoming more responsive to the needs of their LGB students (Cochran-

Smith, 2004; Freire, 1998; Little, 2001; Mathison, 1998) and attenuate their fear of teaching about the “isms” (Grant & Gillette). To interrupt the current repetition of inequality and to increase the potential for the success of all future students, teacher educators must include in their curricula opportunities for raising teacher candidates’ self-awareness of personal beliefs and assumptions about their and others’ cultures before they begin teaching in their own classrooms (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Zeichner, 1996).

One way to increase self-awareness is to provide opportunities for people of different backgrounds and experiences to interact. Creating safe spaces for teacher candidates to interact with members of the LGB community has led to positive changes in attitudes toward LGB people (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Ben-Ari, 1998; Nelson & Kreiger, 1997). Athanases and Larrabee found that more than three-fourths of respondents valued the information that they received, and nearly two-thirds began “to wear the mantle of advocate for [lesbian and gay] youth” (p. 248). Nevertheless, although most students reported greater understanding of lesbian and gay issues, half of the participants continued to raise questions about the appropriateness of the information for inclusion in curricula, and one-fourth were challenged by trying to reconcile the new information with their religious teachings. The current study further explores the immediate impact of LGB-themed instruction by examining the reflections of recently certified teachers.

Teacher Educators as Change Agents

Banks (2007) pointed out that “sexual orientation deserves examination when human rights and social justice are discussed because . . . many gay youths are victims of discrimination and hate crimes” (p. 17). Teacher training can be a critical tool for preparing teachers to intercede in this pattern of injustice (Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Round, 2002). Preservice teachers reportedly understand and accept that LGB students have a right to their education, free from harassment and discrimination (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Walters & Hayes, 1998), and 85% of secondary teachers agreed with the statement, “Teachers and other school personnel have an obligation to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students” (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005). Yet, the negative experiences of LGB students persist (Harris Interactive & GLSEN; Kosciw et al., 2008; Russell et al., 2001). It is clear these issues require greater attention.

Methods

Context for the Study

This study was conducted at a Midwestern public state university, in the suburbs of a metropolitan region, which enrolls approximately 17,000 students. The participants in this study included the instructor, two guest speakers, and 18 credentialed, master's degree education students. Primarily novice teachers with less than three years' experience, some had not yet secured permanent teaching positions. The instructor, a heterosexual woman; she is the co-author of this study. The co-presenters were two gay men; one is a co-author of this study. The students were all enrolled in the same class, *Introduction to Educational Studies*. The Graduate Course Description Catalog (Oakland University, 2009) stated that this course "investigates current education research, technology and instructional techniques and methods of implementing them in effective teaching and leadership practices." By bringing in guest speakers, the instructor introduced her students to current research in education from experts in their fields; moreover, the presenters offered research-based strategies for effective teaching. Throughout the course, the professor worked to empower her students to effectuate their leadership potential.

There were two guest lectures prior to the presentation under discussion. One lecture focused on social justice and culturally responsive teaching; the other provided an overview of teacher leadership trends and issues. The week following each guest lecture, students submitted critical self-reflections. Students received no written prompts for writing their reflections; they were given only a verbal reminder to focus their writing on their reactions to the presentation rather than on recounting the discussion. Students earned credit for their submissions, but they were not graded for content. Nineteen of 20 students enrolled in the class were female. One student did not attend this presentation, and another did not submit a reflection; thus, 18 reflections were available for analysis.

The speakers opened their presentation with a review of terminology commonly associated with the LGB and transgender (LGBT) community: *sexual preference, choice, and sexual orientation*. They addressed sexual orientation and gender identities: *gay/lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual, and intersex, transsexual and transgender*. They briefly discussed *heterosexism* and *homophobia* and explained two gay pride symbols, the inverted pink triangle and the rainbow flag. The speakers reviewed state law and educational policy relating to LGBT people and highlighted research on the development of gay identities, coming out, and self-endangerment. The lecture included strategies that teachers

could implement to create a more inclusive environment. The presentation concluded when students ceased asking questions.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, the reflections were stripped of any identifying information. The first phase of analysis consisted of reading through the reflections holistically. One co-author coded the data using inductive analysis to identify emerging themes (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) and the data were annotated (Dey, 1993). To reduce researcher bias, a doctoral candidate not previously associated with the study independently coded the data. The co-author's and graduate assistant's coding showed strong similarities. Of the 15 themes identified by the researcher and 16 themes independently identified by the graduate student, 10 themes were consistent with each other. The others were more or less detailed in analysis, but each incorporated the same four overarching themes: *learning opportunity*, *educational concerns*, *cultural contexts*, and *personal dispositions*. Where there were discrepancies, the researcher and graduate student reviewed and recoded the data until the final model was created. Following the identification of overarching themes, each reflection was re-analyzed for discrepancies in students' writings. The reflections were carefully scrutinized for negative responses to the lecture.

Findings and Discussion

Emerging Themes

Learning opportunity. Most commonly, students ($n=13$) described the presentation as informative; for others, the discussion was consciousness-raising. One participant wrote, "I had never thought out the implications of insensitive remarks or actions of my students . . . I have realized that this topic could affect my classroom in many different ways." Nine reflections included responses to the terminology and concepts behind them presented in the lecture. Of those students who wrote about sexual orientation in contrast to sexual choice, none disputed the lecturers' assertions. One student wrote that the speakers "re-confirmed [her/his] answers." Eight students reacted to finding out that state law does not include LGB people as a protected class. Students wrote that they were "shocked," "astounded," or "sad" upon learning that the state's educational policy does not explicitly require protection of LGB students.

Six students expressed a desire for more information. Four students conducted their own personal inquiries, including searches on the Internet and in ERIC documents. One student contacted a faculty sponsor of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Another student was moved to "ask

some other Catholics how they feel about the LGBT issues in relation to our Catholic values.” Two students had unanswered questions about how to identify lesbian and gay students in their classrooms.

Educational Concerns

Classroom management. Two-thirds of the students commented on classroom policies or practices to address LGB issues in schools. One student “hoped” and “liked to think” that s/he would intervene if a student were being harassed. Two participants reiterated strategies offered in the lecture or in literature. Two additional respondents conveyed how they would use the information to encourage discussions at home. Two participants remarked on their continuing self-reflections; one wrote, “I know I won’t be saying [that’s so gay] anymore.” Five students reported their plans to implement inclusive classroom policies or practices. Four respondents identified strategies that they employed to redress discriminatory behaviors in their classroom. One recounted that the day after the presentation, “a student blurted aloud, ‘that’s gay.’” S/he responded by pulling the student aside to emphasize that the words were “hurtful and offensive.” One teacher wrote:

Since the presentation I have started being more aware of the language my students are using and when they use hurtful or derogatory language I not only stop it, but also have a short discussion with them about why what they have just said is not acceptable.

Teacher leadership. Of the six students connecting this presentation to teacher leadership, five viewed themselves as teacher leaders or role models. One respondent wrote, “As a teacher leader is it my duty to provide support and guidance to all students no matter what their sexual preferences are.” Another commented, “We must . . . change the prevailing culture in our own schools . . .” One teacher gained a sense of leadership by directly addressing her students’ derogatory comments. An additional four participants described actions that they would take to create change in their schools. Three students remarked on their sense of responsibility to create safe places for LGB students in their classrooms. One of these students wrote:

Our students are a reflection of our teaching and if we do not stand up for and protect all of our kids, no matter their situation, then we are telling our students that that is allowable to pick on someone because they are different. If we are teaching them that, then I do not think it really matters what else they learn in a day.

Another student declared, “I need to discuss this with my administra-

tors, explain and educate my students as to promote social justice, and not be fearful of what parent criticisms may reciprocate [*sic*].”

Cultural contexts. Of the respondents, 11 viewed LGB concerns in terms of social justice. Six students associated the experiences of LGB people with others who have faced discrimination. Two reflections related the respondents' nephews' prejudicial experiences associated with Fragile X or Asperger's Syndrome. Three students connected others' histories of discrimination with the LGB community's search for social justice. One wrote, "Most schools celebrate Black History Month, Women's History Month . . . I think it would be wonderful for schools to celebrate Gay Pride Month." Another student questioned, "We make it a point to treat people of other races, religions, and ethnicities fairly so why are people of other sexual orientations treated any differently?"

Six students reflected on their experience with the LGB community. Three had gay family members, and four had LGB friends. (One student claimed both.) One student reported, "I know for a fact that without the support of a big group of friends and one very understanding teacher, my friend would have struggled with abuse and beatings from a group of students that wasn't ready to accept him."

Personal dispositions. Half of the reflections included affective reactions to the speakers and/or the presentation. Prior to the presentation, three students wrote that they did not know what to expect. One commented, "Honestly, I was a bit skeptical about how much of this presentation would mean to me in my everyday life." One respondent "couldn't wait" to have her gay brother-in-law's assertions confirmed. After the presentation, five participants reported positive responses to the lecture; none shared negative views. These students felt the information was "credible," and they were "appreciative" of the discussion. One student "enjoyed" the discussion while one other expressed, "the presentation tonight left me with one word, WOW!" Eight students shared their personal dispositions toward the LGB community as a whole. All of these reflections emphasized the students' acceptance of LGB people.

Inconsistent responses. Two reflections revealed the most glaring inconsistencies. One teacher never thought that her/his eighth graders might be struggling with their sexuality. This respondent stated, "Starting a club in middle school might not be a good idea because the students are still not at an age where sexuality and orientation is explored." S/he concluded, "Our school could benefit from a club or even a group that meets once a week that can help students or even just inform the student body."

Two students seemed to express inconsistencies in their self-perceptions. One did not see her/his inappropriate use of LGB-related terminology as insensitive. This student, who viewed her/himself as “pretty knowledgeable about differences in people,” described the pain that s/he felt when colleagues identified something as “retarded” or “special” due to her/his nephew’s experiences with those terms. S/he then stated, “I do not have any first hand experience with gay and lesbian insensitivity,” though earlier in the response, the writer had noted:

I had no idea how much I used incorrect terminology when talking about the gay and lesbian community. I use the same terms I hear in the media and with talking to others, but I realized today that they are wrong on the usage of terms concerning the gay and lesbian community.

It appears that this student did recognize the inappropriate use of terminology referring to those with mental challenges as insensitive, but s/he did not recognize her/his misuse of LGB-related terminology as gay and lesbian insensitivity. Her/his classmate wrote that s/he was “very understanding of LGBT issues,” but was not previously interested in inequities in state law because “it didn’t pertain to me.”

More prevalent was an apparent disconnection between acknowledging inequities confronting LGB students and accepting personal responsibility for redressing them. These disconnections most commonly arose in three ways: (a) citing external barriers to taking personal actions; (b) reporting information absent personal reflection; and (c) depersonalizing the issue by discussing societal norms, or projecting responsibility for redressing this social injustice onto others.

Seven students identified external barriers that prevent them from advocating for their LGB students and families. The barriers that they pointed to included the challenges of being a new teacher mastering content and classroom management. Others were apprehensive of parents’ negative reactions, or they perceived the site administration’s lack of support as prohibitive. One student, teaching in a parochial school, stated that s/he “cannot put [her/his] own personal beliefs into the picture” because of requirements to “strictly relate the beliefs of the Catholic faith.” One student simply stated, “Sadly, it’s just easier to ignore it at times.” One respondent did transform her/his fear of parental disapproval into motivation, writing “. . . this only provides fuel to the fire that I should stick to my guns and obtain administrative support.”

Eight respondents placed LGB issues within the context of the larger society, apparently removing themselves from the community. One student commented, “*So many* believe that sexual orientation is a choice or a malfunction of some kind.” Another continued this line of

thinking, stating, “As such, *these people* feel that gay and lesbian people can simply be ‘cured’ or discouraged from ‘making bad choices’” (emphasis added). Others depersonalized their reflections by externalizing the locus of responsibility. One student, who abdicated personal responsibility for addressing social issues in the classroom, wrote, “Have the students admit or explain why a behavior is unacceptable and if parents had a problem then the teacher could explain to them that it was their own child who corrected him or herself.” Another student wrote, “*Schools will need* to implement rules and regulations . . .” (emphasis added). One other student predicted that at some point in “[*his / her*]” teaching career, “*a teacher*” may encounter LGB students and parents (emphasis added). Several students spoke of a collective “we” and “educators,” but lacked an “I” statement to indicate the degree to which their assertions were personally held.

The participants in the current study expressed appreciation for the inclusion of LGB-related instruction in their education class; the information presented was seen as new and revealing. The respondents in this study appeared less reticent to advocate on behalf of their LGB students and families than those in earlier work (e.g., Athanases & Larrabee, 2003). No students cited personal religiosity as a barrier to implementing LGB-inclusive instructional practices, although one student did note that institutional restrictions at the Catholic school where s/he taught prevented her/him from “helping students to keep an open mind about LGBT issues.” This same student clearly stated that s/he disagrees with the Catholic teachings regarding homosexuality. “I am not and have never been one of those people. I am much more open-minded regarding the acceptance of gay people, and their sexual relationships outside of marriage.” Only one respondent questioned the age-appropriateness of establishing a GSA-type club in middle school.

Contextualizing LGB issues within the frameworks of social justice and teacher leadership appears to encourage acceptance of personal responsibility for advocating on behalf of their LGB students. In this study, ten of the respondents wrote that it was incumbent upon them as teacher leaders to enact change and advocate on behalf of their LGB students and families. Eleven participants viewed discrimination against LGB students and families as a social justice issue by linking inequitable treatment of LGB people to that of women, people of color, religious minorities, and/or people with disabilities. Twelve respondents reflected on their classroom policies and practices, including four students who outlined plans for changing classroom management policies; one participant changed her personal behavior, and four others reported concrete actions they had already implemented in their classrooms. The remaining three respondents reported their rededication to taking

“better action” and continued self-reflection on her/his “own language and attitudes.”

Making Meaning of the Reflections

Learning opportunity. In this study, one-third of participants reported they had gay-identified friends and/or family members. Yet, each of these students also wrote about the new knowledge that they had gained from the discussion. They reported learning about classroom management strategies, state law, and statistics on self-endangerment. Further, of the six participants who conducted outside research or asked follow-up questions in their reflections, four stated that they had had prior experiences with LGB people, indicating that, even though education students may have personal relationships with LGB people, academic discussions that combine insider perspectives with relevant scholarship, as recommended by Ben-Ari (1998), are effective in broadening participants’ understanding of social justice and their responsibility for providing equitable learning opportunities for all their students, inclusive of LGB youth.

Contrary to earlier studies (Athanasēs & Larrabee, 2003; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001), the students in this class did not voice resistance to the key concept that broaching LGB issues is appropriate in the classroom, although one-third were reluctant to initiate discussions on the topic. Herek (2000) reminds us that heterosexuals who know LGB people and talk about sexual orientation with them are less likely to express sexual prejudice, and one-third of participants in the current study described close relationships with LGB people, which may have led to more positive responses here.

The positive results reported here may also be due in part to the time in United States history in which this study was conducted. There is continued momentum for the gay rights movement. Since 2004, when no states allowed same-sex marriages, six states (Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont) have approved the issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples. California no longer allows same-sex marriages, but it does recognize those conducted prior to the passage of Proposition 8 in 2008. New York, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia recognize same-sex marriages conducted legally in other states. Eleven states and the District of Columbia provide for civil unions or domestic partnerships; four of these states also grant same-sex marriages (Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont) (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009; Vestal, 2009). There is a clear and growing trend acknowledging that LGB people are entitled to the equal rights and responsibilities of full citizenship in this country.

Educational concerns. Given educators' strong sense of caring (Morehead, Brown, & Smith, 2006; Walls, Nardi, Von Minden, & Hoffman, 2002), it may be expected that teachers, perhaps more than others, might be more willing to express responsibility for advocating for all of their students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Teachers' sense of responsibility for their LGB students can be found in the results identifying six students expressing an interest in, or seeking out, additional relevant information. Two students also initiated discussions with their families, indicating that they saw relevance in this presentation beyond their professional duties as educators.

Notably, significant resistance to the gay rights movement remains. At the time of this writing, 36 states have statutes banning same-sex marriages, 30 states have amended their constitutions to limit marriage to heterosexual couples, and 26 states have both restrictions on their books, including the state in which this study was conducted (Vestal, 2009). This public opposition likely influences some teachers' willingness to advocate for their LGB students. Danielson (2006) noted that many teachers resist tackling controversial issues out of fear. In our study, one-third of respondents reported trepidation of "making waves" or "rocking the boat." This appears to be especially true for new teachers who are struggling with mastering curriculum, establishing classroom management, and working to achieve tenure. As one respondent noted, with the high demands on a new teacher, sometimes "it's just easier to ignore [the issue]."

Participants' hesitancy to advocate for their LGB students may also be understood in view of their geographic location. Herek (2000) reported that sexual prejudice toward lesbian and gays is correlated with living in the Midwest, little or no contact with LGB people, and conservative religious ideology, among other characteristics. As noted above, this study was conducted in the Midwest in a state that bans same-sex marriage. Moreover, ten participants mentioned no relationships with LGB people, and two students claimed they had no prior experience with LGB people. Even though remaining silent may be easier and safer for teachers, continuing to ignore the plight of LGB students in schools works against lessening their sense of isolation, vulnerability to harassment, or barriers to actualizing their academic potential.

To provide all students with equitable access to their education, all teachers, new and experienced, must overcome their fears and lead their classrooms and schools toward a more just community of learners. When they do, LGB students can find their rightful place in school (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). When teachers assume leadership roles and support their LGB students, their students feel more connected and experience fewer problems in school (Russell, 2005). Moreover, teachers who assume

leadership roles also benefit; one respondent wrote, "What I also gained by stopping my students from saying these derogatory terms was a sense of teacher leadership." It is important to note that no participants who advocated on behalf of their LGB students reported any disciplinary actions by their administrator or reprimands from parents.

For some novice teachers, actively promoting change in established attitudes and practices may threaten their job security. For others, this fear may be more perception than reality, as indicated by the lack of repercussions for those who have advocated for their LGB students. Acknowledging the students' fears, the co-presenters emphasized that, if a teacher loses her/his job, it is much more difficult to create change in the school or district by which s/he is no longer employed. In light of this risk, participants were advised to seek out allies in their schools and districts to gain a better understanding of what changes could be implemented to create a more inclusive campus climate. When administrators are not supportive, it will be important for teachers to find other faculty and support staff who can serve as mentors and offer moral support when personal convictions clash with current policy and practice.

Whether or not change will come from within the school or district, teachers can promote social justice in schools by becoming actively involved in the political process. Currently, the state legislature is considering anti-bullying legislation. Teachers can contact their representatives and urge their support of these and similar bills. Teachers can also find others with similar perspectives outside of their schools and districts by joining state and national organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN). By building alliances, teachers can be kept better informed and can access resources that they might be able to incorporate into their teaching, without negative repercussions.

The population of novice teachers participating in this study provides us with new opportunities to see whether teachers change their practices in response to direct instruction on LGB-related educational issues, beyond the positive changes in attitudes established in the literature (Athanases & Larrabee; Ben-Ari, 1998; Nelson & Kreiger, 1997), and we did indeed begin to see the changes in teachers' actions in their classroom as a direct result of the guest lecture. Of the 12 students who discussed classroom practices and policies that could be implemented, two students reported actions that they had taken as a result of their participation in the discussion. When one teacher heard her/his student calling out "that's gay," "It hit [her/him] much harder than usual due to the fact that I had just heard this lecture." Another educator has "started being more aware . . . when they use hurtful or derogatory language." Both of these teachers took action to redress their students'

inappropriate behavior; this reportedly was more than either had done previously in similar situations.

Cultural contexts. Of the 11 students who viewed addressing LGB issues as a form of social justice, eight assumed personal responsibility for speaking to their LGB students' concerns. One student wrote what many others had expressed, "I need to be accepting of every child and not discriminate or let the beliefs of others influence me." As a result of providing a theoretical framework that combines personal responsibility for all students with teacher leadership and social justice, and by building in time for critical reflection, participants appear to gain greater insights into their self-perceptions as teachers and leaders. The results of this study also suggest that some participants appear to gain stature as teacher leaders. As described by Lambert (2003), these participants have a sense of purpose; they are reflective, and they suggest future actions that will require them to speak out and not to be silenced.

Personal dispositions. In this study, students did not write about their internal struggles to reconcile religious beliefs with the assertion that LGB students are deserving of acknowledgement, inclusion, and respect in classrooms and schools. Of the four students who mentioned religion, one admonished a speaker for "a lack of sensitivity when discussing religion." A Catholic student was "somewhat ashamed to be associated with a religious group of people that are not accepting of homosexual behavior." Another student observed, "There is a political and religious undertone spreading. I hear it in my son's discussions. I hear from the Mother's [*sic*] of my son's classmate. It is very prevalent . . ." These comments remind us that, although the participants in this study did not report personal conflicts between religion and acceptance of LGB people, there is a strong religious demographic in the larger community that is less tolerant. Given the high level of acceptance and low level of religious dialogue in the reflections, one must consider that some students may have felt silenced or were prone to put forth a preconceived "acceptable" reflection. As such, the results presented here must be viewed with some caution. Nevertheless, as previously stated, prior research appears to support the positive changes reported here.

Conclusion

The continuing progress towards teachers' acceptance of personal responsibility for advocating for their LGB students and families documented in this study is significant. Past research has focused on preservice teachers' responses to the inclusion of LGB issues in the curriculum (Athanasios)

& Larrabee, 2003; Ben-Ari, 1998; Nelson & Kreiger, 1997). This study advances our understanding of the impact of such instruction by examining the reflections of practicing teachers who have a greater opportunity to implement change in their classrooms than do student teachers.

Although the hesitancy of new teachers to make waves remains strong, this study indicates that there are novice teachers who view it as their responsibility to accept the critically important role of improving student-teacher relationships and school climate (Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and some are taking concrete steps to change their classroom policies and practices to create a safer, more inclusive classroom climate. These changes remain vital to the safety and success of LGB students. Kosciw et al. (2008) reported that LGB students in schools with an inclusive curriculum that includes positive representations of LGB people heard fewer homophobic remarks, experienced less harassment and fewer assaults, and felt a greater sense of safety and belonging to their school. LGB students attending schools with supportive educators were also less likely to feel unsafe, less likely to miss school due to safety concerns, and were more likely to have higher grade point averages and educational aspirations.

The results of the current study indicate that teachers are more likely to establish and implement inclusive policies and practices in their classrooms in response to LGB-themed instruction. Although only two teachers attributed changed behaviors to this presentation, one must allow that only one week passed between the lecture and reflection. Given more time, and more opportunities to share the outcomes of these nascent steps toward teacher leadership and social justice, more of their peers may follow suit. Major and Brock (2003) have already underscored the vital importance of teachers' positive attitudes towards issues of diversity. If we are to significantly ameliorate the impact of homonegativity on LGB students and families, improve their chances of academic success, and maximize their potential to contribute to the society that encompasses us all, we must continue to expand the inclusion of LGB issues in our teacher education programs.

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