Chapter 6

Queering the Curriculum:
An Exploratory Study of Teachers' Perceptions on Integrating LGBTQ+–Inclusive Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Studies show that LGBTQ+-identified students are disproportionately at risk when it comes to factors such as academic success rates, bullying, truancy, suicidality, and more. Multicultural education frameworks are a successful method of combatting these risk factors in other populations. This exploratory study endeavored to gain insight into secondary school English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies teachers' perceptions of integrating a multicultural and LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum as well as the perceived barriers that educators might face when doing so. The results of this study found that secondary ELA and Social Studies teachers in a small New England state are overall willing to integrate an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, but largely feel unprepared to do so. Recommendations include integrating an LGBTQ+ curriculum into educator preparation courses, professional development for practicing teachers, and to continue inquiry into improving pedagogical practice to serve LGBTQ+ students better.

INTRODUCTION

The United States has experienced widespread changes in who it educates and how it has responded to the calls from those initially barred from formal schooling experiences to reform schools and other educational institutions so that curricula reflected their experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives (Banks, 2013a, 2013b). Specifically following the Civil Rights Era, great effort was made to include the lived experiences of racially and ethnically diverse students, as well as other marginalized student populations into school curricula (Banks, 2013a, 2013b). In particular, research in the field of multicultural education both confirms and asserts that students must find the curriculum they are studying relevant to their lived experiences and identities in order to be fully engaged in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2011, 2000, & 1995). While the impact of multicultural curricula is clear, we still have a long way to go in its implementation and providing all students with academic experiences that are relevant to their lived experiences (Banks, 2013a, 2013b, 2006). In particular, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other gender and sexually marginalized (LGBTQ+) students experience a lack of representation or harmful misrepresentation within their classrooms (Burdge, Snapp, Laub, Russel & Moody, 2013; Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boeson, & Palmer, 2012; McGarry, 2013; Preston, 2016, 2013a, 2013b; Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, Gabrion, & Russell, 2015b; Thoreson, 2016; White, Moeller, Ivcevic, Brackett, & Stern, 2017). As a result, in school settings LGBTQ+ students are disproportionately affected by bullying, depression, and suicidality rates compared to their cisgender and heterosexual classmates (Burke & Greenfield, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; White et al., 2017).

Although research in multicultural education has traditionally been geared towards improving the experiences of students based on race and ethnicity, multicultural pedagogy could also support the case for LGBTQ+ inclusion, especially in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Logan, Lasswell, Hood, & Watson, 2014; Logan, Watson, Hood, &Lasswell, 2016). Despite multicultural education's positive impacts, many teachers are resistant to multicultural education (Dunn, Dotson, Ford, & Roberts, 2014; Thein, 2013). If educators wish to provide safe and welcoming environments conducive to future success for all students, immediate action must occur to address the multivariate issues facing LGBTQ+ students and the implementation of culturally relevant curriculum that is accurate, inclusive, respectful, and validates their identities and empowers their voices (Burdge et. al., 2013; Burke & Greenfield, 2016; Crocco, 2001; GLSEN, 2011; Jennings, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Snapp, Burdge, Licona, Moody, & Russell, 2015a; Snapp et al., 2015b; Thornton, 2002; White et al., 2017; Zack, Manheim & Alfano, 2010).

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