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“I would not consider myself a homophobe”: Learning and teaching about sexual orientation in a principal preparation program

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Keywords

principal preparation, leadership, sexual orientation, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, social justice, religion, teaching, homophobia

Disciplines

Curriculum and Instruction | Higher Education | Humane Education

Comments

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“I Would Not Consider Myself a Homophobe”: Learning and Teaching about Sexual Orientation in a Principal Preparation Program

In September of 2011, Jamey Rodemeyer, aged 14, killed himself two weeks into his ninth grade school year. Rodemeyer, who identified as bisexual and gay, was bullied both online and at school, beginning in middle school. A few weeks before his death he posted a short “It Gets Better” video, joining the other 30,000 user-created videos on that website encouraging sexual minority youth to endure (“It gets better project,” 2010-2012). In November, the police closed Rodemeyer’s case without arrests or charges, explaining that there was not evidence to charge anyone, that the bullying didn’t seem to come from just one person, and that many of the bullies were underage. The county district attorney, Frank Sedita III, explained this decision in the *Buffalo News* by saying, “It’s not a crime to be an obnoxious, teenage idiot” (Tan, 2011).

Also in 2011, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the National Center for Lesbian Rights filed suit against the Anoka-Hennepin district, Minnesota’s largest, claiming that the district had not done enough to stop bullying. The district has a “curriculum neutrality policy,” adopted in 2009, which, according to the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, “allows teachers to discuss sexual orientation issues but requires them to maintain neutrality” (Smith, 2011). The five plaintiffs in the case said “they’ve been peppered with demeaning slurs, stabbed with pencils, even urinated on by classmates.” One plaintiff, Kyle Rooker, aged 14, said about his teachers:

They would tell me I shouldn't act a certain way or dress a certain way instead of stopping the kids from harassing me. ... Instead of telling me I'm wrong for being

different, I think we should tell bullies they're wrong for being mean.

The superintendent of Anoka-Hennepin maintained that there had been no evidence of bullying, and was quoted by a CNN article as saying, “It’s a diverse community... and what I’m trying to do as a superintendent is walk down the middle of the road” (Harlow & Probst, 2011). The U.S. Education and Justice departments are investigating.

We have set out to discuss the role that school leaders can play in protecting students like Jamey Rodemeyer and Kevin Rooker. Leaders need to create safe and inclusive learning environments which protect children from harassment related to LGBTQ affiliation or perception. The purpose of this study is to analyze the written reflections of aspiring principals in two principal-preparation courses where social justice is at the core of the content. Both address the needs of sexual minority students as part of the responsibility of a social justice leader. In our approach to this study, the authors have asked two specific questions. First, what patterns emerged during the first course when aspiring principals reflected upon issues related to sexual orientation? Second, what changes to these patterns occurred as the future principals reflected again on these issues during the second course? That is, in what ways did aspiring principals change their thinking over time regarding sexual orientation as they prepared to enter the administrative ranks of K-12 schools? Our ultimate goal was twofold. We wanted to inform and modify our own teaching based on what we learned from our students. We also wanted to inform our colleagues in the field of educational leadership of our experiences and their results in order to advance the conversation about how sexual orientation might be operationalized in the educational preparation curriculum.

Defining Terms

Before reviewing the literature for this study, we want to clarify terms used throughout this manuscript and which students encountered during their two courses. The most commonly used terms referring to sexual orientation are “heterosexuality,” which refers to individuals whose primary attraction is to people of the opposite sex; “homosexuality,” which refers to individuals whose primary attraction is to people of the same sex; and “bisexuality,” which refers to individuals who are attracted to both males and females (Mayo, 2007). Another regularly used term is “sexual minority,” which refers to an individual whose identity or orientation differs from that of the majority.

The term “sex” connotes biological sex as determined by chromosomes and sexual organs. “Gender identity” refers to an individual’s identification with male-associated roles or female-associated roles. Lugg (2003b) has made a helpful distinction: “Gender is an ongoing, lifelong series of evolving performances. Sex is chromosomal” (p. 98). There are individuals who believe that their gender identity and their sex do not match. These individuals are generally referred to as “transgender” and may present themselves by means of behavior, dress, and language in ways associated with the opposite sex, all in order to reflect their perception of their true gender. “Transsexual” is a term that refers to transgender individuals who have had sex-reassignment surgery. “Questioning” refers, as one might guess, to a person questioning his or her sexual orientation as well as his or her gender identity. Sometimes the “Q” in LGBTQ stands for “queer,” which Lugg has pointed out (2003b) was reclaimed by gay and lesbian activists in the early 1990s and encompasses “people with a homosexual or bisexual orientation as well as those individuals who are intersexed, transgendered, and transsexual” (p. 101). For a thorough

review of these terms, as well as the way in which sexual orientation has manifested in schools and in politics, see the rest of Lugg's article.

Two additional relevant terms are “heteronormativity” and “heterosexism.” The term “heteronormativity” comes from the work of Warner (1991), who argued that heterosexual culture is so prevalent and privileged that even if it tolerates minority sexualities, it has a “totalizing tendency that can only be overcome by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world” (p. 8). It is related to heterosexism, which “assumes everyone... is heterosexual” (Blackburn & Donelson, 2004, p. 99).

Koschoreck and Slattery (2006) list several examples of ways in which heteronormativity and heterosexism are enacted in schools at the personal level by individual students and staff, and at the institutional level, by, for example, assuming the heterosexuality of students, staff and parents in school documents.

Finally, we mention three terms students mentioned in their reflections.

“Homophobia” is the “fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbians and gay men or any behavior that falls outside of traditional gender roles” (Blumenfeld, 1992; Griffin & Harro, 1997, p. 146). An ally, particularly a heterosexual ally, is someone who advocates for and supports sexual minority people (GLSEN, 2011). Allies are commonly found in Gay-Straight Alliances, or GSAs, which are student-led school clubs open to everyone interested in LGBTQ issues and in supporting LGBTQ people (GLSEN, 2007).

These terms are much more complex than their definitions here and this list does not represent the fluidity of sexual orientation (for a recent overview, see Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012). This fluidity also makes it difficult to research sexual orientation, as noted in a review by Sell (1997) of sexual orientation research dating back to the

1860s. Identity can not be defined only by attraction or sexual activity. Our goal here was not to reduce the complexity of these terms; but to provide a context for how these terms are used in this article.

Bullying and Harassment of LGBTQ Students

It is well documented that LGBTQ students are regularly bullied and harassed in schools and that such bullying often goes unchecked. Seminal works include Human Rights Watch's *Hatred in the Hallways* (2001) and National School Climate surveys from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2007; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Barkiewicz, 2010). However, school leaders generally have under-estimated the frequency of this type of bullying and harassment. According to *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment*, while most principals reported that students had been harassed because of their gender expression, few believed that this harassment was a frequent occurrence. Only 12% characterized the frequency as "very often" and 9% as "often" (Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 2008). In comparison, *students* reported that they had suffered harassment regarding their gender expression at much higher rates. 90% of LGBTQ students characterized the frequency of this harassment as "very often" and 62% of non-LGBTQ students characterized it as "very often" (Kosciw, et al., 2007).

GLSEN found that transgender youth reported even higher levels of harassment and victimization than their non-transgender gay, lesbian, and bisexual peers. Nine out of ten transgender youth experienced verbal harassment at school; more than half experienced physical harassment; and over 25% reported physical assaults (defined as being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon), all based on their sexual and gender identity (Greytak,

Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Questioning students also are bullied. Students who are questioning their sexual orientation are more likely than either straight or gay/lesbian/bisexual students to be bullied, and more likely to report “significantly more depression/ suicidal feelings, greater use of alcohol/marijuana, and more truancy” (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009, pp. 994-995).

Terms such as *faggot*, *dyke*, and *sissy* are examples of the verbal abuse that gay and lesbian youth face during their adolescent years. Male and female students respond to the effects of sexually degrading name-calling differently, which may reflect societal norms about gender identity, including masculinity. Capper, Schulte, and McKinney have written that male high school students who experienced sexually degrading name-calling exhibited more anger, combativeness, and physical ailments than otherwise would be the case (2009). Similarly, Swearer, Turner, and Givens (2008) found that boys who were called “gay” experienced “higher anxiety and depression, and displayed a more external locus of control than boys who were bullied for other reasons” (p. 170).

According to a school climate survey in the state in which this study takes place (citation omitted for blind review), 36% of LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted, often with a weapon. The same report found that one out of four LGBTQ students skipped school in the past month because they were simply too afraid to go.

The result of this violence against LGBTQ adolescents has resulted in high levels of suicide attempts and actual suicides among this population. In one recent study, nearly 20% of lesbian and gay youth and 22% of bisexual youth reported attempting suicide at least once in the previous twelve months, compared with 4% of their heterosexual peers

(Hatzenbuehler, 2011).

However, not all schools are unsafe, and there are bright spots. Several of these studies about the relationship between sexual orientation and negative factors such as absenteeism or suicide identify school climate as a mitigating factor. For example, lesbian and gay students in schools with positive climates and who had less teasing were very similar to straight students in terms of depression, feelings of suicide, drug and alcohol usage, and truancy (Birkett, et al., 2009). Sexual minority students, particularly bisexual students, who had positive relationships with their teachers had fewer troubles in school (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). Clearly, there is a need for school leaders to create spaces where all students feel safe and are free from victimization experiences.

For leaders who may not naturally be impelled to act as allies, there are movements both locally and federally to mandate safe spaces. In 2010 the Office for Civil Rights of the United States Department of Education sent a “Dear Colleague” letter to all school districts outlining their legal responsibilities to address bullying (Ali, 2010). An *Education Week* blog reported in July 2011 (Samuels & Shah) that the Tehachapi school district in California was the first to be federally investigated for failing to prevent the bullying of Seth Walsh, a 13-year-old who hung himself. In response, the district agreed to assess gender and sexual minority harassment via school climate surveys, has formed an advisory council, has suspended one student, and has assigned other students to detention. This response may be too little, too late.

Agency

Not all of the research about sexual minority youth is dismal. Like any other group of people, sexual minority youth are not a monolithic group. They are not all dying or

suffering, some are quite resilient — even happy — and some are activist agents inspiring others. In describing his students' reactions to the readings in a course he taught on "Gay and Lesbian Issues in Schools," Rofes (2004) acknowledged that many of those readings sustained a construct of LGBTQ youth as "Martyr-Target-Victim," a construct his students disparaged. Talburt (2004) has argued that the prevalent image of sexual minority youth as youth at risk has hindered meeting their needs, since not all of them are at risk, and perceiving them as so can be a harmful stereotype, reinforcing, she says, "associations of 'gay' with 'problem'" (p. 119). Instead, "educators must proceed without fixed recipes for action" (p. 121), listening to the youth themselves and the ways in which they define their identities and needs. As educators, we often desire a fixed recipe, or at least, to extend the metaphor, a shopping list of action items. It takes leadership and comfort with uncertainty to listen and then proceed.

Blackburn (2004) has written about the agency of resilient LGBTQ students, or their ability to "exert power" (p. 103). She tells the stories of three young people who acted against the oppression of their schools by working outside of them, such as in a speaker's bureau, or leaving school and then returning. Each of them exerted agency in his or her own way, rather than in a way adults might have chosen, such as a gay-straight alliance. Several national programs have been developed by LGBTQ students and their allies, such as No Name-Calling Week; anti-bullying activities starting at the elementary level; and the Day of Silence, when students protest harassment by refusing to speak at school.

In an introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* on LGBTQ youth, Horn, Kosciw and Russell (2009) suggested that researchers move from

the two paradigms of youth as either at-risk or resilient and instead study the social contexts which LGBTQ youth negotiate. There is a balance between dwelling on the negative experiences of sexual minority youth, which could contribute to viewing them through the lens of a deficit model, as if their sexuality is a problem to be fixed; and refusing to acknowledge responsibility for students' negative experiences in schools. Understanding LGBTQ students' contexts can help meet their needs.

Social Justice Leadership

The literature on social justice leadership has explicitly addressed the role that school leaders, particularly principals, can play in creating safe schools for all students. This literature has called for administrators to strive for equity in their districts and buildings regarding marginalized sexual-minority students and staff (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002; Riehl, 2000). A recent edited volume entitled *Sexuality Matters: Paradigms and Policies for Educational Leaders* (Koschoreck & Tooms, 2009), makes a deliberate effort to merge both sexual orientation and educational leadership by exploring issues related to policy, pedagogy, and identity.

It is incumbent upon preparation programs to prepare preserve administrators to act equitably on behalf of all their students and staff. A promising educational strategy from the pedagogy of social justice has been to ask students to reflect critically upon their beliefs about equity and elements of cultural identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Brown, 2004; Milner, 2003). Ridenour (2004), for example, has established a strong rationale for analyzing aspiring administrators' written reflections, arguing that personal identity is

important for administrative work and that self-awareness and self-reflection help administrators make meaning and enrich their dispositions. Built upon adult-education theory (see, for example, Mezirow, 1998) and the theory of the reflective practitioner (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schön, 1983; Steffy & Wolfe, 1997), the rationale for using reflections as a teaching tool is that a future administrator's written reflections indicate their beliefs *and* can change practice. The written assignments and reflections of these aspiring administrators, therefore, offered a glimpse of what and how they were thinking about sexual orientation, with the research-based assumption that such thinking might influence their current and eventual practice.

Methods

Given these guiding principles from previous research, two instructors in a leadership-preparation program incorporated reflection assignments into their respective social justice related courses. One course was offered at the beginning of the program; the other offered at the end. The first course is an educational foundations course that introduces issues related to social justice (e.g. race, social class, sexual orientation) and includes the analysis of historical and social trends of schooling. It engages students with general questions such as: What are your cultural values? How do individual and collective cultural values shape schooling? How have American schools evolved historically? It also asks students to ask themselves: How do these cultural forces impact my school life? And, How am I as a future administrator going to respond to them? Students are required to post short weekly reflections in an online, password-protected discussion forum. Students may respond to readings, to each other, or to situations occurring in their schools. Because this reflective analysis is semi-public, students have

the opportunity to start conversations that can be continued in class while maintaining as much privacy as course management software offers.

In addition, students are asked to engage in an educational plunge, which Brown describes as selecting “an activity that will challenge them to move beyond their present level of comfort, knowledge, and awareness and yet not be so uncomfortable or threatening that they are unable to be open to the ‘minority experience’ (2006, p. 738). They also write a case study based upon a situation occurring in their own schools, and write a final reflection on their cultural identity.

Course readings directly related to sexual orientation include the most recent school climate survey from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, selections from *Adolescents at School* (Sadowski, 2008) and a case about a gay teacher from the Harvard Family Research Project (Berges, 2001). To make concrete the number of LGBTQ people currently in these future administrators’ lives, students are asked to write down the number of staff in their building, then write down the number of students. Then they are asked to determine 3% and 10% of each of those numbers. The instructor explains that 3% would be a very conservative estimate of how many LGBTQ people are in their buildings; whereas 10% would probably be more accurate¹. Then they are asked to report back to the large group the likely range of LGBTQ people in their buildings.

The second course, which students take toward the end of the program, returned to

¹ Earlier we noted the fluidity of sexual orientation and the difficulty researching it. These 3% and 10% numbers were based at the time on two sources: an overview from a Gallup researcher (Robison, 2002) and the Kinsey report (1948), which are not scholarly or recent. Now we use the methodological issues of assessing identity or behavior as a discussion springboard, as well as the call for including sexual orientation data on the U.S. Census, and more contemporary sources on the statistics of sexual identity such as Chandra, Mosher, and Copen (2011), and Gates (2011).

social justice issues and included an equity audit (Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2009; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003) and an analysis of how programs and services are delivered. Students are required to collect student data from their own school on race, social class, gender, English language learners, and special education. Sexual orientation was one of the areas that students must audit, with questions from Capper, Frattura, and Keyes (2009) to prompt them, such as, "Does your district have any active policies that support sexual orientation?" (pp. 142-143). Once students collected data, they were asked to respond to this prompt:

What do these sexual orientation data mean? In your analysis, include the strengths and areas for improvement in serving sexual minority students and staff within your school's curriculum, instruction, and culture, and other learning opportunities. Identify concrete, specific ideas you have for remedying the weaknesses (Capper, Frattura, et al., 2009, p. 138).

Students then devised a vision, five-year goal, and implementation plan to address inequities that surfaced during their audit. Students also were required to post a short reflection online about LGBTQ issues and their personal experiences.

Required readings in this course included *Meeting the Needs of Students of ALL Abilities* (Capper, Frattura, et al., 2009), *Using Data to Include the Achievement Gap* (Johnson, 2002) and Scheurich, Skrla, and Johnson (2000) on thinking about equity and accountability. Particularly related to LGBTQ were "The Law and Gay-Bashing in Schools" (Reese, 1997), "Tips for Professionals Who Work with Gay Youth" (PFLAG), and "My Son, the 11-year-old Drag Queen" (Ebert, 2002). Representatives from a gay-straight alliance came to class for a panel discussion, as suggested by "Integrating

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Topics...into the Curriculum” (Capper, Alston, et al., 2006).

Participants, Process, and Ethics

Students progress through the principal preparation program in cohorts, which enables tracking each cohort from the beginning of the program to the end. Participating in the current study were 25 students from two different cohorts, all of whom, in accordance with Institutional Review Board ethical guidelines, gave written consent before participating in the study, with a clear statement in the consent form that their participation would not affect their course grade. We recognized that students might feel coerced to participate, so tried to convey during class that they were under no obligation to do so. The consent form also explained the purpose of the study and how their reflections would be used:

The purpose of this study is to collect the reflections you make throughout this course and analyze them for patterns. We hope that these patterns will help inform us about your learning so that we can improve our own teaching and inform the teaching of other people who teach in educational preparation programs. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a student in [name of courses removed].

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for the semester in which you are enrolled in [course names]. It will involve no extra work on your part. ...You will submit your regular assignments to your instructor as outlined in the syllabus. If there is a particular reflection which you would like

not to be part of this study, you can write “Do not include in study” on the top of it.

Consent forms were collected and placed in a folder, but the instructor did not look at them to see who was participating and who was not. Two students declined to grant permission for their reflections to be used and, therefore, were not among the 25 participants in this study. However, we were not aware that these two students were *not* participating until the data analysis stage, due to the process we used to anonymize the data. After the completion of each course, an undergraduate research assistant removed student and school names from reflections and assignments and assigned each participant a number and a file, making sure each student had signed a consent form. Thus at that stage, the two students who had chosen not to participate were not represented in the file folders. While as instructors we remembered some student responses or individual assignments from our own courses, if they were not in the file folders, we did not include them in our analysis.

There was a time lapse of approximately a year and a half in between the two courses. Because the second course occurred at the end of the program, students had graduated by the time all of their data had been collected, anonymized, and filed, and analysis had begun. We believe that both the time which elapsed and the students' graduation from the program contributed to our attempts not to coerce our students to participate in the project. However, we acknowledge that this system is not perfect, and that despite our efforts to protect students' anonymity, we know our students and during the analysis stage could sometimes match responses to individuals. Future research in this area might be stronger if third parties collected and analyzed data instead of the

instructors who taught the course. For the purposes of this study, it also would have been helpful if we had asked students to provide demographic data, including their own gender identification, so that we could have provided that data and placed their reflections in that context.

Analysis

Each instructor first analyzed the student reflections from the other instructor's course. Reflections were read repeatedly and common themes in each course and across the two courses were identified. We categorized responses to particular topics under discussion. We also searched for ways in which responses might change over time (or not) and for emerging patterns of response. We used an iterative coding process similar to that described by Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002) and the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Figure 1 illustrates the analysis process. During data review, each researcher read reflections and began to code the data and look for specific themes. As we continued to read the reflections, we analyzed them to determine whether initial themes were present in other reflections. The authors also served as peer reviewers for each other, checking preliminary themes and findings with each other.

Research Context

Many of the students who enroll in our principal preparation program are from small rural communities. In the state in which this study takes place, only one city has a population over 150,000. The surrounding communities are agriculturally focused. Politically it is a swing state. In the most recent state-wide poll on attitudes towards same-sex marriage (2011 – reference omitted for blind review), respondents split three ways among oppose (37%), favor (32%), and “don't care much” (30%). Religiously, the

state is similar to the rest of the U.S., with slightly more mainline Protestants and fewer historically Black congregants (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008).

Reflections are not corrected for spelling or usage. Punctuation, capitalization, and italicization or other emphases are original to the reflections, and not to us. Ellipses (...) are used to indicate when a phrase has been omitted, and brackets [] if we've added information to clarify or deleted it to protect the person's identity. We've also maintained their terminology, so that there is some inconsistency of abbreviations, such as GLBT instead of LGBTQ.

Findings

First, we found that students in our courses had mixed experiences with peers who identified as LGBTQ, with increased experience over their educational trajectory. Second, we found some tension between students' Christian religious beliefs and views of sexual orientation. Third, there was some change in the way in which students responded to sexual orientation, from a more passionate to a more analytical stance.

Personal Experiences with Peers: Are There Any Gay People in Rural America?

Reflections from our students point to a mixed amount of experience with others who identified as LGBTQ. One student attributed that lack of experience to growing up in a rural community:

Growing up in a rural community I did not experience anyone that was LBGT. If they were, they certainly would not reveal this information. In school kids would call certain males in the school gay if they dressed nice. One male in particular was a good friend with a lot more girls than with the guys and so he was also labeled as gay.

As an adult and educator who is still a member of that community, she commented upon how it has not changed:

I still live in my hometown community and the acceptance level of LBGT has remained the same, in my opinion. Recently, the town is buzzing about the two lesbians that live in the yellow house on the corner. One of the women was hired at the local grocery store, which surprised me, because I didn't think that the local owner would be very accepting, but what I think has happened is he was unaware and now the town is letting him "in" on the situation. I wish I could say more but I really do not have many experiences with this subject area.

This student not only implicates the community for not accepting LGBTQ people, but is also adamant that if there were LGBTQ individuals in her school or community, "they would certainly not reveal this information." We are interested that the student claims a lack of experience with LGBTQ issues. Clearly, there are gay people in rural America. This student also says she witnessed homophobic bullying in school and says that the town now is "buzzing" about resident lesbians. We question how this individual might approach, support, or engage in a conversation with students or staff as a school leader, relative to LGBTQ issues. Since the student doesn't write about personal feelings toward the issue at hand, it is not possible to make assumptions about her attitude and values regarding LGBTQ students, but we find her proclaimed inexperience about it interesting. Research has shown that rural communities have school climates more hostile to lesbian and gay youth (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009), which means both that this future leader will have more difficulty establishing a more positive school climate *and* that it is more imperative for the LGBTQ youth in that school that she is able to do so.

In contrast to the student who claimed little experience, another student who also grew up in a rural community wrote:

I have had many experiences with people who are gay or lesbian. I have not had any experiences [with people] who are transsexual or transvestites. My experiences started when I was a senior in high school. We had one classmate out of 101 who was gay. He did not come out in high school but he never denied it either. He received a lot of grief and teasing because of this.

The student that this aspiring principal wrote about may or may not have been gay. This same student goes on to write about his or her personal values and beliefs regarding LGBTQ issues:

My own values and beliefs are mixed about people with a different sexual orientation than myself. I have no problem with the people choosing this lifestyle and I have no problem with them raising children too. My confusion lies within their public display of affection. I just get very uncomfortable when I see a same sex display of affection in public. I do not understand why I am uncomfortable, but I find myself grimacing and turning my head away. When will I not feel so uncomfortable?

While we do not know the student's own orientation, the "othering" language ("them," "their") and discomfort with same sex affection implies heterosexism. The language in this student's reflection points to the classic nature-nurture argument about whether people are born gay or whether they choose to be gay. This particular student's reflection implies that people have a choice whether to be gay or not. Reparative therapy groups which suggest homosexuality can be reversed or repaired reinforce this point of view,

although they are contentious in the psychology and counseling literature (Bancroft, et al., 2003; Bright, 2004; Maccio, 2011; Spitzer, 2003).

One student reflected on the anti-gay experience he or she had witnessed growing up and now as a teacher had made an effort to stop:

Gay baiting happens all of the time in schools. It was that way when I was growing up in [small town]. It is also happening at my school. I had two fourth grade students who said, “That’s so gay” or “You are acting gay” this year. I had a talk with both of them about how that is not acceptable to say, just like it isn’t acceptable to say other things. ...Then during one of our class meetings we were discussing bullying and harassment. During the meeting, I brought up the saying, “That’s so gay” and we discussed it. I haven’t heard it once in my classroom or when I am around. So I hope they aren’t saying it elsewhere. I feel... that when discussing bullying and harassment, it is important to also bring up this issue.

It is not clear from this reflection whether the “gay baiting” that the student references was anti-gay bullying because of someone’s perceived sexual identity, or whether the phrase “that’s so gay” was meant to be insulting because of its association with sexual identity. Context would be important. Regardless, the teacher stopped it.

Two students told us as instructors privately that they had LGBTQ family members. One wrote about that experience on the discussion board:

I find it disheartening that there is so much judgment in this world. I also find it difficult to understand why people feel personally in danger or even uncomfortable around people of a different sexual orientation. My personal

experiences with gay or lesbians has led me to believe that too much of the world just needs to mind its own business and let people be who they are. My aunt is lesbian and struggles with family gatherings. She brings her partners to family functions and calls them her roommates. There are members of my family who are unaware of her sexual choices and would not be understanding or accepting of her choices if they found out. I guess I am just more open and accepting of people's choices.

This student also referenced a relationship with a LGBTQ colleague:

I have developed a great relationship with a teacher who is open about her choices. She has a wonderful partner and they have adopted twin boys. She is an excellent teacher and a fun person. Many people who first know about her sexual orientation, but don't get to know her for the person she is are missing out. I have found this to be true with every person I have come to know who is of a different sexual orientation than me...and those are only the few people who I know are of a different sexual orientation. I'm sure there are many people I come across in my life who are of a different sexual orientation and I don't even know it. I just don't think it should be such a big issue like some people make of it.

The student concludes:

There is too much hate, too much fear, and too much hurting in the world. If we can teach children tolerance, understanding, acceptance, and compassion towards others, then we can hopefully start a generation of people who are more accepting with each other.

We don't know what orientation or sexual identity this student has, which would help us understand her comments about people with "a sexual orientation different than me," though the comments about family members and colleagues who are lesbian seem to imply that she is not. If that is so, she seems to embody previous research findings that heterosexual people who associate with LGBTQ people ("intergroup contact" in the research parlance) have more positive attitudes about them (Anderssen, 2002; Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006; Heinze & Horn, 2009; Herek & Capitanio, 1996). The student also seems to have a "live and let live" attitude, with phrases such as, "too much of the world just needs to mind its own business and let people be who they are" and "I just don't think it should be such a big issue." Yet she also refers twice to the "choices" that her aunt and colleague have made, echoing the student earlier who talked about sexual orientation as a choice.

Another student explained how diversity training as a resident assistant in college helped her understanding about sexual orientation:

During that training I had the pleasure of meeting many people who were lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or an ally. I can't tell you that I liked all of them, but what it did show me was that people who identify themselves as any of the above labels are just normal people like everyone else. They just either love someone, or think about themselves differently than most of the population. During that training we were told about how hurtful words and actions can be and I decided that there was no reason to hate someone because they loved someone that I thought was inappropriate. Who was I to decide who someone else should love, or what was the "correct" clothing or way to think.

As a teacher of [subject omitted] I try to teach the same idea when I am teaching about different cultures. The idea that one person can pass judgment on another is not acceptable in my classroom. It is a little difficult to get that idea across with [middle schoolers], but we work on it the entire year. Hopefully by the end of the year they are more accepting of other's viewpoints than they were at the beginning of the year.

This student acknowledges that LGBTQ people are “normal” and sometimes unlikable, but that they are different in who they love or “think differently.” This assertion seems a little like the “color blind” ideology that White people assert when talking about race (e.g., “I don’t see color; we are the same”), although it echoes research on youth who refuse to identify themselves as gay, emphasizing instead the person they love (Savin-Williams, 2006). The language is heteronormative in that it positions LGBTQ people as “other.” And finally, there is an interesting contradiction between the heterosexist implication that the student doesn’t think LGBTQ love is “appropriate,” yet wants to be non-judgmental and teach her middle-schoolers also to be non-judgmental.

Our students thus appeared to have a variety of experiences with and attitudes about LGBTQ people. While the experiences varied, they seemed to follow a pattern of increased exposure as they progressed along their educational trajectory. During high school, either they were unaware of sexual minority students, or they saw people being bullied, or perhaps they knew one gay person. In college, they had greater exposure to LGBTQ people or issues, perhaps through diversity training. Perhaps as adults they now are aware they have friends, family members, and colleagues who are sexual minorities. Those who had this kind of increased exposure wrote positively about their experiences,

claimed greater acceptance, and talked about the ways in which they interact with sexual minority people as colleagues and as allies in schools. However, most of them, even those who wrote sympathetically about LGBTQ issues, used "othering" language and the language of "choice."

Religion and Sexual Orientation

One of the strongest predictors of anti-gay attitudes in the general American public has been religiosity (Cotten-Huston & Waite, 1999; Herek, 1994; Hicks & Lee, 2006; 2009; Whitley, 2009). As an extended example of the ways in which people talked about their religion and sexual orientation, we offer excerpts from a passionately worded — complete with exclamation points and capital letters — online exchange between two students we'll call Ted and Mike. Ted opened with a comment about sexual orientation generally:

This [sexual orientation] is one of the areas that I struggle with understanding. Just because I disagree with the lifestyle of LGBT students, individuals, that doesn't make me homophobic. I am not a supporter/ally of LGBT individuals, but I am a supporter/ally of human rights. As an administrator, I will have a tough policy on harassment of any kind and follow through with it.

Although Ted discussed his duty as an administrator to protect LGBTQ students from being harassed, he wanted first to establish that he did not approve of LGBTQ "lifestyles." We question the ability of future administrators like Ted to "disagree with the LGBTQ lifestyle" and simultaneously to implement "a tough policy on harassment." Is it possible not to support LGBTQ individuals, as he claims, but to support "human rights" in general? We are skeptical. As a comparison, suppose that this aspiring

principal wrote that although he disliked “the lifestyle” of African American male students, he would support their human rights and “have a tough policy on harassment.” Ted was apparently aware that some might classify his comments as homophobic, since he also wrote that his disagreement “doesn’t make me homophobic.”

In addition to not agreeing with the “lifestyles” of sexual minority students, Ted was also disturbed by the idea of school-aged sexuality:

I think it’s sad that we do have kids as young as fifth graders who are sexually active and to see this term sexual minority toward school age students who are attracted to the same sex is ridiculous. To tell a young person to explore their sexuality is destructive!!! We oftentimes toss this word “sex” around to young people like it is a game to play with.

Ted also worried about the safety of sexual minority youth searching for adult role models, having learned about the National Association for Men/Boy Lovers:

I saw how easy that could be a set up for men to prey on the vulnerability of young students. Attraction is a serious thing and sex is a serious thing not to be played with. Look at the recent cases of those teachers who were having sex with their students. I have learned in my research and have been corrected in my stereotyping that GLBT only think about having sex with their partners. I was wrong to believe that and I was corrected through reading articles and listening to certain presentations.

We do not know the sources of Ted’s research, articles, or presentations, and find it troubling that he worries about gay adults or teachers preying upon young gay students,

since the hurtful and false stereotype of all-gay-people-could-be-pedophiles is common (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). However, he seems to be sincerely concerned for the safety of students, ending his reflection with the comment that “suicides as a result of discrimination and harassment, that concerns me!”

Mike responded directly to Ted’s post:

I come from a devout Christian family and I believe being in a homosexual relationship is a sin. But, like you mentioned in one of your other postings, I would not consider myself a “homophobe.”

Mike cited previous experience living and working with gay people, living in a predominantly gay community, and attending Gay Pride parades and other events, writing, “These are things I would have no problem taking my children to when they are of an appropriate age.” He continued with a religious angle:

But aren’t we all sinners? As I have learned all my life, a sin is a sin is a sin. Meaning that being homosexual is no worse of a sin than any other form of sin...like cheating on your spouse.

Mike relayed a story of attending two separate church services which condemned homosexuality during the sermon. During one he left “because I felt the sermon was hateful” and during the other he stayed, but only because it was part of a class assignment.

What also bothers me is that the sermons made it sound as if homosexual people are bad people. Well, I love my family and friends very much. And I know that

they are all sinners. But they are not bad people. It is not my place to judge anyone because of the sins they commit. Why is homosexuality such a hot topic? I don't get it.

Ted responded to Mike's post: "This is no surprise to me that a pastor would preach a hate message. But as I mentioned, I know those who say they are Christian and show hate." He continued, "Again, I say I have not heard the GLBT population admit their flaws." Ted answered Mike's question about why homosexuality is a hot topic:

Why is that such a hot topic? That's a good question. I say this all the time.

What's the big deal? We are basically talking about who someone chooses to have SEX [student capitalized the word] with right? That's no one's business, exactly!!

...The hot topic is that I see there is a tendency to teach others to tolerate anything. What are we going to accept next? You know what I see next...Sexual relationships between adults and children. Did you know there are those that are pedophiles (not homosexuals) that can't control their urge to desire a young child? When will the pedophiles fight for their rights? We are talking about SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS [student's emphasis] , right? It's illegal right now, right? Even historically, just as with homosexuality, in certain cultures this [pedophilia] was considered to be okay. I believe it will not be long before we see a campaign for this. Oh, so we say that will never happen. Yeah, I believe there are those that believed they would never see a campaign for the rights of homosexuals as well. I believe that's the hot topic. We have a dangerous pattern of accepting a lot of things. Watch the news. See the patterns. I have children and that concerns me.

Both Mike and Ted's religious beliefs cause them to label homosexuality a sin, though Mike claims to be non-judgmental. Ted evokes the slippery slope argumentative fallacy that accepting homosexuality will lead to accepting other sexual relationships, including pedophilia. He concludes, however, with his commitment to the well-being of students, saying, "It frustrates me when someone would believe that because I am a Christian I would be biased about how I treat a child. That bothers me."

While Mike and Ted were the most vocal about the relationship between their religious belief and sexual orientation, one other student referenced it and the way in which his religious beliefs had changed over time:

Throughout college as an RA [resident assistant] I became more and more exposed to diversity. Even so, I struggled with sexual orientation because I was leaning on my religious beliefs and prejudice. Since then, I have changed my religious affiliation and political viewpoints regarding same sex marriage. I have joined an inclusive church.

As a teacher and administrator, I openly support student orientation. Not only is it the law, but I support kids and want to help kids regardless of who they are. Students have come out with me. I attended GSA meetings and support dialogue on diversity — including sexual orientation. I know this still makes some people uncomfortable, but that's okay because that's how I learned.

This is the second student to reference LGBTQ-inclusive diversity experiences as a residence hall assistant in college, which speaks well for those leading that training. While we have no more detail about this student's administrative life, he seems to have internalized a care for students, even if the language sounds a little, in its emphasis on

“regardless” of who they are, as if LGBTQ students are not quite up to snuff. However, he states that he has no problem discussing sexual orientation and making other people uncomfortable, asserting that such discomfort was important for his own learning process.

The tensions between religion, specifically Christianity, and attitudes towards sexual orientation depend much on context. First, attitudes differ by people’s religiosity. Pew’s opinion research on support for same-sex marriage versus support for civil unions, for example (2009), found that 71% of people who attend religious services weekly opposed same-sex marriage, and regularly-attending White evangelicals were the largest religious group to oppose civil unions. Second, attitudes differ by Christian denomination. Pew also reports (2009) that more than half (56%) of mainline Protestants said homosexuality should be accepted, compared with only about 25% of evangelical Protestants and 40% of historically Black Protestants. Some mainline Protestant churches, such as the United Church of Christ, are more “open and affirming” of LGBTQ congregants. And two denominations, the Lutherans and Presbyterians, voted in 2011 to ordain gay clergy.

These religious attitudes toward homosexuality are not new. According to Lugg (2003a), a political movement in the early to mid 1970s saw religious views, particularly evangelical Christian views, grow more “antipathy toward homosexuality, if not LGBT people themselves” (p. 68). She goes on to state, “Many conservative Christians saw openly LGBT people as a direct assault on their religious values—particularly concerning traditional gender roles and human sexuality” (p. 68). However, recent research also indicates that this relationship between Christianity and homosexual attitudes is

somewhat complicated. Christians are more judgmental about sexual promiscuity than they are about homosexuality (Mak & Tsang, 2008). They are more inclined to be non-prejudiced about homosexual people while more prejudiced towards homosexual practices (Ford, Brignall, VanValey, & Macaluso, 2009), an attitude summarized as “love the sinner, hate the sinner” (Sears, 1992; Veenvliet, 2008). While this kind of hairsplitting may seem antithetical to creating a positive school climate for *all* students and staff, it is an attitude that we saw in our students’ reflections. It seems to be one which both Ted and Mike sustain in their discussion, since both reject the identity of “homophobe,” affirm their commitment to children and to all people, yet also speak against the “homosexual lifestyle.”

We have tried to address the tension between religion and sexual orientation in class by asking students: How do you as an administrator balance moral, community, and religious concerns with protecting your students and faculty? They are given time to reflect and write on their own and then to discuss as a large group. We also include the topic of religion in course one via readings and discussion about the role of religion in public schools throughout U.S. history as well as about the religious or non-religious identities of students and school leaders. We ask students to write their spiritual autobiographies and we talk about the unofficial school practices that may privilege Christianity such as a “church night” when no activities are scheduled (Author, in press). We have sought to include religion in the broader discussion about marginalization and cultural identity.

From Personal to Analytic?

In contrast to their emotional exchange about religion and sexual orientation, some

of Ted and Mike's reflections during course two show how these students' thinking seemed to develop from a personal stance to an analytic one. Mike's analysis as a result of gathering equity audit data about sexual orientation in his district was that "A clear weakness in our district is the lack of any curriculum addressing sexual orientation. This does not add to a positive or safe culture for any student." He suggested that there be in-services about bullying "as a good place to start" and that the school needs

to involve our student council and some parents in an open dialogue about how we can best include all students to feel welcome and have a personal sense of belonging. We will also need to work with staff in order to create this second order change so that everyone will understand their role in contributing to a safe environment.

Ted wrote about his district that sexual orientation is included in the district harassment policy and that there is a Gay-Straight Alliance, but that "There is room for improvement. There is no data collected on student achievement and the social struggle that sexual minority students or staff may have." Although neither Ted nor Mike included LGBTQ education in their goals and implementation plans, Ted had a variety of suggestions during his reflection for addressing discrimination, including a climate survey and:

Providing time during professional development to address the issues of equity for all can increase knowledge about sexual orientation. Also providing articles and news articles about students who have been discriminated against because of their sexual orientation can increase awareness. Also there would be time to dialogue about the topic of sexual orientation by inviting speakers who would be

willing to educate and answer questions for staff who may have concerns or questions.

There seems to be some change for Ted and Mike between course one and course two. They are concerned about their districts' lack of attention to sexual orientation because of the negative effect on students and staff, and each has specific steps that their schools could take to remedy this lack of attention. Some of this change may simply be due to the nature of the assignments in course one and course two, which changed from asking students to write personal reflections in course one to asking students to write about "strengths and areas for improvement in serving sexual minority students and staff" in course two.

While Ted and Mike had the strongest (anti-) LGBTQ-related opinions during course one and were thus most noticeably tempered during course two, their classmates during course two also seemed to treat sexual orientation dispassionately, when they addressed it at all. Overall, students reported that there was limited information available about sexual orientation, especially achievement data. This itself prompted a conversation about school peoples' reactions to the request for the data, why that data was not available, and whether it should be available. Some students suggested that their districts probably did not collect sexual orientation data because of the controversy it might create in the community. One student referred to this potential for controversy. She wrote:

I became an Ally when I was at college, but threw my sticker away when I became a teacher. I didn't care what the students thought, but the parents worried me and I didn't want to go somewhere that my principal wouldn't support me.

In an online posting, she continued:

Now I think that the discussion should be brought to the forefront and at least the administration should discuss how best to serve all students and make our school a safe environment for all students to learn and be successful.

However, this student like our other future administrators, did not address sexual orientation in her goals and implementation plan. Students instead focused on other gaps revealed by their equity audits, such as discrepancies based on poverty or special education status.

Discussion

We set out with this research to answer two questions: (1) What patterns emerged when aspiring principals reflected upon issues related to sexual orientation? And (2) How might those patterns have changed during the second course? We believe that we can answer those questions briefly, but what our study really revealed was the complexity of our students' responses and how those responses might inform our teaching of these courses.

Patterns and Possible Change: Critical Consciousness, Knowledge, and Assessment

The Findings section above outlined and interrogated the range of responses that our students had to issues of sexual orientation, including their experiences with LGBTQ peers and students, the intersection of religious belief with beliefs about sexual orientation, and changes between course one to course two. Ted and Mike's more temperate reflections seemed to be an example of the way students' attention focused from personal beliefs about LGBTQ students and staff to analyzing what might be best for them. However, we are not confident that we can say as much about the change as we would have liked. It is not as if someone wrote in course two, "I have changed my

homophobic ways as a result of these thought-provoking courses and now intend to go out to lead my school towards greater inclusion of sexual minority students.” In similar research with one of their educational leadership classes, Allen, Harper, and Koschoreck (2009) ask if it is even possible for “five short weeks in an educational leadership graduate course focusing on social justice and LGBTIQ matters” to “have a positive impact on the dispositions of aspiring administrators” (p. 76). The question is a good one, especially as there has not been much research about how even attitudes which change are sustained over time (Sears, 1997).

A useful way for us to answer the question of whether we have made an impact is to apply the framework provided by Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) on the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to prepare educational leaders. We hope to have had some impact in what they call the “curriculum about critical consciousness,” which “raises student consciousness about power, privilege, and associated issues, for example, white racism, heterosexism, and the ways that schools are typically structured [to] perpetuate power inequities” (p. 214). Our courses included some of the pedagogical practices they suggest for raising critical consciousness, such as equity audits, reflective analysis journals, educational plunges, and diversity panels. We also addressed the “curriculum about knowledge” via readings. We did not address the “curriculum of skills” adequately, which is a change we have made in the course subsequently, using Theoharis’ book, *The School Leaders Our Children Deserve* (2009) in course one to provide students with both knowledge and applicable skills about developing more inclusive schools.

The third area of this social justice framework is assessment, which Capper and colleagues have argued elsewhere (2006) is missing from social justice curriculum and pedagogy. Our analysis of student reflections and change between courses was intended to serve as a method of assessment of our students' progress. But this analysis is not enough to know whether our students actually are able to apply this consciousness of and knowledge about sexual orientation to their school settings. What we really need to do is conduct additional research with them as leaders in their schools to see how they might or might not be utilizing the critical consciousness and knowledge that we tried to teach.

Reflection on Reflections: Explanations and Speculations

We continue to reflect upon our students' reflections and offer the following explanations and speculations. First, as mentioned earlier, the assignments changed from course one to course two — from personal reflections in course one to equity analysis in course two. And we believe that students' reflections changed too, so that sexual orientation was mentioned much more temperately, if at all, in course two than it was in course one. It makes pedagogical sense to try to access students' affective responses before asking them to engage in an analytical one. Since course one was early in the training of the aspiring principal, it may have been the first time that these individuals openly discussed issues related to being LGBTQ and their responses were more indicative of “gut” reactions rather than analytical responses. Perhaps this change in writing about sexual orientation was due to a natural progression of emotion from the beginning of the program to the end, or of a change in analysis from the personal to the school level. Perhaps it was due to a change in attitude about sexual orientation.

It is difficult to separate what students believe from what they say they believe, and

ultimately from how they act. We have made an assumption, drawing upon the literature about the pedagogy of social justice, adult education theory, and the reflective practitioner, that critical reflections can change administrative practice. We also presume that the experience people have in classrooms, building knowledge together, can change them. What we do not know is whether what people write and say during their classroom experiences with us is sincere, or if they bow temporarily to perceived social pressure from their instructor or their peers. It is possible that they espouse what they think is the “right” answer in order to get an A grade. So perhaps there was change in writing but not in belief or practice.

If we presume that there *was* a change, we wonder if it could be attributable to students’ reaction to instructors’ respective sexual orientation. The instructor of course one is straight; the instructor of course two is gay and not out to his students. Both instructors had a student in the class come out to us – though not to the rest of the class – as well as other students telling us in side conversations about their LGBTQ family members, friends, or colleagues. If knowledge in a classroom is socially constructed, then it is certainly possible for faculty identity – or students’ perception of that identity – to influence that knowledge and students’ written responses. Recent research on undergraduate students’ perceptions of their instructors as gay or straight has indicated that openly gay instructors who raised issues of sexual orientation were perceived as “having an agenda,” whereas straight instructors were not (Anderson & Kanner, 2011). We have not yet seen research examining the orientation, out-or-closeted status, or gender of instructor as a more concrete influence on classroom dynamics in educational leadership or on students’ own change in attitudes, and believe that such research might

be fruitful as we seek to improve teaching and preparation of future leaders.

While course one contains a final assignment asking students to reflect upon their cultural identity, we need to be more intentional about exploring identity and its social construction. There are several identity development models available (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997); some directly related to sexual orientation (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Evans & Broido, 2005). Asking students to explore their own identity development might help provide language for expressing ways in which belonging to different groups, such as religious groups or gender groups, affects their beliefs and their actions in schools.

Reflecting upon Our Practice as Teachers: Heteronormativity and Heterosexism

We do not claim to be experts in queer theory², but we find especially helpful the concepts of heteronormativity and heterosexism, and in this section question our own practice as teachers via those lenses. We have been troubled by anti-gay responses like Ted's and Mike's. If reflection is to promote and challenge student thinking that eventually leads to improved practice, it has to be authentic. It also has to be interrogated. We've wondered how to honor and create a safe space for authenticity while fostering interrogation and lively discussion. This question is complicated by the relationship between Christian religious belief and beliefs about sexual orientation.

We mentioned earlier that students came out to each of us individually, and that they would tell us in side conversations about their gay relatives or acquaintances. While it is an individual decision whether or not to be out in the classroom either as a teacher or

² We recommend the following resources for an introduction to queer theory as applied to educational contexts: Loutzenheiser & Macintosh (2004); Mayo (2007); Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt (2004) and Talburt (2004).

a student, we worry that we did not provide a safe-enough classroom for our student(s) to do so. Others who have written about pedagogy related to sexual orientation have suggested that setting ground rules for discussion can assist with maintaining a safe space (Capper, Alston, et al., 2006; Griffin & Harro, 1997). We concur. We also know that setting ground rules is only a first step towards creating a safe environment. Like most activities, it is much easier to theorize about how to teach social justice than it is to actually do it. Team-teaching and peer observation are additional strategies for us to consider as we seek to improve our practice.

Two of the reviewers of this manuscript gently pointed out that some of our assignments and activities might contribute to heteronormativity by conceptualizing LGBTQ people as “other.” The activity in which we ask students to determine the number of LGBTQ people in their school building, for example, might suggest that it is “normal” for everyone to be heterosexual, whereas “some” people – a minority – and not *us* – are something else. Further, like Rofes (2004) we find that many of our readings have been in the “martyr-victim” paradigm rather than in the “agency” or “resiliency” paradigm, or even of the “lives in context” paradigm (Horn, et al., 2009). These are areas for us to change.

Implications

We believe our students are fairly typical in their experiences of and reflections about sexual orientation. Thus the results of this study lead us to suggest six implications not only for our practice, but also the practice of other preparation program faculty teaching social justice courses. First, as a field we should attempt to assess what we do and how well we do it. We have tried to do this as individual instructors, but the effort

needs to be sustained both at the institutional level and across the discipline. We support Capper et. al.'s strong recommendation for assessing students' preparation related to sexual orientation:

The field of education could greatly benefit from the development of instruments that measure student dispositions, knowledge, and skills regarding LGBT topics and leadership, not only those measured before and after taking a course that includes such content, but also those regarding to what extent school leaders are engaging in proactive LGBT practices after program completion (2006, p. 153).

We would extend that recommendation beyond assessment of LGBT topics to include other social justice topics as well. Bussey's doctoral dissertation (2008) provides one example of an assessment instrument. Its "Survey of Social Justice Knowledge and Dispositions" includes both open-ended items (e.g., "Please describe one example of how a school leader could enact social justice through his or her Work") as well as fixed-response Likert scale items (e.g., "Doing your job fulfills your life's purpose"). This kind of assessment of our graduates in the field would help us evaluate and thereby improve our programs.

Second, we suggest that all of us work to change the "martyr-target-victim" paradigm used to justify researching, discussing, and teaching about sexual orientation in our programs. We recognize that this paradigm lends urgency and a rationale for those who might be hesitant to address the topic otherwise. We recognize that the urgency is sometimes well-justified and that it resonates with our students. However, we also suspect that people have hidden behind the topics of bullying and suicides of LGBTQ youth in order to protect themselves from controversy or stigma. Instead we need to

emphasize the agency and resiliency of sexual minority people.

Third, we suggest shifting the language in our curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to talking about full inclusion. The social justice literature has already been moving in that direction, but we wish to link that body of literature explicitly with what we know from research about schools and LGBTQ youth. Most relevant in the social justice literature is its applying an inclusion rationale to *all* students. Theoharis' work on the skills of social justice principals, for example, suggests "creating a climate of belonging" by, among other strategies, reaching out to "marginalized families and the community. The research already cited here, as well as our own findings, illustrates the marginalized status of LGBTQ students, staff, and families. However, research has also repeatedly found that schools with positive climates – the kind of "climate of belonging" that Theoharis advocates – mitigate against that marginalized status, and can serve as "buffering influences" (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008, p. 203) for sexual minority students. Language from standard two of our national preparation standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2007) already advocates for this kind of inclusive school climate: "An education leader promotes the success of *every student* [italics ours] by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program." Much has been written about establishing positive school cultures generally. As educational leaders, we need to operationalize the definition of "all" to include LGBTQ students, families, and staff, and we need to be explicit about that inclusion.

Fourth, one way to be explicit about including the sexual minority community is to include sexual orientation in anti-bullying policies. While GLSEN's survey of principals

reported that nearly all schools include anti-bullying policies at the building and district levels, fewer than half of them included sexual orientation (46%) or gender identity or expression (39%) (2008). Some research has found that students are often unaware of whether or not such an inclusive policy exists, but there is an association between the existence of such policies and a more inclusive environment for everyone (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Szalacha, 2003). That is, school leaders who care enough about including sexual orientation in policies seem to be those who also care enough to follow through on creating a more inclusive school climate generally.

Fifth, we also must advocate for policies to go above the school or district level to the state level. Analysis of school climates in Massachusetts after it was the first state to implement a Safe Schools law revealed a better climate for both gay and straight students (Szalacha, 2003). Subsequent to the time our study was conducted and the students in this study graduated, our state became one of the eleven in the U.S. (in addition to the District of Columbia) with a Safe Schools law that specifically protects students from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (2009). The law adds extra authority to addressing issues of sexual orientation in our classes and in demanding full inclusion for sexual minority students in schools. In our state, the law passed partly in response to a state-wide climate survey which revealed a large degree of bullying based on sexual identity. It was supported by a broad base of educational and religious coalitions. Educators in the other thirty-nine states also should advocate for such laws .

Finally, we need to train our future administrators in strategies for listening to the needs of all students, including sexual minority students. Advocates for democratic education have proclaimed for years that student voice and participation is missing in

schools. It is clear from any month's worth of current events that educators often have no idea how students and staff are being marginalized or what they might need. The occasional climate survey is helpful, but we also recommend that school leaders interact regularly with their school's Gay-Straight Alliance. If there isn't a GSA, we recommend that the administrator start one. The positive influence of GSAs on inclusive school climates has been well-established (GLSEN, 2007; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006), and it is a way administrators can gain information about what students need.

We recognize that some of these recommendations, such as starting a GSA or advocating for inclusive policies at the school or state level, may be hazardous to the job security of any school administrator, particularly new school administrators. Sexual orientation continues to be a politically charged topic in the culture wars. We thus must also provide our students with political skills such as choosing battles, coalition-building, and establishing trust.

As we consider how preparation programs can train leaders who are committed to all students' learning, including sexual minority students, we present our students' responses as examples of the ways in which at least one set of future leaders thinks about sexual orientation. However, while our courses may be helpful in encouraging future leaders to think of acting equitably on behalf of LGBTQ students and staff, additional research is needed. The research described in this paper attempts to understand future administrator beliefs about sexual orientation. But there is only a very tenuous line linking pre-service leaders' beliefs, the assignments we require of them in preparation programs, the work our graduates do as leaders, and the eventual learning of their students. Only when we understand the ways each of those concepts links to the other

will we be able to enhance academic excellence, equity and social justice.

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Figure 1: Coding and Analysis Flow Chart

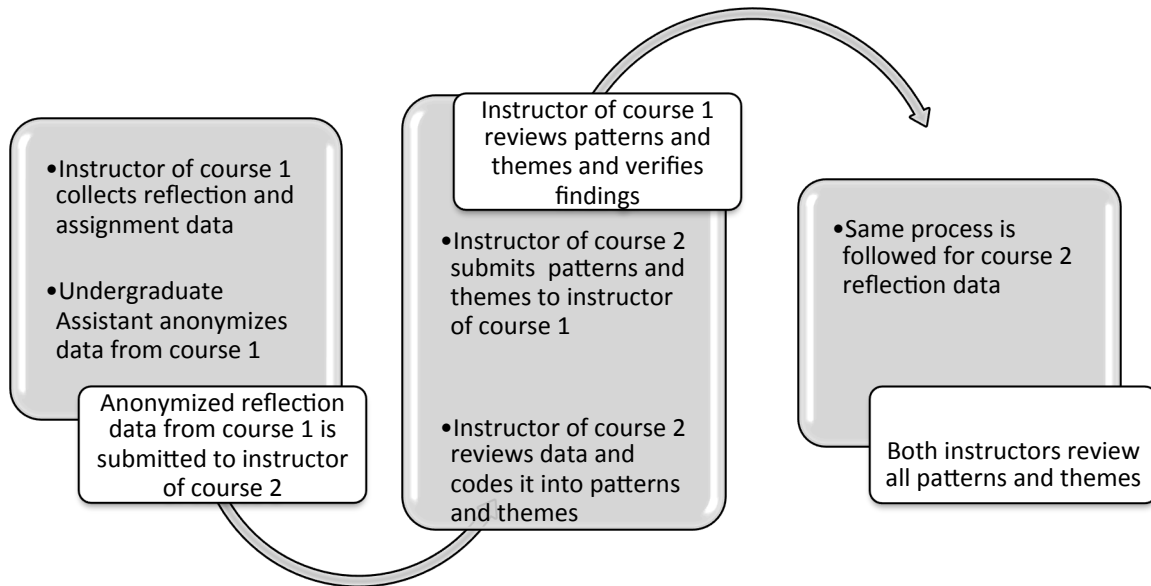


Figure 1. Description of the process of qualitative coding, analysis, and peer debriefing.