BILL 13 (THE ACCEPTING SCHOOLS ACT): ONTARIO LEGISLATION MANDATING SUPPORT FOR LGBT STUDENTS IN PUBLICLY-FUNDED SCHOOLS

by

Renato (Rainier) M. Liboro

Bachelor of Science in Psychology, University of the Philippines, 1987

Doctor of Medicine, University of the East-

Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center, Philippines, 1991

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

Faculty of Science

Wilfrid Laurier University

© Renato M. Liboro 2015

Abstract

Twenty-six key stakeholders from schools in Waterloo Region, Ontario, participated in semi-structured, open-ended interviews for this dissertation. They included students, teachers, school board representatives in administrator and superintendent roles, trustees, and community service providers. This study explored the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth in publicly-funded schools, the effect of those experiences on their mental health and well-being, and the success of strategies, programs, and policies implemented by schools to address LGBT youth issues. It also examined the perspectives of participants on Bill 13, Ontario's *Accepting Schools Act*, particularly strengths and weaknesses of the bill in terms of mandating initiatives that would promote positive school climates that are accepting and inclusive of all students, as well as potential benefits and challenges of the legislation. Findings revealed a dichotomy in the perspectives of participants that led to the proposal of a *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* in this dissertation. Applying the framework to initiatives that could be readily interpreted as adherence to the mandates of Bill 13 in Waterloo Region school boards, a theoretical interpretation of how the actual positive outcomes resulted from the legislation of Bill 13 was posited. It became apparent from the theoretical interpretation that the participants' perspectives over two and a half years ago were considerably foretelling of the benefits and positive outcomes that would transpire from the legislation of Bill 13. There were positive outcomes that resulted from sections of the bill that exercised *specificity* by explicitly mandating the implementation of strategies, programs, and policies in publicly funded schools that have been empirically and historically proven to support LGBT students. There were also positive outcomes that

resulted from sections of the bill that allowed for *flexibility* so that stakeholders could implement new, creative, and customized initiatives to navigate challenges distinct to each of their schools, as well as address LGBT youth issues that were neglected or left unresolved by previous interventions. Researchers who collaborate closely with policymakers could potentially utilize the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* in the future in order to maximize the benefits that could result from a proposed bill advocating for marginalized minority populations. An *Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health and Well-Being* that was constructed at the end of this dissertation also holds promise for future use in advocacy research.

Acknowledgements

There are a lot of people that I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for their guidance and incredible support I received. First, I would like to thank the members of my Doctoral Dissertation Committee – Dr. Robb Travers (advisor), Dr. Todd Coleman, Dr. Felix Munger, Dr. Michael Woodford (internal-external), and Dr. Shelley Craig (external) – for agreeing to be part of my committee, and for all the amazing feedback and input you provided to make this dissertation the best it could possibly be.

Second, I would like to thank all the great people who volunteered to participate in this study. I will never forget the students, teachers, school board representatives, and service providers who devoted so much time and energy into immersing themselves in our interviews. Your generosity and willingness to share your stories, experiences, and perspectives were invaluable to my research.

Third, I would like to express my appreciation to all the great people who supported and collaborated with me in this study. Thanks to the past and current researchers of the Equity, Sexual Health, and HIV Research Group of Wilfrid Laurier University, the Waterloo Region District School Board Equity and Inclusion Office, Carrie Greig (formerly of KW Counselling's OK2BME), the founding members of Spectrum (Waterloo Region's Rainbow Community Space), and my allies at Waterloo Catholic District School Board's PRISM. Without your help, I would not have been able to gain the lessons and memorable experiences I had in the last three years.

Also, I would like to thank my professors (Dr. Chris Alksnis, Dr. Colleen Loomis, Dr. Terry Mitchell, Dr. Geoff Nelson, Dr. Manuel Riemer, Dr. Mark Pancer, Dr. Ketan Shankardass, and Dr. Richard Walsh) and colleagues (Allison, Courtney, Darren, Emily,

Felix, Janna, Jessica, Johanna, Kathleen, Lauren, Livia, Rachel, Ravi, Rebecca, Shaan, Tim, and Rita) from the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I learned so much from all of you in what seemed like so little time.

Thanks too to the Ontario Graduate Scholarship program for the support I received on my last academic year in the Community Psychology graduate program.

A special thanks goes to my advisor/supervisor/mentor, Dr. Robb Travers. For your advice, direction, patience, concern, understanding, and continued support, not just during the writing of this dissertation, but also throughout the entire time I was completing my graduate education.

Lastly, to the person who has encouraged, guided, supported, and loved me the most all these years, my biggest thanks goes to my husband, Dr. Colin Andrew Lee. Your wit, humor, wisdom, compassion, gentleness, and kindness made my return to university a lot less difficult and a lot more fun. I would not have dreamed of pursuing this PhD without you.

Table of Contents

Abstract i

Acknowledgements iii

Table of Contents v

List of Tables vii

List of Figures viii

List of Appendices ix

Chapter 1 – Introduction 1
The Influence of Community Psychology Values and Principles 3
Community Psychology Theories Relevant to the Research Focus of the Study 4
Heeding the Call to Action for More LGBT Research in Community Psychology 9
Purposes of the Study and Research Questions 10
Locating My Social Position 15
Terminology Used in This Dissertation 18
Organization of This Dissertation 20

Chapter 2 – Background 24
School Experiences of LGBT Youth, Their Mental Health, and Well-Being 24
Addressing LGBT Youth Issues: How Change Happens in Schools 29
The Importance of Legislation and Public Policy in Supporting LGBT Youth 54
The Social, Political, and Legal Contexts Relevant to This Dissertation 57

Chapter 3 – Method 75
Partnerships 75
Participants 76
Procedures 79
Materials and Analysis 82
The Advantages and Constraints of Qualitative Research 84
Ethical Considerations 86

Chapter 4 – Findings: School Experiences of LGBT Youth in Waterloo Region 90
Negative Experiences of LGBT Youth 91
Coming Out and Being Out in Negative School Climates 93
Each School is Different and Unique 97
The Need for a Comprehensive Approach to Addressing LGBT Youth Issues 103
Endorsing Different Perspectives to Bolster the Comprehensive Approach 108
Strategies, Programs, and Policies for Addressing LGBT Youth Issues 111
Summary of Findings 130

Chapter 5 – Findings: Perspectives of LGBT Youth and Their Advocates on Bill13 132
First Impressions 132
Strengths of Bill 13 as a Proposed Statute 140
Weaknesses of Bill 13 as a Proposed Statute 144

Benefits Resulting from the Legislation of Bill 13 147
Challenges Resulting from the Legislation of Bill 13 156
Responses to the Indignation of Catholic Conservatives Towards Bill 13 160
Summary of Findings 165

Chapter 6 – LGBT-Affirming Waterloo Region Initiatives After Bill 13 166
WRDSB and WCDSB Response to Bill 13 Mandates 166
Summary of Findings 173

Chapter 7 – Discussion 174
Different and Unique Schools, Same Basic LGBT Youth Needs 178
Community Coalitions Coming Together to Collaborate 180
The Prospect of Legislation Promoting Greater Change 184
Valuing a Dichotomy in Stakeholder Perspectives 192
Applying the Specificity-Flexibility Dialectical Framework 199
Constructing an Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Students 206

Chapter 8 – Conclusion 209
Lessons Learned from Reflections on Participant Engagement 211
Strengths and Limitations of the Study 216
Implications for Future Research and Recommendations 219

Appendices 221

References 230

List of Tables

Table 1 – Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems 4

Table 2 – Important Legislation Prior to the *Accepting Schools Act* 68

Table 3 – Student Demographics 80

Table 4 – Teacher Demographics 80

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Nested Ecological Levels of Analysis 6

Figure 2 – A Comprehensive Approach to Addressing LGBT Youth Issues 106

Figure 3 – Microsystem to Mesosystem Level of LGBT Student Advocacy 183

Figure 4 – Bill 13 as a Macrosystem Level Factor for LGBT Student Advocacy.....188

Figure 5 – Applying the *Specificity-Flexibility Dialectical Framework* on Bill 13 204

Figure 6 – *Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health* 206

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Guide 221

Appendix B – Recruitment Flyer 223

Appendix C – Script for Email Recruitment 224

Appendix D – Informed Consent Form 225

Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the last 35 years, academic research on the mental health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth has steadily increased in the various fields of the social and health sciences. During the 1980s, research focused mostly on the identification of lesbian and gay youth as a population at increased risk for mental health issues. The focus of research in the 1990s, however, gradually shifted to the identification of schools as a risk environment for LGBT youth as homophobic and transphobic bullying and harassment in primary and secondary schools became emerging prominent safety concerns (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). In subsequent decades, more research was conducted on the development, implementation, and evaluation of school-based interventions to address issues that affected LGBT students.

There were many studies done on the establishment of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools and the impact of such clubs on the well-being of LGBT students (Conway, Crawford & Fisher, 2007; Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; Doppler, 2000; Fetner & Kush, 2007; Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Hansen, 2007; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011; Lee, 2002; Toomey & Russell, 2011; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). There were numerous studies that centred on the promotion of LGBT-affirming curricular changes (Bittner, 2012; Hunter, 2007; Minton, Dahl, O'Moore, & Tuck, 2008; Ryan, Patraw, & Bednar, 2013) and appropriate teacher/staff education (Case & Meier, 2014; Conoley, 2008; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Hunter 2007; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Research articles were published in peer-reviewed journals that asserted the value of

combining different school-based supports in order to promote synergistic and systemic change, which could help create school environments conducive to the learning of LGBT students (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Griffin et al., 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Hansen, 2007; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Szalacha, 2003). There were even several articles that emphasized the need for the backing of school administrators, as well as the creation of board-wide policies, to support the implementation of LGBT-affirming school initiatives (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007; Konishi, Saewyc, Homma, & Poon, 2013; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Minton et al., 2008). Other than peer-reviewed publications on the usefulness of school-based supports and board-wide policies to address the challenges of LGBT youth in schools, there was also some research published on the importance of public policies and legislation mandating direct and explicit initiatives for LGBT students (Fetner & Kush, 2007; McGuckin & Lewis, 2008; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Russo, 2006; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011).

As a relatively novice researcher on the topic of advocacy for the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth in schools, I recently developed a personal interest on how legislation and public policies help the cause of supporting marginalized LGBT students in Canada in the last few decades. This interest subsequently became the research focus of my study for this dissertation. It was obviously my good fortune to receive the opportunity to conduct research on this new-found interest and focus when I became both a doctoral student of the Community Psychology program and a member of the research team of the Equity, Sexual Health, and HIV (ESH-HIV) Research Group of the Centre for

Community Research, Learning, and Action (CCRLA) at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, in 2011.

The Influence of Community Psychology Values and Principles

The Community Psychology values and principles for guiding work that I have learned in the last three and a half years as a student has had a profound influence on me both as a scholar and a researcher. Coming from an almost completely different background before entering the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University, I eagerly absorbed the values and principles of Community Psychology as I gradually learned about them in my graduate-level courses. Despite the deeply-rooted, primarily clinical and positivist orientation and outlook I possessed after having been educated as a medical doctor and trained as a surgeon prior to immigrating to Canada, I encountered very little difficulty in embracing the Community Psychology values and principles of participation, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, compassion and support for community structures and institutions, accountability to oppressed groups, equity, and social justice (Kloos et al. 2012; Nelson & Prilleltensky 2010), which attracted me to both the Community Psychology sub-discipline and graduate program in the first place.

As a scholar, I was inspired to learn more about societal issues that revolved around the promotion of diversity, inclusion, equity, social justice, and compassion and support for community structures and institutions. As a researcher, I learned to wholeheartedly acknowledge and appreciate the intrinsic value of collaboration and the sustained participation of others while I engaged with members of the community in the conduct of my research. For this particular study, I genuinely believed that the motivation

and passion I had in pursuing this dissertation were based on the Community Psychology values and principles I have chosen to respect and uphold.

As I went through the different stages of the research process for this study, I remained cognizant of and genuinely grateful for the value of the collaborations I had with the various stakeholders I had the privilege of working with along the way. It is because of my commitment to the Community Psychology values and principles I learned from my graduate education and training that I was able to enjoy the personal gratification that I experienced during my research praxis for this dissertation.

Theories in Community Psychology and Other Academic Fields Relevant to the Research Focus of the Study

Apart from important values and principles, I also learned about many different concepts and theories from my Community Psychology graduate education, which I have found useful in the research and practice I have engaged in over the years. One such theory that is of particular relevance to the research focus of this study happens to be one of the first fundamental theories presented to us in our Community Psychology graduate program introductory course – Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (Table 1).

Table 1 *Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems*

Systems	Descriptions	Examples
Microsystem	A pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by an individual in a given direct setting that would constantly influence the individual	A youth's interactions with family members or peers from school
Mesosystem	Interrelationships between 2 or more microsystem level settings in which the individual is situated	Interactions between a child's peer group and home environment
Exosystem	Interrelationships between 2 or more settings, one of which does not contain the individual; the interrelationship indirectly influences the processes within the immediate setting where the individual is embedded	Interactions between a parent's workplace, where child is not part of, with the child's home environment

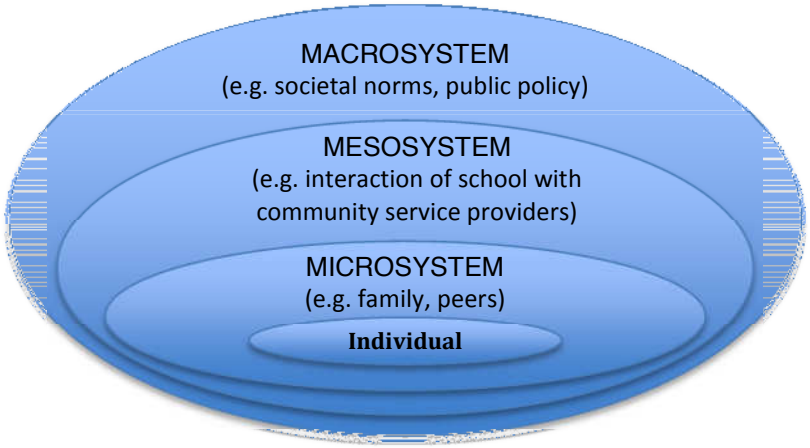
Macrosystem	Organizational, social, cultural, and political contexts, which influence the interactions within the other systems	Belief systems, shared knowledge, material resources, laws, and policies
Chronosystem	Changes in systems over time via processes of mutual accommodation	A youth's transfer from one school to another over several years

Although the origin of this systems theory can be traced to a different sub-discipline of Psychology, as Bronfenbrenner was a recognized developmental psychologist, community psychologists have made considerable use of the ecological metaphor he described in their own research and practice (Trickett, Kelly, & Todd, 1972). Because of its ability to contextualize issues and problems faced by disadvantaged people over time and across multiple nested levels of analysis (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010), the ecological systems theory has had a wide range of practical applications that proved valuable to many research areas and focuses (Figure 1).

As a theory that places value in holism over reductionism, the relevance of the ecological systems theory to the research focus of this study is that it underscores the importance of the interconnectedness and interdependence of social phenomenon and factors found in the smaller systems (e.g. characteristics of the individual LGBT youth, microsystem level: school teacher support for students) with those found in the larger systems (e.g. mesosystem level: LGBT-affirming collaboration between school faculty and community service providers, macrosystem level: societal homophobia and LGBT-positive legislation). Moreover, the ecological systems theory recognizes the significant impacts that the interconnectedness and interdependence of these nested structures could have on vulnerable individuals within an open ecological environment where social phenomena and factors from the different system levels are free to dynamically interact

and considerably influence one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Trickett et al., 1972).

Figure 1 *Nested Ecological Levels of Analysis (Adapted from Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010)*



Most importantly, the ecological systems theory helps to explain the natural evolution of the focus of researchers who have advocated for the mental health of LGBT youth in the last several decades. From focusing on LGBT youth as at-risk individuals for mental health concerns to school systems as risk environments for LGBT youth (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002), and later, shifting attention to school and community programs and public policies for supporting LGBT students that involve multiple and collaborative efforts (Griffin et al., 2004; Hansen, 2007), researchers have progressed from focusing solely on the vulnerable individual to influential factors in the individual's immediate environment, and then to larger social phenomena and factors in society. Over time, researchers have grown to recognize and appreciate the importance of structures and influences in society surrounding the individual, as well as the effects that the interactions of these structures and influences have on the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth in schools.

Apart from systems theory, community psychologists have also placed great value on theory developed around social movements. In their book, *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-Being*, Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) noted the role of social movements in promoting or resisting social change in order to uphold an explicit set of values. They argued that social movements root from a combination of factors such as suffering and deprivation, consciousness-raising, congealing events, and political opportunities, and that in order to prepare for action, advocates engaged in social movements should seriously consider multiple sources of support, congruent interests, communication networks, organizational effectiveness, and resource mobilization. They also emphasized the importance of building efficient community coalitions and mustering political influence in efforts to create social change.

As a theory that underscores the benefits of collaboration and coalition building among community members with a common cause, the relevance of the social movements theory to the research focus of this study is that it highlights not only the importance of the collaborative partnerships that made this research study possible, but also the significant roles of the key stakeholders in Waterloo Region, Ontario (the location where the research of this study was conducted) who purposely collaborated to advocate for the needs of their LGBT youth. In particular, the theory underscores how members of the community of Waterloo Region, particularly those who were affiliated with their two school boards and had significant involvement in the collaborations to advocate for the needs of LGBT students, benefited from their deliberate efforts to improve their member, relational, organizational, and programmatic capacities by creating organized and efficient community coalitions (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001).

Social movements theory also highlights the necessity for researchers and advocates attaining a better understanding of how change happens at small- and large-scale social movements, from the establishment of GSAs in public schools to the creation of legislation and public policy mandating support for LGBT students at a provincial level. The social movements theory discourse on how collaboration and political mobilization generates significant change at different scales can also be found in research studies of other academic fields that focus on the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth (Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler, 2012; Fetner & Kush, 2007; McEntarfer, 2011). Using the lens of social movements theory, McEntarfer (2011) analyzed the collaborative, conciliatory, assertive, and subversive methods that advocates in American schools used in order to establish GSAs and other LGBT-affirming initiatives when they encountered resistance from school administrators. She reviewed three models for consideration (i.e. political process, resources mobilization, and frame analysis models) in efforts to promote social movements at the school board level, all of which emphasized the importance of collective action, political dynamics, and policy, and how these factors could be used by powerbrokers to overcome institutional barriers, advance and shape LGBT-positive agendas, and push for transformative change within their local school systems, and potentially even in larger community political contexts.

It was important to review existing concepts and theories relevant to the research focus of this study, especially those from Community Psychology and other related academic fields, in order to be aware and mindful of theoretical frameworks that have already proposed ways of thinking and understanding how initiatives to support youth in schools work and succeed. Although I will generate new theory grounded from the data

that were gathered for this study, it was useful to identify relevant theories from other studies for reference, guidance, and critical reflection in the coming discussions of the dissertation.

Heeding the Call to Action for More LGBT Research in Community Psychology

Outside of theory applied specifically in Community Psychology research endeavours, there are other theoretical frameworks that have been proposed and used in various academic disciplines to advocate for LGBT youth concerns in schools, which are relevant to my research work and have likewise served and upheld the values and principles that Community Psychology has espoused as a field. Theoretical frameworks that have proposed organizational, pedagogical, and systemic strategies to address LGBT youth issues in schools, while incorporating human rights approaches and social justice agendas, have been applied in research by scholars and advocates from other sub-disciplines of Psychology, as well as fields such as Education, Human and Community Development, Law, Sociology, and Social Work (Currie et al., 2012; Mayberry et al., 2011; Mercier, 2009; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009; Taylor, 2007). As it turns out, theory, research, and action related to advocacy for the mental health and well-being of LGBT students have been more advanced and prominent in other disciplines despite the valiant efforts of community psychologists working on issues affecting LGBT populations in previous decades (Garnets & D'Augelli, 1994; Harper & Schneider, 1999).

In their article in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Harper and Schneider (2003) noted that for more than a decade, community psychologists working in the area of LGBT research have argued for an increased focus on LGBT issues in community theory, research, and action. They expressed that despite a rich history of

social action and change on many other societal issues, Community Psychology as a discipline has been largely silent on the topic of LGBT people and communities, lagging behind the advocacy and activism for LGBT rights that other disciplines have promoted over the years. After reviewing the advances within the field of Community Psychology with regard to LGBT research and action, Harper and Schneider (2003) initiated a call to action among fellow Community Psychology researchers to devote greater attention to gathering knowledge on LGBT issues and building theory and interventions for LGBT people and communities. They highlighted a critical gap in Community Psychology research that needed to be filled by investigators who desired to advocate for the needs of LGBT populations.

By conducting research on the perspectives of LGBT students and their advocates on provincial legislation mandating support for LGBT youth in publicly-funded schools, and at the same time honouring values and principles such as collaboration, diversity, inclusion, equity, social justice, and compassion and support for community structures during the conduct of the study, it was my intention to heed Harper and Schneider's (2003) call to action for increasing research on LGBT issues in the field of Community Psychology.

Purposes of the Study and Research Questions

Aside from the intention of helping fill the gap in LGBT research in Community Psychology, I set out to fulfill two more purposes in this study. While attempting to obtain a better understanding of the current laws that were available to help address the plight of LGBT youth in Canadian schools in early 2012, I not only learned of relevant bills that were passed and enacted as law over the last 12 years, but also learned of a promising

new bill that was proposed by then Ontario Liberal Party leader and Premier Dalton McGuinty in 2011. This was Bill 13, which later came to be more popularly recognized as the *Accepting Schools Act*. Among many other things, Bill 13 was poised to be the controversial legal statute that would explicitly mandate all publicly-funded schools in Ontario, including all Catholic schools, to accept and support the establishment of GSAs upon the request of any of its students (Lewis, 2011).

Despite the myriad research studies that have been done on the success of different school-led initiatives to support the mental health and well-being of LGBT students over the last couple of decades, there have not been as many studies that have been conducted to explore the relationship between legislation and school-based efforts of advocates for LGBT students, particularly in the Canadian setting (Anderson, 2014; Bellini, 2012; Goldstein, Collins, & Halder, 2007; Rayside, 2014). This is another gap that I intended to help fill by conducting this study.

But before I could explore the role of provincial legislation in supporting LGBT youth advocacy in schools from the perspectives of the participants of this study, it was necessary to first establish the specific contexts in which this study's participants formed and developed their perspectives. This meant that it was necessary to explore the experiences of LGBT youth in the school settings involved in the study, the impact that their experiences had on their mental health and well-being, and the initiatives that their advocates developed and implemented to support them. By gathering this necessary information, a clearer understanding of the participants' perspectives on Bill 13 and the potential outcomes of its legislation could be achieved.

The first of the two additional purposes of this study, therefore, was to examine the school experiences of LGBT youth in Waterloo Region, and the impact of those school experiences on their mental health and well-being. Before looking into any of the participants' perspectives on Bill 13, it was important to establish the contexts in which the participants of the study were coming from prior to their inclusion in the study. Establishing these contexts that included their specific circumstances, struggles, advocacies, and personal experiences was necessary to help yield a better understanding of the participants' perspectives on Bill 13. Exploring these specific contexts within and surrounding the Waterloo Region school systems was needed to obtain a more detailed background on and greater understanding of the participants' perspectives on Bill 13. In order to attain a better grasp of their perspectives, it was essential to have a clear idea of the background, lived experiences, and distinct challenges of the LGBT youth and other key stakeholders in Waterloo Region. The study not only aimed to ascertain whether the climates in the publicly-funded schools of Waterloo Region created negative experiences for LGBT students, but also whether LGBT youth's experiences had detrimental effects on their mental health and well-being. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate whether Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools developed and implemented any LGBT-affirming strategies, programs, and policies to support their LGBT students, as well as learn how successful they were with their efforts.

The second additional purpose of this study was to explore the strengths and weaknesses of Bill 13 as a proposed law with specific components that purportedly addressed certain needs of LGBT students in Ontario, as well as the benefits and challenges that would result from its legislation, particularly from the perspectives of the

LGBT youth themselves and the different stakeholders working with the publicly-funded secular and Catholic school boards in Waterloo Region. The study aimed to identify any aspects or components of the bill (i.e. new amendments to the *Education Act*) that the LGBT students and their advocates considered to be strong and weak parts of the proposed statute. It was also important to determine from the perspectives of the participants any positive and negative outcomes that would result from the legislation of Bill 13 in order to know if they actually believed that the bill would be able to help with gaining support for LGBT students and addressing LGBT youth issues in schools, and exactly how they believed it could help.

At this point, it is essential to note the timing of the conduct of the study, bearing in mind that the study participants were interviewed at a unique and special period of time in history when Bill 13 was still being legislated (i.e. April to June of 2012) and shortly after it was passed as law (i.e. July to September of 2012). The importance of noting the timing of the interviews in this section of the dissertation is to make it clear that it is not the purpose of this study to determine the actual impact of the *Accepting Schools Act* on the advocacy efforts of Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools in supporting LGBT youth, nor the act's impact on the mental health and well-being of LGBT students, as it would obviously require much more time after the legislation of Bill 13 for any study to be able to determine such impacts.

However, by exploring the perspectives of the LGBT students and their advocates on Bill 13 before its actual impacts can be examined, the study hopes to uncover not only the attitudes and expectations of the participants with regards to legislation aimed at supporting LGBT youth in schools, but also take advantage of the unique insights and

knowledge of the participants whose lived experiences would be tremendous resources for trying to understand how legislation can help meet the needs of LGBT students.

Based on the purposes that were set, the following research questions were therefore posed in this study: 1) What were the school experiences of LGBT youth in Waterloo Region and what impact did these school experiences have on their mental health and well-being?, 2) Did the publicly-funded schools of Waterloo Region implement any LGBT-affirming strategies, programs, and policies to support their LGBT students and were these initiatives successful before Bill 13 was passed?, 3) Which particular aspects or components of Bill 13 did the LGBT students and their advocates consider as strengths of the bill, and which ones did they consider as the weaknesses of the bill?, and lastly, 4) What benefits, challenges, or other outcomes did the LGBT youth and their advocates believe would result from the legislation of Bill 13?

I believe that the information that could be derived from this study can be useful not only to the various stakeholders who have an interest in supporting the LGBT students in Waterloo Region, but also to the lobbyists, powerbrokers, policymakers, and legislators who have a great deal of influence on the bills that are proposed and enacted for the benefit of LGBT youth in Ontario, and perhaps the benefit of LGBT youth in the other provinces of Canada. I also believe that the information and lessons that could be derived and learned from this study would significantly contribute, not only to the academic and scientific body of knowledge on LGBT advocacy research within the sub-discipline of Community Psychology, but also to accumulating knowledge on the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective public policies for the advocacy of different marginalized minorities.

Locating My Social Position

One of the many things I learned from my Community Psychology graduate courses is the importance of locating my social position early on in each research process and acknowledging this position at the beginning of any manuscript I write. A concept that was originally introduced by City University of New York Philosophy professor, Dr. Linda Alcoff, *positionality* refers to the idea that certain important aspects of one's identity – for example, gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, age, and national origin – are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities, which open up new ways of seeing and considering the lived experience of individuals in society (Tetreault, 2012). In the past three decades, *positionality* has gained recognition as a concept that exposes privilege and power differentials in research, not only in Community Psychology, but also in fields and areas of study such as Ethics, Education, Geography, Sociology, Qualitative Research, and Feminist Studies (Bourke, 2014; Chiseri-Strater, 1996; England, 1994; Hopkins, 2007; Merriam et al., 2001; Sultana, 2007).

I have recognized that locating one's social position in a research process allows for a transparency that lends to the trustworthiness of one's study. In my case, and for this study, it was important that I reflected on and revealed my social positions, as they both influenced my motivations for carrying out this study, as well as conferred certain personal privileges I have as a researcher.

As most gay men who had no idea what their sexual orientation was or what it meant at a very young age, I was no stranger to ridicule and bullying in the Catholic, all-boys, private elementary and high schools I attended in the Philippines. Not recognizing soon enough how different my mannerisms, actuations, and behaviour were from most

other boys, I became an occasional target for name-calling, taunting, and even jokes that I was too young and innocent to understand growing up. By the time I understood how different I was from other boys, I had already suffered years of intermittent verbal torment and occasional but significant threats of physical violence. I was fortunate in a sense that I eventually caught on with how I could avoid homophobic bullying by trying to act more masculine and modifying my behaviour to pass as a heterosexual boy. I was also fortunate in the sense that I developed a gregarious personality as I grew older, which helped me with establishing close friendships that afforded me social support through the years. By the time I was in university, I was, for the most part, already used to adjusting my behaviour to expected social norms, and was hardly a constant target of homophobic bullying. Still, I knew that there were certain individuals who enjoyed making fun of how feminine some of my mannerisms were from time to time. Luckily, I did not sustain deep emotional scars from my earlier experiences of being victimized in elementary and high school. However, I was always aware that other gay youth were not as fortunate as I was, and that they continued to suffer from constant sexual orientation bias-based harassment.

Based on both my own experiences of being bullied because of homophobia and the memories of witnessing other gay boys being bullied over the years, I have always been curious to know why there was never any help offered to the likes of us who had no choice in the matter of being born as non-heterosexuals. As an adult, I was eventually gratified to know that there were some changes happening in society in the recent years that benefited LGBT youth in schools but was still puzzled and frustrated as to why there have been no laws established for the safety and protection of the basic human rights of LGBT individuals, especially those at a vulnerable young age.

Another facet of my social position that was relevant to my motivations in pursuing research on advocacy for LGBT youth involved my experiences of growing up gay as a devout Catholic. I was raised in a conservative society where gender-nonconforming behaviour was suppressed because of the heavy influence of religious proselytization on societal norms and expectations of individual gender and sexual expression. By the time I realized what it meant to have a different sexual orientation than what most people in Philippine society expected, I had already internalized the homophobia that was ingrained in the religious beliefs that were instilled in me by the Catholic Church. It was not until I immigrated in 2007 that I then fully recognized the critical role of Catholicism in the oppression of LGBT persons in the Philippines and the significant advantages I enjoyed living in Canada that allowed me to both freely express my sexuality and advocate for LGBT rights and needs. Thus, I had at least a couple of reasons why I have such a personal investment in conducting research that explores the potential impact of legislation and public policy on school-based LGBT-affirming initiatives that are dedicated to supporting bullied and marginalized LGBT students. Like many researchers, my personal history has had a dramatic influence on where, who, and how I currently am as an individual, as well as on the issues that matter to me today.

Now that I am a researcher with graduate education and training, and armed with certain knowledge and skills on how to conduct research within the community and with community members, I have reached a privileged position that many in society may perceive as expert and respectable. However, as I have learned from teachings espousing Community Psychology values and principles, this public perception is only partially true. It has become my calling and responsibility to recognize and value the personal

perspectives and lived experiences of the various members of the community that ultimately become the different stakeholders and experts in the issues that investigators like me address in their theory, research, and practice.

Terminology Used in This Dissertation

Before I continue with the actual body of this dissertation, there are two more ideas I need to carry out. Admittedly, I pinched these two ideas from the dissertations of former graduate students that were either available from the Wilfrid Laurier University Psychology Department files or online because I thought that they were quite useful. First, I think that it might be helpful at this time to define some of the terms that I have used or will subsequently be using in this dissertation. For some terms, I will be describing what I mean when I use them in the text or why I used them in the first place.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be using the terms *LGBT*, *sexual minority,* and *gender minority*, acknowledging that these terms are different in meaning and are not interchangeable. Since different individuals have too many different ideas of how the term *queer* should be used, I have purposefully left out the *Q* in *LGBTQ* to keep things simple. I recognize the importance of the term *queer* in many respects, but I decided that it would not be a concern that I would discuss in this dissertation.

I will be using the term *sexual minority* in the text of this paper to refer to any individual who identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The reason why I bring up the fact that I will be using the term *sexual minority*, particularly in the Background, Findings, and Discussion sections of this dissertation, is because not only is it the term that was used in some of the research articles I cite, but it was also the term that many of the participants chose to use in their interviews. In order to respect the terms that some of the researchers

and participants chose to use and be true to their actual statements, I decided to use the term *sexual minority* in the text when it was applicable. For similar reasons, I will be using the term *gender minority* in the text, when applicable, to refer to any individual who identifies as transgender.

I will use the term *ally* in this dissertation as it was defined by Washington and Evans (1991) to refer to any individual from a majority group who works to eliminate oppression by supporting and advocating for oppressed individuals. When the participants used the term *ally* in their interviews, they usually meant heterosexual students who they knew were sympathetic and supportive of LGBT students.

Two terms that I will use in the text that are occasionally confused or conflated with each other in some literature are *homophobia* and *heterosexism*. When I refer to them in this dissertation, I use the term *homophobia* to mean a fear of or antipathy towards homosexuals, and the term *heterosexism* as a systematic process of privileging heterosexuality relative to homosexuality, based on the assumption that heterosexuality and heterosexual privilege are normal and ideal (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009).

Lastly, from my own experience, certain scholars and researchers are not particularly copacetic with using the term *victimization* when describing the experiences of LGBT youth in schools. They believe that the use of this term paints LGBT youth as victims and takes away from the notion that they are or can be resilient and empowered individuals. As much as I would like to agree to a certain degree to this notion, I have decided to use the term *victimization* in this dissertation when I believe it is appropriate or when participants used the term themselves in their interviews. In truth, although I know I cannot speak for all LGBT individuals who have been bullied and abused in their youth,

I can honestly say that a few of my own negative experiences as a young child in school certainly made me feel victimized.

Organization of This Dissertation

The second thing that I still need to do before I continue with the actual body of this dissertation is to describe the way I will organize it in order to allow the reader to anticipate what is still ahead, as well as provide an idea of the flow of the dissertation. I believe that by doing this, the reader will also have a better grasp of the dissertation as a whole entity from start to finish. If there is anything I would remember from writing all those research papers from my course requirements in the last three and a half years, it is that most readers appreciate a roadmap of what they are about to read.

As presented in the Table of Contents, I will be dividing the remainder of this dissertation to five major sections: Background, Method, Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion. I will be using the Background section to describe and explain all the necessary contexts that the reader will need to be aware of and familiar with so as to appreciate and understand the content that I will present in later sections. In the Background section, I will include a literature review that is relevant to the school experiences of LGBT youth in the last few decades; the consequences of these experiences as they relate to their mental health and well-being; how much-needed social change happens in schools; and the school-based supports and initiatives that have been developed, implemented, and evaluated to support LGBT students over the years to promote that change, including different strategies, programs, and board-wide policies, and some of their outcomes. I will also include in the Background section a short segment on the importance of legislation and public policy in supporting school-based initiatives

that have been empirically documented to create change that helps LGBT students, as well as descriptions of the social, political, and legal contexts in Canada as a nation, Ontario as a province, and Waterloo as a region, that are relevant to the findings and analysis aspect of the study. As I describe these social, political, and legal contexts, I will enumerate and elucidate on bills that have been passed as laws and public policies that have been created in the last 20 years, in order to provide a clear picture of where the current laws and public policies stand regarding explicit protections for the rights and safety of LGBT students, as well as the promotion of their mental health and well-being, prior to the legislation of Bill 13 on June 5, 2012. Most importantly, I will provide a concise description of Bill 13 based on the version that eventually received Royal Assent, and a synopsis of the hostile response to this legislation by members of the conservative and religious sectors in Ontario as it was chronicled in mass media accounts.

In the Method section, the first aspect I will present will be a description of the important collaborative partnerships that I was a part of during the study, followed by a general characterization of all the study participants. I will then describe the participants according to their different roles: student, teacher, board representative, or service provider supporting LGBT students from Waterloo Region. I will provide descriptions that will contain the ages, sexual orientations, gender identities, ethno-racial backgrounds, and length of GSA memberships of the student participants. I will also provide some aggregate demographic information on the non-student participants. Next, I will outline the procedures and research approaches that I adopted during the conduct of the study. Lastly, I will describe the materials and form of analysis that was used to examine the data from the participant interviews.

I will separate the Findings section to three discernible parts. In the first part, I will include findings related to the experiences of LGBT youth in the publicly-funded schools of Waterloo Region; the impact of these experiences on the LGBT youth's mental health and well-being; and the success of the schools in promoting a safe environment for learning of all students prior to the passing of Bill 13, including strategies, programs, and policies schools employed to help LGBT youth and create positive changes in school climates. In the second part, I will describe the participants' general impressions of Bill 13; their perspectives on which aspects or components of the bill contributed to its strengths and weaknesses; their perspectives on what benefits, challenges, and other outcomes would result from the bill's legislation; and other important issues they brought up regarding the *Accepting Schools Act*. In the third part, I will present some changes that have occurred in the two school boards of Waterloo Region in the last two and a half years that could be construed as adherence or positive responses to the mandates of Bill 13 based on a document review of the information available to the public on the two Waterloo Region school board websites, and from recent personal correspondence with staff from the two school boards.

In the Discussion section, I will first present a brief summary of the pertinent findings of the study. Second, I will identify and expound on relevant themes that emerged from those findings. I will discuss the important connections between school climates, negative experiences of LGBT youth, impacts on their mental health and well-being, and the role of legislation and public policy in the whole scheme of things. Then, I will end the section by considering how the new themes relate to concepts of existing theories and assertions from previous research studies, particularly those that were

reviewed earlier in the dissertation, and discussing new theory and lessons that were generated from the analysis of the findings based on the approaches described in the Method section. From the data derived from the perspectives of the participants, I will propose a new conceptual framework and posit a theoretical interpretation of how outcomes resulted from Bill 13 based on an application of the framework. At the end of the section, I will construct a model consolidating concepts from the theories, new framework, and theoretical interpretation of how outcomes resulted from Bill 13, which could be used to examine how advocates can successfully support LGBT student mental health and well-being in future advocacy research efforts.

Finally, I will recapitulate the main lessons that were derived from the findings based on the set purposes of the study in the Conclusion section. I will then share some critical reflections on lessons that I personally learned during the research process of this study. In this section, I will also review the strengths and limitations of the study, and present implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Background

School Experiences of LGBT Youth, Their Mental Health, and Well-being

Authors of peer-reviewed journal articles have already raised awareness of the fact that LGBT youth are at special risk for bullying and harassment compared to their heterosexual and gender-conforming counterparts (Conoley, 2008; Poteat, 2008; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, and Austin (2010) even revealed that, based on the United States survey data from 2001 *Growing Up Today Study*, not only were gay male youth more likely to be bullied in schools compared to other youth, they were also less likely to report being bullied compared to both their heterosexual and lesbian peers. Apparently, bullied gay boys experienced greater psychological distress, verbal and physical abuse, and had more negative perceptions of their school experiences because of their sexual orientation than boys bullied for other reasons (Swearer et al., 2008).

In a survey conducted by D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Herschberger (2002) that included 350 LGBT youth from 20 American states and 5 Canadian provinces, they discovered that over half of LGBT youth reported that they experienced verbal abuse in their high schools because of their nonconforming gender expression, sexual orientation, or other students' perception of their sexual orientation, and about 11% of them were also physically assaulted within their school campuses. Such bias-based harassment has been found to be linked to compromised health both in quantitative and qualitative research studies (Berlan, et al., 2010; Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2009; Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, & Koenig, 2012). Russell and his colleagues' (2012) quantitative

research involving two large United States population-based studies of adolescents, noted that compromised health was more strongly associated with bias-based harassment than general harassment. Mishna and her colleagues' (2009) qualitative study using in-depth, semi-structured interviews of nine Canadian LGBT youth advocates found that bias-based harassment specific to LGBT youth involved important dimensions such as risks to coming out and sexual prejudice in the media. Both studies recommended incorporating attention to sexual biases into anti-bullying policies and programs.

Schools have become more and more the place for adolescents to express their pent up aggressions, and LGBT youth have become easy targets and prey for name-calling, taunting, ridicule, and bullying. Several studies have detailed the fact that just in the last few years, schools have cultivated unwelcoming and unaccepting climates for LGBT students, and that this lamentable trend has persisted even in the last few recent years (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig, & Russell, 2013). Schools have become overtly and covertly hostile places towards LGBT students, as many of them experience victimization, discrimination, and marginalization on a regular basis (Greytak et al., 2013). LGBT students have continued to experience multiple forms of discrimination and victimization in schools systems due to ingrained homophobia and heterosexism, and bias-based harassment has become an unfortunate but all too common part of growing up and going to school (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009).

Another trend that research has noted in the last decade is that, despite the increasingly hostile climate in schools, LGBT students are coming out at a younger age

and are more visible than ever before (Hunter, 2007; Russell, Toomey, Ryan, & Diaz, 2014). LGBT youth have become more open about their sexual orientation and more willing to display gender atypical behaviour, which has attracted more homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools (D'Augelli, Pilkington, Herschberger, 2002).

A multitude of research studies have reported the significant adverse effects resulting from these negative school climates and school experiences of LGBT students. These adverse effects have manifested mostly as mental health issues, problematic drug and alcohol use, risky sexual behaviour, and academic difficulties.

Adverse effects of negative school climates and experiences on the mental health and social behaviour of LGBT youth. Apart from legitimate threats to their physical safety, the discrimination, harassment, and victimization of LGBT students have led to serious negative consequences affecting the vulnerable youth's mental health and social behaviour. Many research studies have shown that because of homophobic and transphobic hostile school climates, LGBT students have become at greater risk for depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, problematic alcohol and drug use, and risky sexual behaviour (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Poteat et al., 2009).

Several studies found that negative experiences in schools, where youth spend the most significant amount of time outside of their homes, has led to increased rates of depression among LGBT students (Birkett et al., 2009; D'Augelli et al., 2002; Hatzenbuehler, 2011; Poteat et al., 2009). With increased rates of depression, other mental health concerns affecting LGBT youth in schools such as self-harm and suicidal ideation were also observed (Saewyc et al., 2008; Scanlon, Travers, Coleman, Bauer, & Boyce,

2010). Studies showed that LGBT youth were at greater risk for both inflicting self-harm and developing suicidal ideation among general student populations (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, and Azrael, 2009; Espelage et al., 2008; Hunter, 2007; Saewyc et al., 2008). Based on a study done by D'Augelli and his colleagues (2005) to examine predictors of suicide attempts among LGBT students in the United States, about half of all suicide attempts by students were related to their sexual orientation. Many other studies suggested that non-heterosexual students were more likely to attempt suicide after victimization than their straight counterparts (Bostwick, 2007; Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; Hatzenbuehler, 2011; Remafredi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998; Russell & Joyner, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2001; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

Van Wormer and McKinney (2003) reported that the alarming spike in self-harm and suicide rates among LGBT students in the United States, Europe, and Canada that started in the last two decades of the past century indicates that school systems all over the world have increasingly become toxic environments for LGBT youth. Their assessment of their study data only supports the notion that in order to save the lives of LGBT students at higher risk for committing self-harm and suicide, school climates must change at a global scale to become more welcoming and accepting of different sexual orientations, gender identities, and other minority statuses.

Research has also shown that LGBT students have encountered more struggles related to alcohol and drug use when compared to heterosexual adolescents and that they were at greater risks for problematic substance use (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; McLaughlin, Hatzenbuehler, Xuan, & Conron, 2012; Russell,

Driscoll, & Truong, 2002). A social behaviour issue that was found to be strongly associated with the negative consequences of victimization of LGBT youth in schools is risky sexual practice (Hunter, 2007). According to a study by Robinson and Espelage (2013) that used a *Dane County Youth Assessment* tool administered to grades 7 to 12 students in Wisconsin, LGBT youth engaged in riskier sexual behaviour more than their straight counterparts. They even found that the disparities between the risky sexual behaviours of LGBT students and those of their heterosexual peers were already significant as early as when the youth were attending middle school.

Adverse effects of negative school climates and experiences on the academic performance of LGBT youth. Researchers have determined that negative school climates and experiences of LGBT students had adverse effects on academic performance too. The basic reason why youth go to school is to learn so that they could grow up to become better individuals and productive citizens. When LGBT youth are discriminated against in school, it would not be unreasonable to expect that such negative experiences could impede their learning, growth, and development (Fetner & Kush, 2007).

Some studies found that declines in the grade point averages of LGBT students were linked to homophobic and transphobic harassment and victimization in school (Greytak et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2013; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Poteat et al., 2013), while others have documented how rates of absenteeism, truancy, suspensions, expulsions, and dropouts among LGBT students slowly escalated as school climates became increasingly hostile towards sexual minorities (Fetner & Kush, 2007; Hunter, 2007; Murdoch & Bolch, 2005). These findings presented more challenges for school boards, adding to the already growing concerns for the physical safety and mental health

of LGBT students.

Addressing LGBT Youth Issues in Schools: How Change Happens in Schools

At the beginning of the 21st century, research on the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth began to shift attention from the identification of schools as risk environments and the adverse effects that resulted from the negative school experiences of LGBT students to efforts that address root causes and the establishment of ways to help sexual and gender minority youth in schools. This shift in attention included research on the development, implementation, and evaluation of different strategies, programs, and policies within school systems, as well as other initiatives to create substantial change in schools to support the safety, mental health, and well-being of LGBT students (Goodenow et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007; Hunter, 2007).

Since the adverse effects of negative school climates on the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth have been well documented in the last two decades, several researchers have purposely attempted to examine exactly *how* change that promotes positive outcomes for LGBT students actually happens in schools (Fisher et al., 2008; Goodenow et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007). Goodenow and colleagues (2006) found that good schools usually had well-meaning and determined advocates for LGBT students who deliberately made efforts to shape school culture in positive directions, as well as foster health-enhancing behaviours and social responsibility in their students, with the hope that patterns of learned behaviour in school will carry over into non-school life. Their efforts took different forms that involved the provision of services for adolescents at risk for poor mental health, social behaviour, and academic outcomes, particularly approaches that

focused on the needs of sexual and gender minority students. Among the many programs that schools implemented to create substantial change that converted negative school climates into positive ones, the establishment of support groups such as GSAs, provision of professional training on diversity designed to increase the accessibility of staff support, incorporation of LGBT material into the curriculum, practice of group counselling, and development of board-wide policies explicitly recognizing sexual orientation and gender identity issues, were the ones that were documented to be the most empirically sound and historically successful (Fisher et al., 2008; Goodenow et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007).

Nichols (1999) asserted that schools are obligated to address the unique needs of LGBT students. When the students are within the walls of a school, it becomes the responsibility of the school to keep them safe from harm, ensuring an environment that does not marginalize, discriminate, or oppress any of its students, particularly those most vulnerable. Schools must adopt a proactive stance by developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies, programs, and policies to create a positive environment for its LGBT students in order to address issues that emanate from systemic homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism.

In their article discussing the beliefs of Canadian educators on raising LGBT issues in schools, Schneider and Dimito (2008) suggested that schools discuss strategies and programs for reaching all students in order to create more welcoming and positive environments. They underscored the need for more progressive curricular changes and explicit anti-discrimination policies, and emphasized the demand for appropriate teacher and staff education, increased resources for LGBT-affirming initiatives, and the development of community networks that could connect LGBT youth to supports outside

of their schools.

Researchers who chose to advocate for the mental health and well-being of sexual minority youth expressed concern that the failure of schools to take a proactive stance in supporting sexual minority students is a major cause of their students' mental health issues and poorer academic performance (Van Wormer & McKinney, 2003). Fisher and her colleagues (2008) observed that not enough schools implemented initiatives to support LGBT students. Since previous studies have already established the strong relationship between positive school climates and the healthier adjustment of LGBT students to their schools, the proven relationship highlighted the moderating influence of social support coming from the schools (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Based on their research using a survey of 13,921 high school students from a Midwestern United States public school district, Espelage and colleagues (2008) were able to document the buffering influence of positive school climates on the mental health outcomes of LGBT students.

School-based supports and interventions can be successful in helping LGBT youth by promoting positive school climates (Hunter, 2007; Orpinas & Horne, 2006). LGBT students who have support groups such as GSAs, allies, supportive staff and administrators, and programs that promote a climate of inclusivity in their schools report decreased rates of victimization and suicide attempts (Goodenow et al., 2006; Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014). In their study that surveyed 5,730 LGBT youth in secondary schools in the United States, Kosciw and colleagues (2013) claimed that these school-based supports lowered victimization rates of LGBT students, as well as helped improve their academic performance. They echoed the notion that apart from GSAs, and supportive fellow students and educators, LGBT-inclusive curricula and anti-bullying

policies with specific protections regarding students' sexual orientations and gender identities were effective school-based initiatives in supporting LGBT youth.

Through the years, research studies have mostly focused on five school-based programs promoting the advocacy for the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth: 1) supporting the creation of GSAs to provide safe spaces for LGBT youth, 2) providing staff training related to LGBT knowledge and issues, 3) increasing LGBT visibility and issues in the school curriculum, 4) including sexual orientation and gender identity specifically in anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, and 5) increasing LGBT-positive activities, and resources to support advocates for LGBT youth (Graybill, Varjas, Meyers, & Watson, 2009; Jeltova & Fish, 2005; McFarland, 2001; Peters, 2003).

During the conduct of my own literature review for this dissertation, I was able to discern that these different programs were usually implemented to carry out at least one of four distinct strategies, which schools adopted as part of their efforts to provide support for LGBT youth: 1) creating safe spaces for LGBT youth (Currie et al., 2012; Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007; Fisher et al., 2008; Hansen, 2007; Lugg, 2003), 2) fostering school climates that promote respect and acceptance for LGBT individuals (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2013), 3) facilitating diverse stakeholder collaboration in school efforts to support LGBT students (Fisher et al., 2008; Greytak et al., 2013; Hunter, 2007), and 4) providing additional resources for LGBT youth outside of the school's capacity (Poteat et al., 2013; St. John et al., 2014). Each of the strategies had at least one corresponding program in order for the strategies to be implemented in their schools. Many of the schools that supported their LGBT youth would choose at least one of these strategies and implement at least one program to carry out a chosen strategy.

The most common program that school boards implemented in order to carry out the strategy of creating safe spaces for LGBT youth in their schools was supporting the establishment of GSAs or similar clubs that espoused diversity and inclusivity, especially when students requested them (Doppler, 2000; Griffin et al., 2004; Lee, 2002). To foster school climates that promoted respect and acceptance for LGBT individuals, many schools supported the celebration of LGBT-positive events and activities, as well as the promotion of LGBT-positive campaigns (NoH8 Campaign, 2011; Poteat et al., 2013; Tossel, 2010). Schools facilitated diverse stakeholder collaboration in their efforts to support LGBT youth by implementing several types of programs either alone or in combination: 1) pre-service and in-service trainings during professional development activities for teachers and staff (Greytak et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012), 2) LGBT-inclusive curricular changes (Barber & Krane, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2010; Lovett, 2011; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012), 3) innovative counselling approaches (Craig, 2013; Fisher et al., 2008), and 4) board-wide anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies (Hansen, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2013). In order to provide additional resources to LGBT students outside of the school's capacity, some schools established connections with community service providers that were able to provide services and supports that catered specifically to the needs of LGBT youth (Poteat et al., 2013).

Creating safe spaces for LGBT youth. Since the early 1990s, population-based surveys of teenagers in North America have consistently found reported suicide attempts to be two to seven times higher in secondary school students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual compared to those who identified as heterosexual (DuRant, Krowchuk, & Sinal, 1998; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Haas et al., 2011; Russell & Joyner, 2001). Due

to these alarming rate of suicide attempts, a discourse on the need for the creation of safe spaces in schools, particularly for LGBT youth, rapidly emerged by the end of the 20th century. Not surprisingly, attention to the establishment and success of GSAs in schools grew exponentially popular.

Gay-Straight Alliances in schools. Many advocates have asserted that one of the best ways to support LGBT youth in schools was to create safe spaces where they could congregate, socialize, and discuss issues important with them without feeling ridiculed or threatened. These safe spaces could also be places where LGBT students could seek counsel from individuals who would provide guidance, or where they could obtain support from other students who understood and sympathized with what they were experiencing (Doppler, 2000; Griffin et al., 2004; Lee, 2002).

By far, the most popular program for this strategy of creating safe spaces in the last two and half decades was the establishment of school-based GSAs or similar clubs that promoted diversity and inclusivity. GSAs are typically student-run, non-curricular, after-school clubs that are open to all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and established for the purposes of providing a safe space for addressing LGBT youth issues such as bullying, harassment, and marginalization (Currie et al., 2012; Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007; Fisher et al., 2008; Hansen, 2007; Lugg, 2003). According to Doppler's (2000) findings from his research on GSAs in Massachusetts public schools, the function of GSAs has been three-fold: educational, social, and for dedicated support. This meant that GSAs were supposed to raise awareness about homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism; provide a healthy atmosphere for LGBT students and their allies where they can develop healthier interpersonal relationships; and

affirm LGBT youth as they deal with discrimination, harassment, and problems with family and friends. In their study of organizational level changes in high schools that participated in Massachusetts' *Safe Schools Program*, Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004) later described four important roles GSAs played, especially in schools with negative environments hostile to LGBT students: 1) as safe spaces where LGBT students could be themselves and not feel imperiled, 2) as a source of support and counsel that revolved around LGBT youth issues, 3) as primary vehicles for increasing educational efforts and awareness about LGBT youth safety and acceptance, and 4) as part of broader school efforts to make schools safe for LGBT students.

Since concern for students' safety had been a growing issue among school boards and policymakers from the late 1980s (Lugg, 2003), part of the political appeal of establishing GSAs was the attempt to provide LGBT students with protected spaces. In the 1990s, American national organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Gay- Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) emerged in response to resistance against the establishment of GSAs, as well as to help create GSAs in public schools across the United States through the use of advocacy and public education (Currie et al., 2012; Fetner & Kush, 2007).

As more studies were devoted to examining the value of GSAs to the mental health and well-being of sexual and gender minority youth, researchers soon discovered that the establishment of GSAs proved to have more beneficial effects than simply fulfilling its original intended purpose of ensuring safety for LGBT students (Mayberry et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2011; Toomey & Russell, 2011).

Greater safety. The idea of forming clubs in schools that could allow gay and lesbian youth to gather together with their allies, and create a space where they could feel safe was what sparked the creation of the first GSAs (Currie et al., 2012; Fetner & Kush, 2007; Griffin et al., 2004). The creation of GSAs in schools had a positive impact on the sense of physical safety of LGBT students as GSA members learned to move around together in groups and discovered greater safety in numbers (Lee, 2002). Goodenow, Szalacha, and Westheimer (2006) supported the finding that GSAs and other support groups for sexual minority youth in schools were significantly associated with greater safety. According to their study using data from the *Massachusetts Youth Behavior Risk Survey* administered in 52 schools, sexual minority students in schools with GSAs were half as likely to report dating violence, threats, injuries, and truancy, and less than a third as likely to report multiple past-year suicide attempts (Goodenow et al., 2006). Similarly, LGBT students in schools with GSAs reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks, noted school staff intervening more on their behalf, and felt safer overall (Kosciw et al., 2010).

In the last five years, even more research studies confirmed the safety that GSAs provide for LGBT youth in schools (Mayberry et al., 2011; Walls et al., 2010). In a survey done with the general student population in 28 American high schools with GSAs, the majority of students perceived their schools as safer for their gender-nonconforming peers (Toomey et al., 2012). More recently, however, Currie and colleagues (2012) examined the limitations of confining research to a "safe space" discourse. They argued that GSAs afforded more than just safety to LGBT students and that it was important for schools to provide more than just safety in order to address the many needs of sexual and gender minority youth.

Improved mental health. Research studies have uncovered other benefits to creating GSAs in schools apart from providing safety. One such benefit is the improved mental health of LGBT youth (Toomey et al., 2011). In their study with 145 American LGBT youth participants, Heck and colleagues (2011) found that LGBT students in schools with GSAs reported having more positive school experiences and better mental health outcomes. They documented lower levels of depression, psychological distress, suicidality, and problematic substance use among LGBT youth in schools that supported GSAs. In addition, Konishi and colleagues (2013) also found that the presence of school GSAs was associated with reduced problematic alcohol use among all students, not just LGBT youth.

In a quantitative study by Heck and colleagues (2014) using 12 logistic regression analyses of responses from online surveys from all over the United States, results showed LGBT youth in schools without GSAs were at increased risk for the problematic use of cocaine, hallucinogens, and marijuana, as well as the misuse of prescription medications for pain and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Improved academic performance. GSAs also help to improve LGBT students' academic performance (Lee, 2002). Using data from the American *Preventing School Harassment Study,* Toomey and Russell (2011) identified that GSA memberships and involvement in GSA social justice activities increased the academic achievements of LGBT students, observed in improved grade point averages. Moreover, sexual minority students who had histories of skipping or missing school were later found to have decreased rates of absenteeism and truancy after the formation of their GSAs (Walls et al., 2010). Researchers theorized that these positive academic outcomes were either due to

shifts in campus climate from the legitimization of GSAs or increased social supports provided by GSAs for sexual and gender minority students.

Increased sense of community. Along with feelings of safety, LGBT youth experienced a sense of community in GSAs that they could not attain elsewhere in their schools (Mayberry et al., 2011). Being with other students who understood exactly what they were going through and with allies who sympathized with their circumstances and concerns provided LGBT students with a sense of belonging in the company of other GSA members (Heck et al., 2011; Lee, 2002; Toomey & Russell, 2011). From the GLSEN *2009 National School Climate Survey* findings, Kosciw and colleagues (2010) found that LGBT youth involved in their school's GSA reported a greater sense of connectedness to the school community and a stronger psychological attachment to the school itself. With enhanced feelings of social cohesion with the rest of the school community, LGBT GSA members showed more willingness to become involved in school activities outside of those sponsored by their GSAs (Currie et al., 2012).

Supported identity development. For some LGBT youth, the GSAs became more than just a club where they could feel safe but also a place that would allow them to slowly and carefully construct their individual and collective identities (Mayberry, 2007). Macgillivray (2005) contended that school GSAs became important forces for the shaping of the democratic identities of LGBT youth. He claimed that GSAs were spaces that helped LGBT youth build citizenship skills, navigate school administration bureaucracy, and work with others with diverging opinions. Griffin and colleagues (2004) clearly saw the potential of GSAs for promoting resilience and other positive characteristics in LGBT youth. In fact, over the years, GSAs became organizations that promoted positive youth

development of both LGBT and heterosexual students (Poteat et al., 2013; Walls et al., 2010).

GSAs in high schools facilitated the development of strong LGBT youth identities and promulgated greater well-being for sexual and gender minority students that continued into young adulthood (Toomey et al., 2011). Analyzing data from a sample of college students of a large Southern university in the United States, Worthen (2014) found that the presence of GSAs in high schools was a robust positive predictor of supportive attitudes towards LGBT individuals among heterosexuals even when considering many control variables. She also pointed out the possibility that the positive effects on the identity development of both LGBT and heterosexual youth could be long lasting.

Cultivated youth empowerment. Second only to the safe space discourse, a focus on the role of GSAs in the cultivation of youth empowerment among LGBT students stimulated a lot of research interest in the last 15 years. Several studies found that GSAs cultivated a sense of empowerment in LGBT youth through a variety of ways (Mayberry et al., 2011). One aspect in the role of GSAs in the cultivation of youth empowerment was the notion that GSAs offered LGBT youth opportunities for gender activism in their schools (Mayberry et al., 2011; Schindel, 2008), which in turn provided them an outlet for adolescent idealism. Through their collaborative involvement with GSAs, LGBT youth were able to take part in activities such as Safe Schools Summits that strengthened their skills and bolstered their commitments to confront bullies in the pursuit of engendering safe spaces for all in schools (Craig, Tucker, & Wagner, 2008). Apart from opportunities for LGBT youth to feel empowered, an added bonus to the establishment of GSAs was that GSAs also helped straight allies gain confidence and reinforced capacity by providing

them with their own opportunities to help those who were not able to advocate for themselves (Doppler, 2000).

From data pooled from American public high schools, Fetner and Kush (2007) claimed that the upsurge of the formation of GSAs indicated a generational shift that placed collaboration as a new approach to activism. This signified that becoming members of GSAs and having the support of allies empowered LGBT youth to speak out more against homophobic remarks, initiate school events designed to raise awareness on issues important to them, and challenge existing heteronormative school cultures (Currie et al., 2012). In a study of 15 youth leaders of California high school GSAs, Russell and colleagues (2009) described the youths' feelings of empowerment as derived from utilizing knowledge they learned from being part of a GSA (strategic empowerment), having a voice and control over their destiny within an organization that provided various opportunities (personal empowerment), and sustaining GSA membership and the commitment to the responsibility of empowering others (relational empowerment). Mayberry (2012), however, noted that although GSA members felt psychologically empowered as individuals to speak out against homophobic and transphobic sentiments, GSAs as groups, on the other hand, seemed not as fully empowered at organizational or community levels to engage in activist projects aimed at disrupting heteronormative practices underlying LGBT stigmatized identities.

Fostering school climates that promote respect and acceptance for LGBT individuals. The inability to muster organizational and community level empowerment as school groups was not the only criticism made about GSAs in published literature. A few studies contended that the narrow focus of GSAs sometimes overshadowed the

advancement of issues concerning racial minority students or youth from other marginalized populations (McCready, 2003), as well as drew attention away from the greater need for entire school systems, as opposed to just GSAs, to challenge persistent cultural norms and become more LGBT-affirming for students (Griffin et al., 2004; Hackford-Peer, 2010).

As an initiative originally conceived to primarily create safe spaces for LGBT youth, some researchers conceded that GSAs were not designed to disrupt heteronormative practices since they were not inherently based on a framework for engaging systemic change and problematizing underlying causes of heterosexism in school cultures (MacIntosh, 2007; Watson, Varjas, Meyers, & Graybill, 2010). As such, other researchers felt that GSAs had very limited transformative power (Griffin et al, 2004; Walls et al., 2010), and instead championed the need for broader systemic efforts to challenge heteronormative school practices (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002).

In their essay, "Going Beyond Gay-Straight Alliances to Make Schools Safe for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students", Griffin and Ouellett (2002) clarified that GSAs were important but were only part of the bigger picture because of the need for changes in the school climate that could only take place through broader changes in the schools' organizational setting. Several researchers agreed that GSAs would be most effective as part of a broad ongoing effort to make schools safe and welcoming for all students and staff, particularly if established in combination with other school-based supports and initiatives (Griffin et al., 2004; Kosciw et al., 2010; Szalacha, 2003).

LGBT-positive events and campaigns. In an effort to carry out the strategy of

fostering school climates that would promote respect and acceptance for LGBT individuals, GSA initiatives were sometimes linked with LGBT-positive events and campaigns sponsored by schools. Activities such as Day of Silence, National Coming Out Week, and Ally Week allowed LGBT students who were not members of GSAs to psychologically benefit by perceiving LGBT-positive events as symbolic affirmation of their identities and open support for their well-being. School-supported campaigns such as *ThinkB4YouSpeak* helped instill a sense of empowerment and healthy identity in LGBT youth outside of GSAs (Poteat et al., 2013). Programs were launched to educate people about LGBT rights and to rally against adverse reactions and hostile attitudes towards school diversity and inclusion. These programs were mostly created to prepare for and reinforce day-long LGBT-positive events in high schools such as Anti-Bullying Day and International Day Against Homophobia, as well as to support media campaigns like *Gener8tion NoH8* and the *It Gets Better* project (NoH8 Campaign, 2011; Tossel, 2010). Although some researchers criticized these annual "visibility" programs as token symbols of improved school climate (Payne & Smith, 2012), the programs likely still managed to provide much-needed encouragement to LGBT students.

Facilitating diverse stakeholder collaboration in school efforts to support LGBT students. According to Griffin and Ouellett (2002), the gains of efforts by GSAs and other LGBT-positive initiatives in one year may well be lost the following year when GSA members graduate or club advisors retire, change schools, or move on to do other work. They emphasized that in order to help ensure that the progress achieved to support LGBT youth is sustained, and that momentum is maintained, maximum involvement from as many different members of the school community should be encouraged. Horne,

Stoddard, and Bell (2007) recommended that a group approach to interventions, involving not only student leaders and teachers but possibly also administrators, superintendents, trustees, school counsellors and psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers, other mental health professionals, and school personnel, would increase participation from the entire school community.

To encourage different members of the school community to take active part in school efforts to support LGBT youth, advocates in schools implemented various programs to facilitate diverse stakeholder collaboration including LGBT-affirming pre-service and in-service training in professional development activities (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Greytak et al., 2013), incorporation of LGBT-inclusive material in school curricula (Adams, Cox, & Dunstan, 2004; Hunter, 2007), innovative counselling approaches (Craig, 2013; Fisher et al., 2008), and board-wide anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies (Hansen, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2013). These different programs not only served an immediate goal when they were implemented (i.e. professional development training to prepare staff for LGBT issues, curricular changes to incorporate LGBT topics, counselling approaches to respond to LGBT youth conflicts, and board-wide creation and amendment of policies to explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity), they also provided opportunities for stakeholders to collaborate and build coalitions that had a unified objective.

Professional development. Teachers play a pivotal role in promoting a safe school environment for LGBT youth in schools, especially because they can intervene in situations that could prove to be detrimental to the mental health of bullied students. Studies revealed a variety of reasons why teachers and school staff did not intervene when

they encountered homophobic slurs in school settings. Some did not know how to effectively intervene when they heard heterosexist or homophobic comments, while others often rationalized that teasing and taunts between teenagers are just part of normal adolescent development (Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007). Some school personnel provided ineffective responses to situations that required intervention in the past and were reluctant to intervene on subsequent occasions (Conoley, 2008; Bias, Conoley, & Castillo, 2005). Thus, a pattern of minimal staff intervening on behalf of LGBT youth exists in many schools, and as a result, fewer adults advocated against homophobic and transphobic bullying and discrimination (McGuinness, 2008).

This is why research that underscores the importance of LGBT-affirming professional development in-service personnel training becomes relevant to efforts that attempt to create more positive school climates. In their study that explored the experiences and support needs of LGBT youth living in Sussex, England, Sherriff, Hamilton, Wigmore, and Giambrone (2011) stressed the importance of learning how teachers and other staff perceived the needs of LGBT students because this information was important in assessing their training needs as educators and determining the approaches necessary to help them support LGBT youth. Greytak and colleagues (2013) reviewed published literature in the United States on in-service professional development trainings regarding LGBT issues and found that district-wide training programs were effective in changing educators' previous beliefs and biases against LGBT advocacy, as well as successful in improving self-efficacy for educator agency. They found that with LGBT-affirming professional development trainings, school staff experienced an increase in confidence in their ability to promote an inclusive environment for LGBT students.

Schneider and Dimito (2008) revealed that teachers had a range of perceptions, not only about the needs of LGBT youth, but also the risks they had to take in order to advocate for diversity and inclusion that explicitly supported different sexual orientations and gender identities in their schools. While some school personnel feared for the security of their jobs and the possibility of being bypassed for promotions, others had no such concerns.

Several studies reinforced the idea that the presence of supportive school staff was significantly related to positive outcomes for LGBT students (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Hansen, 2007; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Kosciw, 2004; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). When sexual minority students were able to identify supportive school staff, they reported improved mental health and greater well-being (Goodenow et al., 2006), as well as improved grade point averages (Russell et al., 2001).

In an article discussing their research undertaken in schools across New South Wales, Australia, Robinson and Ferfolja (2008) pointed out that it was the responsibility of academic institutions to promote teacher education that incorporates anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist topics into the professional development trainings of teachers and staff. A good number of studies supported this position asserting that sexual diversity climates can improve in schools with the effective training of school personnel (Blake et al., 2001; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Canadian Theory and Policy professor, Dr. Christine Bellini (2012) underscored the vital role that teacher education played in setting the stage for equitable practices in educational school systems. With appropriate training, school personnel can be taught how to confront homophobia, counsel both victims and perpetrators of homophobic bullying, and contribute to the elimination of systemic heterosexism within the school

community (Hunter, 2007).

Studies showed that professional development training activities that led to better understanding of LGBT topics were useful at almost any level where school staff might be involved. Based on their research exploring the homophobic bullying experiences of LGBT youth in Ireland, Minton and colleagues (2008) prescribed professional development trainings on LGBT issues and advocacy not only for in-service activities but also for pre-service activities of staff so that educators and personnel could have a better understanding of how to manage difficult situations regarding LGBT concerns even before they began their tenure at schools. Pedagogical strategies could provide new skills and resources for educators, counsellors, and child and youth workers at K-12 settings so that they could become adult allies to LGBT youth (Case & Meier, 2014). The introduction of critical pedagogy surrounding LGBT issues could be initiated in professional development activities at any stage of a school staff's career (Mayo, 2013).

Professional development was just one tool utilized by schools to facilitate diverse stakeholder collaboration in efforts to support LGBT students. Studies documented the benefits of the appropriate training in increasing the knowledge, confidence, and agency of teachers, school personnel, and other representatives of the school boards, including administrators, superintendents, and trustees (Case & Meier, 2014; Hunter, 2007; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). The implementation of high school staff training on LGBT concerns was associated with lower rates of homophobic harassment and higher numbers of students reporting that teachers and personnel intervened during episodes of homophobic language or bullying (Hansen, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2010). The majority of these researchers attributed these improvements to increased awareness of LGBT

perspectives and rights, and increased confidence in managing LGBT issues, among personnel who underwent LGBT-affirming professional development training.

Curricular changes. Programs that encouraged curricular changes to incorporate LGBT-inclusive material have resulted in more interest, participation, and collaborative involvement, as well as greater LGBT student support from teachers, curriculum consultants, administrators, superintendents, and school board trustees. In their article using the *2009 National School Climate Survey* experiences of LGBT youth in United States public schools, Kosciw and colleagues (2010) stressed the importance of incorporating positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events in school curricula in order to improve LGBT student experiences during secondary school.

A few studies mentioned that LGBT students found very meager incorporation of LGBT topics in school curricula (Adams et al., 2004; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Without any representation of LGBT identities in the materials they studied and learned in schools, it would be easy to surmise how LGBT youth sometimes felt demoralized in their school settings. Although some schools managed to include lessons that incorporated the contributions of LGBT historical figures to society (Lovett, 2011; Toomey et al., 2012) and discussions on homophobia in sports and physical education (Barber & Krane, 2007), most made little effort to integrate LGBT representations in their curricula. To increase LGBT content, some advocates introduced novels and other contemporary literature as effective sources of LGBT narratives and sex education (Bittner, 2012).

Several research studies confirmed that with the incorporation of LGBT material into school curricula, sexual and gender minority students reported increased feelings of

safety, decreased homophobic remarks from other students, and overall greater acceptance from members of the school community (Kosciw et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2013; Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006). In her essay on homophobic bullying in the *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, Columbia University professor, Dr. Joyce Hunter (2007) lauded the implementation of age-appropriate curricula in some middle and high schools that steadily increased awareness on LGBT identities, comprehensive sex education for both heterosexual and LGBT youth, anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies, and support and protections for bullied students, under the supervision of trained teachers and staff. In an American study done by Ryan and colleagues (2013), it was noted that elementary school-aged children readily accepted age-appropriate inclusion of transgender and gender-nonconforming identities into the curriculum. Minton and colleagues (2008) advanced the need for schools to provide more resources to support progressive curricular development that would introduce age-appropriate LGBT content so that sexual diversity awareness can be gradually promoted into school systems. Greater availability of such resources would also help stimulate participation and creativity from different school stakeholders involved in the development of more LGBT-inclusive curricular content.

Counselling approaches. Apart from teachers, there are other stakeholders in the school community who are known to advocate for the mental health and well-being of LGBT students. Guidance counsellors, social workers, child and youth workers, pastors, and school psychologists are just some of the trained professionals who work tirelessly in schools to provide counselling and support to students. Given the alarming rates of suicides associated with homophobic and transphobic bullying (D'Augelli et al., 2005;

Van Wormer & McKinney, 2003), the need for innovative approaches to counselling and supporting sexual and gender minority students has never been more apparent. In the past few years, school counsellors have responded by developing and implementing new intervention strategies in schools (Fisher et al., 2008).

One approach proposed for practitioners who provided school counselling to support LGBT students was the implementation of content-specific strategies (Graybill et al., 2009). The proponents of this approach suggested that when using content-specific strategies, practitioners need to keep in mind that the information gathered on the types of circumstances, incidents, and school situational variables commonly reported by students and school personnel could be useful in building a knowledge base about LGBT issues in schools. Knowledge of these factors, in addition to the decision-making process executed by school-based advocates, may assist all school personnel who wish to advocate for LGBT youth in schools. Another approach that has been used by school practitioners in helping LGBT students is the practice of group counselling. Group counselling targets the unique needs of sexual minority youth and may enhance their feelings of social connectedness by allowing them to connect with peers who have similar circumstances and experiences (Goodenow et al., 2006). Supporters of group counselling report that LGBT youth take more comfort in spaces where they are free and more relaxed to discuss topics and issues that are important to them. A third approach that has been explored is the use of intergroup dialogue for considering the characteristic perspectives of sexual minorities (Dessel, Woodford, & Warren, 2011). Although intergroup dialogue has historically been a method for exploring race and gender identities, it has also been entertained as an approach for issues related to sexual orientation to assist clients learn

and accept their own sexual identity for the purposes of personal empowerment.

More recently, Craig (2013) described the development of the Affirmative Supportive Safe and Empowering Talk (ASSET), a gay-affirmative, school-based group counselling intervention designed to promote the resiliency of racialized sexual minority youth. ASSET was developed from a community needs assessment that identified the paucity of school-based supportive services for sexual minority youth. The program aimed to provide a safe place for youth-focused discussion of LGBT student issues, and to enhance youth coping across multiple domains of functioning such as family, school, and mental health. The ASSET model provided benefits to LGBT youth through identification of the universality of LGBT struggles with discrimination, as well as its participants' articulation of their personal strengths.

When schools encouraged their own mental health professionals to find innovative ways to reach and counsel LGBT students, they promoted the strategy of facilitating different stakeholder collaboration in the effort to support better sexual diversity school climates more efficiently (Horne et al., 2007). School counsellors and other counselling practitioners could consider introducing new and innovative counselling approaches for helping LGBT students to other members of the school community, which in turn could stimulate collaborative endeavours among school staff.

Board-wide policies. Apart from administration level school board representatives, other members of the school community may become involved in the creation or amendment of board-wide school policies. The process of developing and implementing school policies not only include trustees, superintendents, and school

administrators, but also teachers, school counsellors and psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers, early childhood educators, educational assistants, student leaders, and various other personnel from individual schools within a district school board (Ozga, 2000; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). Consequently, some schools have taken the opportunity during the process of developing board-wide school policies to facilitate diverse stakeholder collaboration in efforts to support LGBT students.

Researchers have identified certain issues and challenges that warranted attention while using this approach. In their article examining the relationships between perceived heterosexism in high school programs and policies, social environments, and the victimization of sexual minority using a large cohort from an American internet survey, Chesir-Teran and Hughes (2009) commented that the absence of general harassment policies, specific non-discrimination policies, and inclusive programs were all aspects of systemic heterosexism in high schools. Different research studies noted the lack of such policies in many schools, and nearly all sources working on ending homophobic harassment in schools agreed on one tactic for school boards to implement: establishing a clear and explicitly written policy that forbids harassment (Boland, 2002; Hansen, 2007; Holzhauer, 1993; Horowitz & Loehnig, 2003; Szalacha, 2003). Although some studies documented decrease in victimization of LGBT students in schools with comprehensive anti-bullying policies (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Kosciw et al., 2013; Szalacha, 2003), many schools were found to have anti-bullying policies that make no mention of students' sexual orientations and gender identities as bases for bullying bias (Kosciw et al., 2010; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). After examining the

results of their exploratory survey on homophobic bullying in Ireland, Minton and colleagues (2008) endorsed that all school anti-bullying policies should explicitly consider homophobic bullying in their language and implementation since schools with harassment policies specifically addressing discrimination against sexual minorities had lower levels of victimization of LGBT youth. Greytak and colleagues (2013) added that the more explicit policies produced even greater positive outcomes for transgender youth.

Hunter (2007) raised the importance of creating bullying or harassment policies that intervened for the benefit of both LGBT youth and perpetrators. Such policies could incorporate rehabilitative programs based on the principles of progressive discipline (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) and restorative justice (Zehr & Mika, 1997). With progressive discipline, schools can promote positive student behaviour and choose appropriate consequences to address inappropriate behaviour by incorporating elements such as engagement with parents, provision of learning opportunities for youth, and arrangements for psychological support, counselling, and early intervention (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The practice of restorative justice can help ensure that the way forward focuses on the harm done, and involves not only wrongdoers and victims, but also the rest of the youth's community in efforts to heal the harm and make things right (Zehr & Mika, 1997). Related to this concern, Konishi and colleagues (2013) pointed out in their population-level evaluation of school-based interventions to prevent substance abuse among lesbian, gay, and bisexual Canadian adolescents, that carefully designed homophobic bullying policies could even be beneficial in the tackling of issues that affected *all* students, such as problematic substance use and poor academic performance.

Despite the distinct issues and challenges that were encountered while trying to facilitate diverse stakeholder collaboration in the process of developing board-wide school policies, some schools still continued to take advantage of the opportunities presented in the process. School-based programs such as staff retreats involved various school community members in the design and creation of LGBT-affirming school board policies (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). These programs were found to positively influence the organizational settings of the majority of schools that implemented them through the promotion of greater knowledge about, and empathy toward, LGBT concerns. More so, these programs created some policies that were able to help inform statewide legislation.

Providing additional resources to LGBT youth outside of the school's capacity. Scarcity of resources is a common obstacle for many institutions in their efforts to improve social environments, and schools are no exceptions to this reality. Researchers noted that some schools, particularly those with GSAs, provide referrals to community-based resources for LGBT students (Poteat et al., 2013). These referrals connect students to resources outside of their school's capacity, and in the process, facilitate access for youth to additional social networks and supports. With the collaborative involvement of members of the community, especially service providers who are able to deliver services and supports that most schools could not offer, community participation is promoted in the enterprise of caring for the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth (St. John et al., 2014).

Research showed that community participation is one of the key ingredients necessary to ensure longer lasting safe and welcoming environments for LGBT youth (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). By establishing alliances with LGBT-positive agencies,

schools were able to provide access to resources to their LGBT students such as external funding, technical expertise, social networking, and materials such as books and videos that catered to their interests and needs (St. John et al., 2014). These extra resources were especially important for LGBT students who were studying in schools located in rural communities (Snively, 2003). According to Griffin and Ouellett (2002), providing LGBT youth access to more resources from community partner agencies is an important step to going beyond simply creating safe spaces for these marginalized students.

The Importance of Legislation and Public Policy in Supporting LGBT Youth

Legislation that creates legal protections for the rights of LGBT youth has been scarce on an international level, and when implemented, has primarily been in response to publicized issues or tragedies (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; McGuckin & Lewis, 2008; Peel, 2008; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012). Despite identifying a number of groundbreaking victories in education, Russo (2006) reported a dearth of public policy and civil rights protections for all students regarding their sexual orientation throughout the United States.

Likely the source of greatest contention among previously passed bills, the *Equal Access Act* of 1984 was enacted by the United States Congress to prohibit secondary school authorities from denying student organizations access to school space for meetings during non-instructional times based on religion, philosophy, and politics. Prior to the high demand for the formation of GSAs, many religious and faith-based extracurricular clubs across America enjoyed the unfettered use of campus space for different religious purposes after school hours. When the establishment of GSAs gained popularity in the

last two decades, some American schools refused to allow LGBT students to form GSAs or to convene them on school grounds, thereby violating the *Equal Access Act* as federally funded institutions (Fetner & Kush, 2007; Mercier, 2009; Russo, 2006). According to the *Equal Access Act*, schools receiving federal funding are prohibited from discriminating against student non-curricular groups from gathering on campuses, irrespective of their beliefs and organizational missions (Toomey et al., 2011). Public schools are government entities, and everyone in them must conform to the dictates of government laws, regulations, and policies (Lugg, 2003).

A landmark lawsuit victory for LGBT student rights and advocacy occurred when the East High GSA and two of its 16 year old members filed suit in Federal District Court in Utah against the Salt Lake City Board of Education for repeatedly forbidding them to meet in their high school, and won. Since then, some American conservatives tried to use abstinence-only policies and anti-obscenity laws to prohibit GSAs from meeting in public schools but mostly remained unsuccessful in their efforts (Mayo, 2008). The success in protecting the rights of LGBT students to establish GSAs that the *Equal Access Act* in the United States helped instigate and promote is a testament to the possibilities of what appropriate legislation and public policy can accomplish.

Although national or federal anti-bullying policies have been found to decrease the victimization of LGBT students, Robinson and Espelage (2012) maintained that more explicit public policies in addition to those aimed at simply decreasing bullying are necessary to promote safety and inclusivity in schools. The presence of legislation and public policy favoring LGBT students and their rights along with the support of progressive political leaders are needed to promote social change (Fetner & Kush, 2007).

Fetner and Kush (2007) argued that anti-discrimination legislation not only provides policy support for LGBT students who are discriminated against in their schools, but also sends an important societal message in support of LGBT rights. Their findings revealed that policies at state level can support efforts of LGBT students because the pressure of anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBT individuals at that level has a strong positive influence on a large percentage of high schools that support GSAs. They noted, however, that current state legislation does not necessarily always provide protections for the formation of GSAs in the same way the *Equal Access Act* does, and therefore, LGBT-positive laws at a federal level are also very important. Their recommendation was that both state and federal legislation and public policy in favour of LGBT rights be developed and passed in order to afford better and more supports for LGBT youth in schools.

But what exactly is the role of legislation in promoting social change in schools? What is the role of public policy in making schools safer and more inclusive for LGBT youth? More specifically, how does legislation and public policy affect the relationship between school climates and LGBT youth mental health and well-being?

Despite the fact that scholarly researchers have repeatedly extolled the value of legislation and public policy at both state and federal levels in addressing LGBT youth issues such as bullying, harassment, and discrimination in schools (Fetner & Kush, 2007; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Russo, 2006), as far as I could determine from my literature search, there has been very little discourse in published academic, peer-reviewed journal articles on the specific role of legislation and public policy in the advocacy for LGBT student mental health and well-being. This leaves its implicit value as an important matter for my discussion in this dissertation to examine, explore, and define.

The Social, Political, and Legal Contexts Relevant to this Dissertation

Though it is likely that much of published research on legislation and public policy supporting LGBT youth in schools has been based on data gathered from the United States, there are a number of researchers that have looked into, and even critically analyzed, similar legislation and public policy in the Canadian context (Anderson, 2014; Bellini, 2012; Grace & Wells, 2005; Rayside, 2014; St. John et al., 2014; Taylor, 2007). For this dissertation, it is important to review the social, political, and legal contexts relevant to the content that will follow. This entails reviewing the social, political, and legal contexts surrounding the legislation and public policy supporting LGBT youth mental health and well-being in schools not only in Canada, but also in Ontario, and in Waterloo Region, where this dissertation's data were specifically collected.

The Canadian social, political, and legal contexts. Although a large body of international research conducted over the last two decades has brought attention to homophobia in schools and its impact on sexual orientation development, mental health challenges, and risk behaviours (Garofalo et al., 1998; Marshal et al., 2008; Russell, 2011; Russell & Joyner, 2001), the majority of research on strategies and programs to address issues affecting LGBT students has been within the context of the United States public school system. In the United States, where education is provided either by public schools that are funded and controlled by government, or by private schools that receive no government funding and are operated mostly by religious institutions, very few strategies and programs to support LGBT students exist in the religiously affiliated private schools (Getz & Kirkley, 2006). Apart from a few publications that have looked into the success of GSAs and the professional development of staff in American Catholic high schools

(Bayly, 2007; Maher, 2004), most research involving American faith-based or private schools has focused on examining the attitudes, perspectives, and experiences of students and teachers regarding homosexuality (Getz & Kirkley, 2006; Kirby & Michaelson, 2008; Maher & Sever, 2007).

In Canada, the educational system differs from the United States and most other countries in the sense that public funding from the government is not only provided to public secular schools, but also to Catholic separate schools in certain provinces such as Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. In this context, there have been only a few studies on the success of GSAs and other strategies and programs that support LGBT youth in high schools (Goldstein, Collins, & Halder, 2005, 2007; St. John et al., 2014). Moreover, there have been even fewer studies specifically acknowledging faith-related homophobia in publicly-funded Canadian Catholic separate schools (Callaghan, 2007, 2009; Liboro, Travers, & St. John, 2015). For the most part, research in the Canadian school system context has focused on the bullying of LGBT students and the need to challenge homophobia and transphobia as root causes of students' marginalization (McCaskell, 2005; McCaskell & Russell, 2000; Short, 2008; Walton, 2004). In the process, some Canadian researchers have expressed astonishment with how entrenched homophobia is in their country's school systems (Bellini, 2012; Goldstein, 1997).

Each province and territory in Canada is responsible for providing education for its citizens. Provincial and territorial education legislation generally requires school boards to provide their students with a safe learning environment. To accomplish this objective, many school boards develop a Code of Conduct, thereby establishing bullying and harassment policy (Anderson, 2014). While some school boards have been proactive

in fighting homophobic bullying, many others have been less engaged or even inactive. Although evidence suggests that Canadian students are just as frequently bullied and harassed based on their sexual orientation as in other Western countries (Chamberland, 2011; Dorais, 2011; McNinch & Cronin, 2004; Saewyc et al., 2007, 2006; Short, 2013; Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Walton, 2005), only a minority of Canadian school boards have moved on their own towards affirmatively recognizing sexual diversity in their schools (McCaskell, 2005; Rayside, 2008; St. John et al., 2014; Warner, 2002). Furthermore, most provincial and territorial education ministries have been extremely reluctant to develop policies targeting the marginalization of LGBT students for a variety of reasons. Among many, one of the most prominent reasons for this reluctance is the continuing capacity of religious conservatives all over Canada to mobilize opposition to LGBT-inclusive measures, including those in schools (Rayside, 2014). Despite these seemingly bleak circumstances, Canadian history reveals significant moments that have brought hope and inspiration to marginalized sexual minorities.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canadians benefit from certain legal policies and protections against discriminatory actions based on sexual orientation. The most significant of these legal policies and protections is the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), which in 1995, consequently included sexual orientation in its section on anti-discrimination (Parliament of Canada, 2007; Schneider & Dimito, 2008; Rayside, 2014). The historical context behind the addition of sexual orientation to the Charter dates back to 1967 when then Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code that resulted in the decriminalization of homosexuality (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 1967). Trudeau's staunch

defense and support of the decriminalization of homosexuality, legalization of contraception and abortion, and new restrictions for gun ownership paved the way for subsequent liberal legal victories in the next decades. Another significant moment in history was the decision of the American Psychiatric Association [APA] (1973) to remove homosexuality from its official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* following momentous cultural changes brought on by the social protest movements of the 1950s to the 1970s: beginning with the African-American civil rights movement, then evolving on to the women's and gay rights movements. Over a decade later, the Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC] (1986) amended its Code to add sexual orientation as a ground for discrimination and harassment, also finally giving way to pressure from various human rights activist movements. These landmark points in history undoubtedly contributed to events that led to the eventual legalization of same-sex marriage across Canada with the enactment of the *Civil Marriage Act* in 2005, which provided a gender-neutral marriage definition for the entire nation (Parliament of Canada, 2005). Since the incorporation of sexual orientation in the anti-discrimination section of the Charter in 1995, teachers' federations and individual school boards across Canada have also started to include sexual orientation in their anti-discrimination policies (Grace & Wells, 2005; Schneider & Dimito, 2008).

Supreme Court of Canada rulings. In the last two decades, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) faced a number of high-profile cases where prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation was an issue. In *Egan v. Canada* (1995), the SCC ruled that sexual orientation was an analogous ground for protection from discrimination under section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. James Egan and John Norris

Nesbitt were common-law spouses for 36 years. Egan applied for a retirement income supplement in British Columbia assuming that he would be able to receive a spousal allowance. Egan was denied his request as they were informed by the government that the *Old Age Security Act* did not apply to same-sex couples. Egan took the federal government to the SCC, citing a violation of section 15 of the Charter, and was victorious (Anderson, 2014; Bellini, 2012). This was a landmark case because the SCC's decision in favour of Egan led to the specific inclusion of sexual orientation into the section of the Charter on anti-discrimination (Badari, 2010).

In *Vriend v. Alberta* (1998), Delwin Vriend, an employee at a Christian college in Edmonton, Alberta was fired in 1991 for being gay. When Vriend attempted to file a human rights complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission, he was denied on the grounds that Alberta did not include sexual orientation in its *Individual Rights Protection Act*. Although Vriend originally won his case when he filed a lawsuit for being denied his complaint, the government of Alberta filed an appeal that went to the SCC. The SCC then ruled that the Commission's omission violated section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Bellini, 2012). Consequently, the Alberta Teachers' Association amended its Code of Conduct to require "teachers to teach in a manner that respects a person's sexual orientation", which paved the way for several LGBT-positive initiatives in the province (Grace & Wells, 2004).

In *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36* (2002), the SCC ruled that school authorities could not impose their religious values by prohibiting teachers to use materials portraying same-sex couples in a positive light for elementary school classes (Rayside, 2014). The SCC stated that religious beliefs could not be used as a basis for judging

curriculum and that the Surrey school board's banning of Chamberlain's educational material choices for teaching was a restriction on freedom of speech (MacDougall & Clarke, 2004).

In *Hall v. Durham Catholic District School Board* (2002), openly gay student Marc Hall asked the Durham Catholic District School Board if he could take his boyfriend to the prom and was refused on the grounds that Catholic doctrine did not support homosexuality (Bellini, 2012). Hall and his parents sued the school board, stating the board's decision violated the Ontario *Education Act*. The case was heard in front of the Ontario Court of Justice and resulted in an interlocutory injunction with Judge Robert McKinnon's ruling in favour of Hall attending the prom with his partner (Grace & Wells, 2005). The case was set to proceed to the SCC, but because of events unrelated to the merits of the arguments, the case was adjourned.

While these SCC landmark cases did not lead to any new specific legislation for the support of LGBT youth, as historical precedent-setting-litigations, they demonstrated the power of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to set the stage for LGBT rights and protections within school systems (Schneider & Dimito, 2008), and likely the visibility of LGBT individuals.

Activism and social change in school systems. In the mid-1980s, the huge burden of HIV/AIDS on gay communities attracted significant publicity that increased the visibility of sexual diversity across society, including school communities. Despite the spotlight on LGBT human rights, there was still little systemic change in school policies and programs for LGBT youth during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Rayside, 2008). By

1995, however, the inclusion of sexual orientation in section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* by the SCC instigated the amendment of many provincial, territorial, and federal human rights statutes to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Gender identity was subsequently added to the Human Rights Codes across Canada as well, beginning in the Northwest Territories in 2010; Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario in 2012; and Newfoundland and Labrador in 2013 (Hunt & Eaton, 2007).

The mid-1990s saw an acceleration of efforts to generate LGBT-inclusive policies and practices in Canadian school systems. In some situations, the initiatives formed within boards and among students, teachers, staff, and school administrators. Students were often at the forefront of advocacy and activism to make their schools more inclusive, creating GSAs and celebrating events like Anti-Homophobia Day or Ally Week. In the late 1990s, these efforts became most prominent in British Columbia and Ontario (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere [Egale], 2011). The first significant policy shifts at the school board level were the result of activism mobilizing Toronto's public school boards, which enhanced the visibility of LGBT issues (Goldstein et al., 2007; McCaskell, 2005; Rayside, 2008; Short, 2013). In the early 2000s, school boards in other provinces, mostly in the large cities, followed suit by establishing policies that explicitly included the needs of LGBT students. Calgary, Montreal, Quebec, Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Winnipeg were among the cities that created policies supportive of LGBT youth (MacDougall & Clarke, 2004; Walton, 2004; Schneider & Dimito, 2008).

Education legislation in Canada. Education legislation in Canada has moved forward at different paces for different provinces and territories over the years (Anderson,

2014). In Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island, the language of education legislation has remained conspicuously silent in terms of including sexual orientation, gender identity, and the provision of safe learning environments. In New Brunswick and the Northwest and Nunavut Territories, the content of education legislation has at least already included the mandate for the provision of positive education or safe learning environments, but has yet to specify the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in their policy texts. So far, it has only been in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario, where education legislation has mandated schools the positive obligation to provide LGBT youth with a safe environment free from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, including bullying and harassment (Anderson, 2014). Rayside (2014) noted, however, that most provinces and territories in Canada have moved very slowly with enacting these LGBT-positive education legislation changes in the last decade, and that sadly, there have been more studies than policies developed in some cases.

The Ontario social, political, and legal contexts. Since 1990, the province of Ontario has seen three governments and an abundance of educational policy changes. In 1994, the Ontario Ministry of Education put into effect the *Violence-free Schools Policy*, which not only addressed school safety, but also specifically included sexual orientation in its content (Rayside, 2014; Winton, 2012). At that time though, the Ministry of Education seemed to have no idea how distinctly ubiquitous homophobic bullying already was in Ontario schools (Short, 2013). The *Violence-free Schools Policy* required school boards to develop and implement their own board-wide policies to prevent and respond to violence in their own campuses without explicit direction and guidance, essentially

allowing and encouraging huge disparities in focus and content in the management of safety between districts in the province.

School climates started to shift as growing attention was paid to violence, drugs, weapons, and gangs. University of Ottawa professor and sociologist Thomas Gabor gained the attention of many politicians when he submitted a report to the Solicitor General of Canada in 1995, endorsing zero tolerance for bullying as a policy for implementation in education. Gabor was a staunch proponent for zero tolerance and did not believe that minority students should be treated any differently despite their known experiences with systemic oppression and discrimination in society (OHRC, 2011). In spite of the growing evidence that the real victims of zero tolerance policies would be visible minorities (Carter, Janzen, & Paterson, 1999), then Ontario Premier Mike Harris included Gabor's recommendations in his 1999 election propaganda as part of his "Common Sense Revolution".

In 2000, under the Harris Conservative government, the Ontario Legislative Assembly [OLA] passed the *Safe Schools Act* after it was introduced by the Ministry of Education to promote more standardized and centralized school violence policies. The *Safe Schools Act* outlined specific infarctions that would result in automatic suspensions or expulsions from Ontario schools (Winton, 2012). Apart from mandatory suspensions and expulsions, the other significant changes in policy that the act would enforce were related to zero tolerance for violent acts, drugs, and weapons in schools, providing even more power to teachers, administrators, and school boards to suspend or expel students (OHRC, 2011). In many ways, the new legislation mirrored zero tolerance policies introduced throughout the United States in the 1990s. Under zero tolerance policies,

perpetrators were punished uniformly and were suspended or expelled after committing certain acts without any consideration of factors surrounding their actions (Kajs, 2006). However, the *Safe Schools Act* was not entirely a zero tolerance approach, as it allowed for consideration of a few mitigating circumstances surrounding acts of violence before suspension or expulsion was considered (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Many educators still viewed the act as heavy-handed and advancing a law-and-order approach to school safety (McCaskell, 2012). Before long, the act became quite controversial, as its approach would punish a significant number of racial minority youth in schools over white students. The racialized students who were suspended or expelled experienced serious long term consequences, had trouble going back to school, poorer relationships with teachers, and developed negative attitudes towards adults in the educational system (Brown, 2007; Kajs, 2006). In a report to the OHRC, human rights consultant Ken Bhattacharjee criticized the *Safe Schools Act* as being discriminatory to racial minorities and students with disabilities (Bellini, 2012). He expressed that racialized students and those with special needs were disproportionately punished by the new act. Regrettably, there was no mention of LGBT youth and the act's impact on their welfare in his report.

In 2006, openly gay politician Kathleen Wynne of the Liberal Party was promoted to Minister of Education, and from the beginning of her tenure, took a different approach to safety in Ontario schools. Instead of the zero tolerance practices of the past government, Wynne recommended a progressive discipline approach. Her endorsement was that the Ontario College of Teachers, Association of Canadian Deans of Education, Council of Directors of Education, Canadian Association of Principals, and boards of education must provide safe school training that included prevention and management of

homophobia (Bellini, 2012). Every form of education training in Ontario was mandated to change the way it perceived and treated gay and lesbian students. This was a significant shift in Ontario education legislation and policy since it was an acknowledgement that the issue of safety was extremely complex, not just for victims, but also for perpetrators, and that LGBT youth could be at either end of the spectrum.

In 2007, Bill 212 was introduced by the Liberal Party and passed by the OLA as the *Education Amendment Act: Progressive Discipline and School Safety*. The new act revised parts of the *Safe Schools Act* and introduced certain changes (Bellini, 2012; Winton, 2012). First, it marked a shift from a zero tolerance to a progressive discipline approach. This meant that there were no longer any mandatory expulsions. Behaviours that automatically led to suspension under the previous *Safe Schools Act* instead became behaviours that *may* lead to suspension. Next, it required school administrators to investigate mitigating circumstances that have any influence on disciplinary actions. Mitigating factors may involve a student's history, previous disciplinary records, race, religion, ethnic origin, disability, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Then, the new act extended the right for schools to discipline even off school property. Lastly, and probably most importantly, Bill 212 added the word "bullying" to the *Safe Schools Act*, defining it as a "dynamic of unhealthy interaction that may take many forms, physical (e.g. pushing, hitting, tripping) or verbal (e.g. name calling, mocking, making comments that are racist, sexist, or homophobic)" (Bellini, 2012). With the definition of bullying added to the act, the importance of verbal abuse was rightfully placed at par with physical abuse.

In 2009, Wynne introduced even more amendments to the *Safe Schools Act* under Bill 157, the *Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act*. Bill 157 focused its attention on

gender-based violence that included inappropriate sexual behaviour, sexual harassment, and homophobic and transphobic bullying. It emphasized the role of teachers, staff, administrators, and other school personnel with regards to treatment of bullying incidents. In particular, it required them to respond, report, and record such incidents in a timely fashion. The bill stiffened the requirements for reporting harassment. Later, the Ministry of Education issued a memorandum based on Bill 157, requiring all school boards to develop and implement policies that clearly indicated specific attention to gender identity and sexual orientation (Rayside, 2014). Bill 157 was an important legislation prior to the introduction of Bill 13, the *Accepting Schools Act* (Table 2).

Table 2 *Important Legislation Prior to the Accepting Schools Act*

Bill	Title	Year passed
81	Safe Schools Act	2000
212	Education Amendment Act: Progressive Discipline and School Safety	2007
157	Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act	2009

The Accepting Schools Act. Before the end of 2011, then Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty introduced Bill 13, the *Accepting Schools Act*. Bill 13 toughened penalties for bullying and hate-motivated actions (particularly those associated with bias related to gender identity and sexual orientation), as well as required school boards to create equity policies and to support students who want to establish groups and activities aimed at promoting inclusivity, including GSAs (Lewis, 2011). These concerns were catapulted to the headlines of major news publications by the suicide of an openly gay student who was persistently cyber-bullied, adding to the demand on the government to institute policies that incorporated a complete range of equity concerns, notably sexual orientation and gender identity (McCaskell, 2012; Mills, 2011). Because there was push back on some aspects of the act, especially from religious conservatives in the province, it took over half

a year before Bill 13 was passed by the OLA, and finally given Royal Assent on June 19, 2012. Bill 13 included several amendments to the *Education Act* that required considerable tasks for Ontario school principals, school boards, and the Minister of Education to perform (OLA, 2012).

School principals' tasks. Ontario principals are required by Bill 13 to investigate reported incidents of specified activities, including homophobic and transphobic bullying. They would have to communicate the results of their investigation to the teacher or school personnel who informed them of the reportable incident. They would also have to notify the parents or guardians of both the pupil who they believed was harmed, as well as the pupil who they believed engaged in the activity that resulted in the harm. The principal must then take steps to ensure the harmed pupil's safety and provide supports to the pupil in response to the harm that was done. Principals must invite the parent or guardian of the pupils concerned on different occasions to discuss the supports that will be made available to the pupils, as well as the disciplinary measures that will follow. According to the act, there would be progressively more serious consequences for repeated or more serious inappropriate behaviour. As prevention strategies, principals would set up procedures that would allow pupils themselves to report incidents of bullying safely, and in a manner that minimizes the possibility of reprisal.

School boards' tasks. School boards are required by Bill 13 to create and implement policies that promote the prevention of bullying and a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils; provide annual professional development programs for school staff about bullying prevention and the promotion of a positive school climate; provide programs, interventions, and supports for pupils who have been

bullied, witnessed bullying, or engaged in bullying; and use surveys at least once every two years to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their policies relating to their new goals.

Furthermore, the school boards are required by the act to support pupils who want to establish and lead activities or organizations that promote a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acceptance of and respect for others, and the creation of a positive school climate. School boards are explicitly prohibited from refusing the name "Gay-Straight Alliance" or a similar name for certain organizations, as long as the name of the activity or organization is consistent with the promotion of a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils. However, nothing in the amendments should be interpreted to require the school boards to support the establishment of an activity or organization in a school unless there is at least one pupil who wants to establish and lead it. All school boards are asked to develop a model bullying prevention and intervention plan. Lastly, school boards must submit annual reports to the Education Minister with respect to suspensions and expulsions.

The tasks of the Ontario Minister of Education. The Minister is required by Bill 13 to make policies and guidelines with respect to disciplining pupils, bullying prevention and intervention in schools, and the collection of specified information and about specified reports, as well as set out matters that must be included in the policies and guidelines. The Minister must annually post information submitted by the school boards about the number of reported suspensions and expulsions on the ministry's website.

Ontario Catholic sector's response to the Accepting Schools Act. Significant

media attention was drawn to the issue of homophobic and transphobic bullying when it was announced in November 2011 that the provincial government was proposing Bill 13, the *Accepting Schools Act* (Lewis, 2011). According to the press release, Bill 13 would require all publicly-funded school boards (both secular and Catholic separate) in Ontario to implement programs and policies that combat bullying and "promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils, including pupils of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, or disability..." (Lewis, 2011; OLA, 2012). It would also call for "activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of and respect for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name Gay-Straight Alliances or another name" (OLA, 2012). This announcement sparked a contentious debate that lasted for over half a year between the Ontario government and some members and representatives of the Catholic school system, as well as among many of the representatives of the Ontario Catholic school system themselves (Lewis, 2012; Nonato, 2012; Perkel, 2012). The subsequent polemics surrounding the implementation of GSAs and other LGBT-affirming strategies and programs in publicly-funded high schools from January to June 2012 were thoroughly documented by the Canadian news media, both in print and online.

In February 2012, the National Post reported that the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA), supported by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO), presented a new 15-page school counter-document that recommended stringent guidelines for the formation of more generic "Respecting Differences" clubs in

place of GSAs, which they deemed too controversial and an affront to Catholic discipline and values (Nonato, 2012).

By April 2012, despite rising tensions between the opposing sides, it was clear to the media that there was a split among the Ontario Roman Catholic school representatives over the acceptance of GSAs and other LGBT-affirming strategies and programs in their campuses. While the OCSTA and ACBO were against Bill 13, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, representing 44,000 Catholic school board teachers, supported it (Lewis, 2012).

Before the end of May 2012, then Education Minister Laurel Broten confirmed that there would be no further compromises with the Ontario Catholic school boards. She stated that once Bill 13 was passed, students and teachers would be able to form LGBT-affirming clubs in their schools if they desired, and call them by any name, even if they chose the name "Gay-Straight Alliance" (Perkel, 2012). After the OLA passed Bill 13 into law on June 5, 2012, the ACBO released a concession statement to the press attesting that Ontario Catholic high schools will abide by the *Accepting Schools Ac*t requiring them to allow GSA-type clubs and other LGBT-affirming programs in their campuses. They also emphasized that at no point was civil disobedience to the new law ever considered (Mann, 2012). In Waterloo Region, where the study for this dissertation was conducted, there were no signs of civil disobedience documented after Bill 13 was passed.

The Waterloo Region social, political, and legal contexts. Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada is a municipality of approximately 500,000 people, consisting of three smaller cities (Cambridge, Waterloo, and Kitchener) and their environs, approximately an

hour's drive southwest of Toronto. It has a median income of $29,500, one of the highest in southern Ontario (Region of Waterloo, 2006), and is home to two universities, and one college. Like many municipalities in Ontario, it has two types of publicly-funded school boards: a secular one, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), and a Catholic separate one, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB). At the time the research for this dissertation was conducted, the WRDSB comprised of 16 schools, all of which had GSAs, while the WCDSB had 5 schools, with only two schools that officially had an organization that functioned in a similar manner to a GSA.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education introduced its *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy,* which provided a number of guidelines that schools were asked to use to foster a safe and accepting school climate for all youth. The document included references to the OHRC Code (1990), and specifically highlighted discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation. Whereas historically, content on homophobia and LGBT concerns were absent in this kind of public policy (Walton, 2004), the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* explicitly emphasized homophobia as an unacceptable form of discrimination.

Prior to the introduction of the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, the WRDSB was already well on its way to addressing issues of equity and inclusion in Waterloo Region schools. The *WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Policy*, first approved in 2006, specifically incorporated protections on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation. This policy led to the commissioning of an *Equity Audit Report* in 2007, which recommended that an Equity and Inclusion Office be created along with two equity and inclusion officer positions. In 2008, an assistant superintendent position was added to

the Equity and Inclusion Office structure. The function of the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office was to ensure equitable school experiences for all youth in Waterloo Region – a role that was supported by both the *WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Policy* (2006), and the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2009) more recent *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (St. John, et al., 2014).

Chapter 3

Method

Partnerships

The participants included in this study are part of a larger study examining the success of GSAs and other LGBT-affirming initiatives in supporting sexual and gender minority students in Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada. The Equity, Sexual Health, and HIV (ESH-HIV) Research Group of the Centre for Community Research, Learning, and Action at Wilfrid Laurier University undertook the larger study, in partnership with the OK2BME Program of KW Counselling Services. OK2BME is a program that offers counselling and support groups for LGBT youth, as well as education and training to service providers, school-based stakeholders, and the broader community. Over the years, the ESH-HIV Research Group, the OK2BME Program, and advocates from the schools of both of the regional school boards have worked closely together as partners to identify and address LGBT youth concerns and issues in Waterloo Region. As a member of the ESH-HIV Research Group, I had the privilege of gaining access to the strong connections the research team had built with the OK2BMBE Program and advocates for LGBT youth in schools. It was because of the strength of these connections that I was able to reach prospective participants for the study.

The Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board (REB) reviewed and approved the purposes and conduct of my study on October 2011 (Modifications to REB project # 2806), before I began the recruitment strategies and participant interviews. As the same interviewer for all the 26 interviews of this study, I used an REB-approved

interview guide to maintain a degree of structure within and uniformity among the interviews (Appendix A).

Participants

In the ESH-HIV Research Group's larger study, 38 interviews were primarily conducted to examine the impact of GSAs and other LGBT-affirming initiatives on the mental health and well-being of sexual and gender minority youth in the schools of Waterloo Region. After the research team's initial 12 interviews for the pilot study, I subsequently interviewed 26 stakeholders from Waterloo Region with an additional focus on the relevance of the *Accepting Schools Act* as a bill undergoing legislation in early 2012 that had aspects purportedly dedicated to support LGBT youth in Ontario. I conducted these interviews in a span of approximately six months, from April to September of 2012.

I was able to complete these interviews through a variety of strategies, initially using purposive sampling methods, and later, through snowball sampling. I recruited students at the Waterloo Region GSA conference in 2012, an annual event cosponsored by the OK2BME Program and the WRDSB, which brought together youth from across the region to network and discuss issues relevant to GSAs, as well as participate in workshops facilitated by LGBT community members. I did this by posting several REB-approved recruitment flyers (Appendix B) at the premises of KW Counselling and the GSA conference location, and made two public announcements on the day of the conference. I selected students who attended the conference for recruitment because of their past or current membership in local GSAs. I circulated an additional recruitment

flyer through the OK2BME Program's e-mail network and placed an advertisement using the same flyer on their website. I also recruited teachers, school staff, and board representatives at the GSA conference and by invitation through the personal and professional networks of the research team using REB-approved recruitment emails (Appendix C).

I specifically chose to recruit students, teachers, school staff, administrators, and representatives from the two school boards who were in unique positions to provide information and personal perspectives relevant to the purposes of this study based on their roles, job descriptions, individual commitment, collaborative involvement, histories, and own lived experiences studying, and working in or with the Waterloo Region school systems, particularly concerning advocacy for LGBT student mental health and well-being (purposive sampling method). I was able to choose which individuals from the two school boards to recruit during the OK2BME conference because many of them stood out as highly informed and actively engaged participants of the conference. They were outspoken and confident about their advocacy for LGBT youth issues in schools, and their passion for their advocacy was apparent during the conference, making them excellent candidates for the interviews of the study. Subsequently, I was also able to recruit some participants from the referrals of initial interviewees who suggested names of other key stakeholders in the school setting who would be able to share valuable perspectives on the research focus of the study (snowball sampling method).

At the time of this analysis, 11 students from eight high schools, six teacher GSA sponsors from five high schools, seven representatives from the administration level of the two school boards, and two key informant service providers who provide LGBT

counselling, education, and outreach support to the community had participated in the study's confidential, digitally recorded, semi-structured, open-ended interviews.

Among the 11 students, only one identified as transgender; none identified as heterosexual; four identified as bisexual; and seven identified as gay. There were four students who identified as male and seven who identified as female. The students' ethno-racial backgrounds were mostly white, with six students who identified as White-Canadians, two who identified as White-South Americans, and one who identified as White-European. Only two students identified as non-white, one who identified as Asian, and another who identified as someone of mixed Aboriginal-European descent. Eight of the students were from schools affiliated with the WRDSB and three were from a school affiliated with Catholic school board. Seven students were from schools located in Kitchener, three students were from schools located in Waterloo, and one student was from a school located in Cambridge. I assigned pseudonyms to each student from the beginning of the study to protect their privacy and confidentiality, particularly in the following quotes I will use in the Findings section.

Among the six teacher GSA sponsors, there was only one who confidentially identified as gay. Two of the teachers were from a school affiliated with the WCDSB and the other four were from four different schools affiliated with the WRDSB. None of the seven representatives from the administration level of the two school boards identified as a sexual or gender minority. From the seven representatives, four were from the public school board and three were from the Catholic one. Out of the seven board representatives, three were trustees, one was a superintendent, two were staff members who worked closely with school GSAs, and one was a school administrator. Each of the

seven representatives from the administration level of the two school boards were in privileged positions of influence with regards to advocating for LGBT youth mental health and well-being. Most of them had already spent years advocating for LGBT students in their own capacities as school administrator, staff member working on equity and inclusion board initiatives, superintendent, or board trustee. This was also true for the two service providers who had been in their positions for years, long enough to have witnessed the changes brought about by their own advocacy for LGBT students, as well as the advocacy of other key stakeholders in Waterloo Region.

Procedures

I interviewed the participants either at the Wilfrid Laurier University campus or at a community location of their choice. The interviews were between one to two hours in length. All participants gave their written consent to participate in the study by signing an REB-approved Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) prior to providing any demographic information and the start of their interview. Youth received a $25 honorarium following their participation. They completed a demographics questionnaire detailing age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and the number of years they had been with their GSA (Table 3), as well as the city where their high school was located, and their ethno-racial background. Teachers were asked about their school and the age of the GSAs in their schools (Table 4). I requested less demographic information from the teachers, the representatives from the administration level of the two school boards, and the service providers who participated in the interviews, in order to maintain their anonymity and protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Table 3 *Student Demographics (n=11)*

Participant pseudonym	Age	Trans	Gender	Sexual orientation	GSA membership
Keith	19	No	Male	Gay	1 year
Shaun	18	No	Male	Gay	4 years
Sydney	16	Yes	Female	Bisexual	2 years
Mike	18	No	Male	Gay	1 year
Ariel	16	No	Female	Bisexual	1 year
Mary	17	No	Female	Lesbian	4 years
Alice	17	No	Female	Lesbian	1 year
Sara	18	No	Female	Bisexual	2 years
Helen	16	No	Female	Bisexual	2 years
Chloe	18	No	Female	Lesbian	1 year
Jaime	19	No	Male	Gay	1 year

Table 4 *Teacher Demographics (n=6)**

Teacher	Age of GSA	Grade level in school
1	5 years	9-12
2	1 year	9-12
3	5 years	7-8
4	6 years	9-12
5	1 year	9-12
6	4 years	9-12

*Providing additional demographic information on board representatives and service providers would compromise their anonymity.

The semi-structured interviews with the students focused on two main areas. First, I asked the youth about their experiences in their schools regarding bullying and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity, their involvement with their GSAs, the success of their schools in promoting a safe school environment, and the presence of any LGBT-affirming programs and policies in their schools. The questions on these topics were to identify if their school experiences mirrored those of bullied and discriminated LGBT youth described in previous studies published in peer-reviewed research articles. Second, I asked the youth what their general impressions were of Bill 13, what their perspectives were on the strengths and weaknesses of the bill as a proposed statute, what benefits or challenges would result from its legislation, and what other specific comments they had regarding the bill. In addition to asking them what their views were on the experiences of LGBT youth in their schools and their own roles as advocates

for LGBT students, I also asked the teacher GSA sponsors, representatives from the administration level of the two school boards, and the service providers similar questions about their own perspectives on Bill 13.

Since policies and procedures of the WRDSB and the WCDSB regarding support for LGBT students were discussed in the interviews, I conducted a thorough review of all the relevant Policies and Administrative Procedures Memoranda that were available to the public on their respective school board websites to verify the accuracy of the participants' comments regarding the school board policies and procedures. I also reviewed from their websites any available content that included information regarding events or initiatives that were meant to support LGBT youth in their schools after the enactment of Bill 13 on June 5, 2012, which could be construed as adherence, compliance, or a positive response to the legislation. These document reviews would be important sources of information when I later on relate the perspectives of the study participants on Bill 13 with what actually transpired in the Waterloo Region schools two and a half years after its legislation.

In order to locate all documents available on each of the websites of the two Waterloo Region school boards that were relevant to the study, I utilized the search function of their respective websites and used appropriate key words for my search such as "equity", "inclusion", "diversity", "safe", "bullying", "harassment", "discrimination", "LGBT", "sexual minority", "gender minority", "gay", "lesbian", "bisexual", "transgender", "professional development", "curriculum", "policy", and "procedure". From the results of the searches, I looked into every single document that came up and chose all the documents that had any information specifically related to strategies,

programs, and polices that can be interpreted as adherence, compliance, or a positive response to the mandates of Bill 13. After compiling these documents, I then began to identify from the documents specific initiatives that were carried out by the WRDSB and WCDSB in the last two and a half years that could be in any way interpreted as or related to efforts in support of promoting positive school climates and addressing LGBT youth issues in schools as mandated by Bill 13. Together with information I received from recent correspondence with a representative from each of the two school boards, I used the data I gathered from the document reviews to examine perspectives of the interview participants on Bill 13 from two and a half years ago in the analysis of the study.

Materials and Analysis

Together with the other members of the research team of the ESH-HIV Research group, we used a modified version of the grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis (Charmaz, 2003, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The grounded theory method allows theory to emerge inductively from the data rather than starting from hypotheses, and then deductively establishing findings. Rather than applying a theoretical framework to data, theory emerges from the data. We modified this approach by establishing a categorical coding framework prior to inductive coding, which allowed analysis to focus on our areas of interest. We transcribed interviews verbatim and coded them using NVivo 10 software. After reviewing the initial transcripts, we developed a categorical coding framework based on the research objectives, interview guide questions, my experience in the interviews, and the transcript data. We developed several categories for the framework during this initial process (e.g. “coming out and being out in negative school climates”).

In the second stage of coding, one other member of the research team and I separately coded interviews from one youth, one teacher, one board representative, and one service provider to ensure intercoder reliability. We developed codes inductively, through the use of "open" coding – using the coding framework as a guide for sorting the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In open coding, research analysts name and describe textual data by asking, "What is happening here?" While many of the codes fit in the existing categorical coding framework, many others did not, which required the establishment of new categories. Next, we gathered together to reach consensus regarding any codes where disagreement existed. At the same time, members of the research team began to make connections among codes and discussed potential theories. Once consensus on the open codes was achieved from the first four interviews, I coded the remaining transcripts using the established coding framework while making appropriate changes as new information emerged from the data. This was easier for me to do because of the intimate knowledge I had with the data, having conducted all the interviews and transcribed most of them.

During the final stage of coding, we identified emerging themes, patterns, and relationships within and between participants' responses. We used a process of data triangulation (Denzin, 1989; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991) between service provider, board representative, teacher, and student responses to enhance the credibility of the data. We also appraised and altered themes iteratively and reflexively as a team (Alvesson & Skoldburg, 2000; Watt, 2007), so that alternate explanations could be explored and discussed. We kept in mind that researchers and participants in the study affected each other mutually and continually during the research process.

In addition to the new themes and lessons that I will generate from the analysis of the interview data using a modified grounded theory approach, I will also present a new framework in this dissertation that could have promising future applications. I will posit the new framework based on theory that emerged from the exploration and examination of data I gathered from recent correspondences with representatives from the two school boards, relevant documents I reviewed that were available from the boards' respective websites, and the interview participants' lived experiences and perspectives on Bill 13.

The Advantages and Constraints of Qualitative Research

Admittedly, having been previously educated and trained in a strictly positivist field prior to entering my current Community Psychology graduate program, there was something quite liberating about being able to conduct qualitative research procedures and analysis in this study, and fully appreciate the freedoms and advantages that the qualitative research approach and methods have to offer. The distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research, the nature of competing paradigms in qualitative research, and the bases for answering ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) were all important concepts I needed to learn in my quest to become more knowledgeable about the fundamentals of qualitative research. Granted that many critics have been reluctant to accept the reliability and validity of qualitative research studies over the years (Shenton, 2004), I recognized that proponents of qualitative research have been determined to establish and preserve stringent evaluative criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that would bolster the rigour and trustworthiness of their approach in order to lend credence to research studies that have been conducted using its methods and forms of analyses.

Personally, I had no qualms and compunctions about conducting qualitative research for this study, as I was quite content and confident knowing that, just like quantitative research, its use had certain advantages and constraints that I was aware of and willing to accept. The advantages of conducting qualitative research include an increased degree of flexibility in the research design; the ability to avoid reliance on the researcher's predetermined assumptions; the opportunity to provide greater depth and detail in a researcher's findings; the capacity to simulate participants' unique individual experiences; and the ability to focus on the meanings of key issues for participants, especially any contradictions or inconsistencies in their perspectives (Griffin, 2004; Prasad, 2005). Qualitative research enables investigators to tackle more sensitive issues, appreciate the wider context of people's experiences, and make connections across different areas of participants' lives (Griffin, 2004). The constraints of using qualitative research in one's work, on the other hand, include the time-consuming and expensive nature of the collection and analysis of research information; the dependence on a relatively smaller number of participants; the reliance on the experience and skills of the researcher; the difficulty to make systematic comparisons; and the reluctance of many academics, practitioners, and policymakers to take it seriously (Griffin, 2004; Prasad, 2005). In order to compensate for these constraints, the researcher should be able to take on the responsibility of showing the reader that the report based on the research can be trusted. The warrant for the claims in a researcher's report can be established through a variety of procedures. For this study, I sought the assistance of other experienced researchers from the ESH-HIV Research Group not only to examine the data both independently and collaboratively, but also apply the method of data triangulation to

strengthen the rigour of the study's research process and the trustworthiness of the themes, lessons, and theory that emerged from our research analysis (Denzin, 2004).

The most important factor that led to the choice of using qualitative research, and more specifically, a modified grounded theory approach for this investigation, was the set of research questions I posed based on the purposes of the study. The kinds of research questions that are posed in a study typically dictate the kind of research approach and method that will be selected by researchers to investigate certain phenomenon (Griffin, 2004). Since the information I sought after to answer the research questions of this study required learning about specific experiences and perspectives that needed to be explored in greater depth and detail, and demanded a higher degree of flexibility when it came to research design, the obvious and rational choice for me was to use qualitative research as an approach. The use of a modified grounded theory that I described earlier in this section was exceptionally useful for the creation of knowledge, themes, and theory that spontaneously and organically emerged from data that were derived from my open-ended, semi-structured interviews. I believe that the theory and lessons that I will extrapolate and deduce from this study have the potential to contribute relevant and useful knowledge not only to LGBT research in Community Psychology, but also to the study of the relationships between public policy, advocacy research, and social change. This added potential could be pertinent to a wider array of practical applications in other disciplines that have a stake in efforts advocating for marginalized populations in society.

Ethical Considerations

The main ethical considerations that I had to keep in mind for this study primarily

involved maintaining the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of my interviewees, a concern that is characteristic of research investigations engaging small connected communities in which significant relationships exist among community members (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012). These considerations are even more typical and commonly part of studies that include participants who partake in audiotaped and transcribed interviews, exploring sensitive issues that involve vulnerable members of different communities (Lichtman 2013). In my study, wherein the risks of being identified for being a sexual or gender minority, revealing negative school experiences, expressing dissenting opinions and controversial perspectives, or merely participating in the interviews could potentially lead to suspensions, expulsions, postponement of career advancement, job loss, or damage to reputation if the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants were not appropriately safeguarded, it was essential to be very conscious of such ethical considerations.

Because these ethical considerations were particularly relevant to my study, it was important for me to accomplish several things. First, it was important that I identified procedures and areas of weaknesses in the study's research process where people outside of the research team involved could possibly identify participants, and therefore, lead to participants' loss of the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Second, it was also important that I identified and included measures and steps that I would implement in the research process to address the procedures and areas of weaknesses that pose as risks to the loss of participants' privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Third, it was necessary that I presented all the concerns and preventive measures for implementation that were related to these ethical considerations to an institutional review board, in this case, the

Research Ethics Board (REB) of Wilfrid Laurier University, for evaluation, scrutiny, and approval. Fourth, it was necessary that I appropriately responded to the feedback of the REB by incorporating new measures and steps into the research process that they believed and recommended would best preserve the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants. Fifth, it was important that I informed prospective participants of the possibilities in the study that could lead to the loss of their privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality if they decided to participate, as well as the measures and steps that I would take to prevent such breaches to occur. Lastly, and probably most importantly, it was essential that I determined and documented that the participants understood the concerns and preventive measures involved in the ethical considerations that were specified in the study.

In order to accomplish all these things, I sought the guidance, experience, and expertise of my advisor, and the assistance of the research team where I belonged. Together, we identified procedures and areas of weaknesses that could potentially lead to the loss of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of our prospective participants, and then identified and instituted measures that we would implement in order to prevent such loss. Next, we included all this information in our application for research study approval from the REB. Then, we incorporated all the new recommendations of the REB into our research process to ensure that we were going to do everything we reasonably could to prevent the loss of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants, which was also necessary to obtain the REB approval that we subsequently received. Lastly, I made certain that all the information surrounding the ethical considerations involved in the study were clearly expressed in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D), which the

participants needed to read, understand, and sign prior to their participation in the study. The measures and steps to safeguard the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants included making sure their names would only appear on the Informed Consent Form and not on any other documents, assigning pseudonyms to the students from the beginning of their participation (especially because they accounted for the biggest number of type of participants), storing Informed Consent Forms separate from all other study documents, keeping all study documents locked in a secure place, ensuring that only members of the research team who were approved by the REB were the only ones who had access to study documents and audiotaped interviews, verifying that all study electronic and hard copy materials were de-identified (especially in the transcriptions and the quotations in this paper), and presenting most of the data in this dissertation in aggregate form with the exception of quotations that were necessary to underscore specific points in the Findings section. In the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D), participants were also informed prior to their participation in the interviews that although all reasonable efforts were and would be taken to safeguard their privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, there were no absolute guarantees that they would not be identified as a participant of the study. The Informed Consent Form also informed them that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw from it anytime without repercussions.

Chapter 4

Findings I:

School Experiences of LGBT Youth and Their Advocates in Waterloo Region

Although it has already been documented in research studies that youth in Canadian high schools are bullied and marginalized on the basis of their gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation as other LGBT students are in other Western countries (Chamberland, 2011; Dorais, 2011; McCaskell, 2005; McNinch & Cronin, 2004; Saewyc et al., 2007, 2006; Short, 2013; Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Rayside, 2008; Walton, 2005), it was necessary to explore the specific contexts in which the Waterloo Region LGBT students and key stakeholders were in to ascertain how significant bias-based harassment was in their schools, as well as how responsive their schools were in addressing the needs of the LGBT youth. Exploring these specific contexts within and surrounding the Waterloo Region school systems allowed me to obtain more detailed background on and greater understanding of the participants' perspectives on Bill 13. In order to attain a better grasp of their perspectives, it was essential to have a clear idea of the background, lived experiences, and distinct challenges of the LGBT youth and other key stakeholders in Waterloo Region.

Generally speaking, the analysis of the data gathered from the study revealed that the experiences of the LGBT youth in the publicly-funded schools of Waterloo Region were in many ways similar to those that have been described in published journal articles. Their experiences mirrored the adverse impacts of negative school climates on the mental health and well-being of sexual and gender minority students previously documented by

other researchers. However, looking deeper into the specific contexts within and surrounding the Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools, it later became apparent how the activism and proactive responses of the LGBT students and their advocates to the negative school climates that needed to be addressed in their schools could have significantly influenced their perspectives on Bill 13.

Negative School Experiences of LGBT Youth

Although there were a few participants who claimed that they did see some LGBT youth occasionally being pushed, hit, and followed around to be made fun of in their schools, most of the participants admitted that the homophobic and transphobic bullying and harassment they witnessed was not physical, but mostly verbal. As Shaun, a student who recently graduated from high school, clarified, "It was emotional, psychological…it was never really anything physical." A high school senior, Mary, echoed this observation, "I've never witnessed physical bullying at any of the schools I've been to due to homophobia. But I definitely heard verbal attacks relatively often." One of the teacher GSA sponsors related a story she vividly remembered, "We had one student when we were starting our GSA who was out, loud, and very visible. He wore skin-tight purple pants, high heels, and a purse while walking through the halls, and he got verbally harassed a lot." Another recent graduate from high school, Jaime, elaborated on his own experiences of being harassed:

> You know, I was lucky because there was never anything physical, and what was said, was never said to my face. So I overheard somebody call me a "fag" one day in science class, whatever, it was nothing, or I would walk

> down the hall and someone would cough and say "gay". But they never said it to my face, so it never bothered me as much. If you're not going to say it to my face, I'm not going to deal with it. I knew there were cases of bullying in the school. I have friends that said they were pushed and taunted, got physical at times. I knew that was happening, so I was lucky that I was never pushed, I was never taunted.

Not all LGBT youth were as lucky, and most of the students who participated in the study were the few who were fortunate enough to have lived through their negative school experiences and come out stronger from them. Mike was one of those resilient students:

> I had been struggling with my sexuality the entire time through high school and for the first few years there was nothing said. There were no resources available. Luckily, because of who I am, I was confident. I had a great group of friends. But hearing stories in the news, and knowing people in my high school who did feel marginalized, who did feel alone, or did feel like, left on the outskirts. I realized, not everyone was going to be as lucky as me, not everyone was going to have great friends, not everyone would have that confidence to say "You know what, this is who I am, deal with it."

Ariel, a student who transferred schools twice because of homophobic harassment, claimed, "There's physical and relational aspects to the bullying, but I think it has a lot more to do with emotional torture because there are a lot of slurs that go around school, like 'that's so gay!' or 'faggot!'…Stuff like that." She later hinted that the difficulties that

LGBT youth experienced in the high schools she attended were related to the fact that they were not secular schools by saying, "Being in a Catholic school, it's a little tight on the acceptance thing." A teacher from the same school as Ariel was more forthcoming when she shared a confession from a gay, former pupil who told her, "When we were here, we just felt lost." A school administrator recalled how bad things could get for LGBT youth several years back, "These kids were constantly coming off the rails, attempting suicide, dropping out, drugging out, numbing out, and no one was listening."

A handful of participants expressed that they found assumptions of heterosexuality sometimes just as hurtful as name-calling and taunting. Alice, a third year student, conveyed these feelings in her statement:

> It often made me feel very uncomfortable when people assumed that I wasn't gay. Especially as a teenager, and other students having assumptions about me…dances were difficult…just general things that most people take for granted. I've never been bullied in my school, but many times classmates still made me feel "other"…

Coming Out and Being Out in Negative School Climates

One topic that kept coming up that some participants felt was important to emphasize was the idea of coming out or being out as a sexual or gender minority in school. One teacher who had been supporting LGBT youth in high school for over four years remarked that LGBT youth have been coming out sooner in the last couple of years. She explained:

> You know, they're not nearly as much in the closet as they used to be, right? Like kids bravely wear their rainbow colours now. They say what they want. Kids will openly say in class "Yeah, I'm gay, get over it." There was never something like that 20 years ago, right? But having said that, I would say that girls come out sooner more than boys, interestingly…girls are much more confident about that…girls walking down the hall holding hands sometimes. Unfortunately, those boys are still hiding.

A school board representative who worked in many of the schools' initiatives for supporting LGBT youth expressed a similar observation:

> It depends on the student, it depends on the school… they do feel a bit safer to come out, I think earlier than they ever have. I think, from what I see is…it's the girls have an easier time coming out than the boys. The boys come out a little bit later. I mean, I've seen a shift even in the last four years, since we've started really, that kids are coming out earlier every year.

Keith, another third year student, admitted that although there were girls who were already out in his year level, he still found it difficult to come out:

> In my first two years, I was still in the closet. I was still trying to figure out who I was. In grade 11, I came out as bisexual because I had a girlfriend. But you know, deep inside I knew she was just a cover up, so I broke up with her and now I have come out as gay. It seemed to me that boys got more flack for being gay than girls did.

Apart from the enormous challenges of coming out as an adolescent, and the differences in the difficulties of coming out between "boys" and "girls", a greater issue for several participants was the fact that there were hardly any teachers, staff, or personnel in their schools who openly identified as a sexual or gender minority. This represented something more deeply disturbing to the participants, particularly the students. One student, Sara, mentioned that although there has been work done in some schools to support LGBT youth, which has encouraged some students to come out, it was obvious to her that there had been no change to encourage LGBT school teachers and staff to come out. She pointed out, "I don't think I've ever had a teacher that has come out and said it explicitly… there have been hints, and I think that, depending on the students they feel more comfortable with, that's who they come out to…"

Jaime reported that the fact that teachers and other school staff did not feel comfortable coming out sent a message to LGBT youth that there is something wrong or very risky with publicly identifying as a sexual or gender minority. He expressed his frustration:

> For me, personally, it's very detrimental. For the longest time, I've always wanted to be a teacher. Since grade four, that had been my life's dream. So being in the school and realizing to myself, yeah, I'm gay and I want to be a teacher. Not seeing anybody that was both, not seeing any gay teachers, that was like… How am I supposed to do that when there's no one there? I knew I was in a Catholic school, so it was going to be harder to find gay teachers, but it was still like…I don't know how I can aspire for that or I don't know what I'm going to face when I finish with teacher's college if I see nobody

> that I can look up to or talk about with what their struggles were with coming out…trying to get into the system and being queer.

One trustee who had been strongly advocating for LGBT-positive changes in the Catholic school board in the last year made his position clear, "If I was a gay teacher and the students have support… great! But why am I not being supported and accepted for it [being gay]? Just what will the LGBT kids think?" Other participants made similar statements.

Many of the participants – a good combination of students, teachers, board representatives, and service providers – all agreed that there was a desperate need for out school adult personnel that students could look up to on a day to day basis. One teacher GSA advisor commented that, although she knew it was a lot easier said than done, she believed that more LGBT teachers and staff needed to step up and identify in schools in order to provide positive examples to students. One of the three trustees insisted that school boards needed to make LGBT teachers and staff feel safe so that they could identify as sexual and gender minorities. The school administrator, however, conceded "Sadly, even with the improving climates in some schools, LGBT teachers today still can't be openly gay, especially in the Catholic schools."

These sentiments emphasized that the negative school climate that LGBT youth were experiencing in Waterloo Region resulted not only from homophobic and transphobic bullying but forces beyond bias-based harassment. It was apparent that institutionalized heteronormativity persisted in schools and that heterosexism was still pervasive in the attitudes of members of the school community despite recent efforts to

address bullying and harassment.

Each School is Different and Unique

One of the earliest themes that emerged from the interview responses, particularly on the topic of addressing LGBT youth issues in schools, was the notion that people needed to remember that each school is different and unique. Apart from the fact that there would be the obvious differences between schools affiliated with the secular board and those affiliated with the Catholic board, participants made a point to emphasize that each school had different set of circumstances, characteristics, resources, ideals, and politics, and therefore, different responses to LGBT youth issues.

For example, even though all the schools affiliated with WRDSB already had GSAs even before Bill 13 was proposed in 2011, interview respondents were quick to point out that the road to establishing GSAs was quite different for some schools. Some schools were ahead of others in advocating for the establishment of a GSA for their LGBT students. In fact, most of the teacher GSA sponsors who participated in the study were the first few advocates within their school board to push for GSAs in their respective schools. They proudly informed me of how their school's struggles and progress paved the way for other schools to have their own GSAs, and how collaborating with newer teacher advocates, members of the WRDSB, and OK2BME of KW Counselling started something good for the LGBT youth of Waterloo Region.

The only teacher who identified as gay among all the participants told me the story of their school's early experiences in trying to address LGBT youth issues and providing support for their LGBT students. The story was also about how the first GSA in Waterloo

Region was established:

> We had done a lot of work prior and I think that the work done prior was a tremendous amount of staff education. As a gay person, and as a teacher who believes in social justice, I was looked upon as an expert. Well, I'm not really an expert. I reached out to the school community and we really made an effort as a staff to educate ourselves around these issues. We reached out to wherever we could get support and reflected upon ourselves by bringing in some books that have LGBT characters, reading them as staff, and looking at our own homophobia and heterosexism. So, that's where I believe we really started. It was a little bit of a hurdle to get the support of our principal then, but when we overcame that, our principal became one of the biggest reasons why we were more successful than other schools in supporting our kids. We started to shift the school culture by shifting ourselves. We actually had positive space signs on our doors and talked to teachers from other schools and collaborated with them. So it was like that already three years before the beginning of any GSA in the region. I started chatting with some kids and they were talking about homophobia. I asked them what should we do about it and if they wanted to start a group. So it started with the kids knowing they could already talk about these issues and feeling comfortable about being able to do so in their school. The next year was when KW Counselling hired someone. Anyhow, so, by then we were really ready to receive all the wonderful support we could from OK2BME, and then we officially started a GSA.

Another teacher, who was also one of the first advocates for LGBT youth in WRDSB, shared a similar narrative of how positive changes started with their school's struggles and efforts even before their school board or the Ontario Ministry of Education initiated any LGBT-positive programs or policies:

> We have had a safe school committee for a many number of years now. It's evolved, it's had different names, but essentially it's a group of teachers that had all good intentions and really wanted to do stuff, but didn't end up doing much at the start. Eventually, we stirred the pot right, and got some kids on board. We let them know that the only way things were going to change was if they went out there and changed it. We teachers can say all we want up here in our ivory tower, but nobody's listening. So, if it comes from the students, and we support it, they're going to pay attention. The administration and board did, and that year in particular, things were quite stupendous. We certainly had the movement towards the application of the LGBT element on the board's anti-bullying policy going strong.

The first student-led LGBT-affirming group that functioned in the same fashion as a GSA in a school affiliated with the Catholic school board of Waterloo Region also had a remarkable origin story. Nearly two years before Bill 13 was proposed, representatives of the student body council at one of the five high schools affiliated with the WCDSB had already expressed interest to their administration to form a GSA. Because of the WCDSB's stand on GSAs then, the school administration turned down the students and told them that a club so specific for LGBT students could take away from the causes of other marginalized youth. Resigned to follow the direction provided to them, the council

representatives formed a club called “the Nest”, which would be a space for youth from different marginalized communities to find refuge and safety. The school’s LGBT youth and their allies made the most of this new club by promoting awareness on the issues of marginalized youth. One year later, with increased and better-organized support from their teachers and school administration, the WCDSB finally permitted the students to form a club that was more specific to their needs and intentions. The students called the second club “Pride and Respect for Individuals of a Sexual Minority” or “PRISM”. As one of the student participants, Chloe, described it: “the establishment of PRISM gave us a place where we were accepted no matter what…and with the presence of allies who were with us, it showed that not everybody was against who we were.” A respectful compromise was established upon the club’s creation. The club was more specific to the students’ needs, and the board was content knowing that their students were under the tutelage of teachers who were capable of navigating the challenges of having such a club in a Catholic school.

Conversely, the responses of some of the other participants made it clear that not all the publicly-funded schools in Waterloo Region were faring as well in addressing the needs of their LGBT students. It seemed that not all the schools affiliated with the same boards were doing a good job at meeting the needs of their LGBT youth since each school had different needs, characteristics, personalities, leaders, and ways of thinking. Both service providers who participated in the study, and who have worked with both boards, stressed the reality of this observation. One service provider commented, “Each school is different and will have circumstances that will require a tailored response to its LGBT youth’s needs”. The other service provider was in support of this comment, saying:

> I think to answer the question of what's needed to establish a safe and positive school environment will be different for each school. I think, depending on which school, we would have different answers. When we think about demographics, where the school's located, we know just in terms of people in each population, that things will be unique for each school. When we look across the region at how long a GSA has been in a particular high school…and we have a GSA that's active in all of our 16 high schools…things will be different for each school. Um, so, I think you would get a different response based on that.

Although there were a few students who said that their schools were quite supportive of LGBT-positive initiatives such as the formation of GSAs and the celebration of events such as Pink Shirt Day and Anti-Bullying Week, other students expressed how unsupportive their schools were when they first requested for help with developing LGBT initiatives. Sydney, another senior high school student, clarified that starting a GSA in their school that was created to comply with the recommendations of the school board was not responsive enough to the needs of their school's LGBT youth:

> My school was pretty closed-minded. It was mostly a white school, and there wasn't really a gay crowd. There were four people in the GSA. It was pretty lame that way. Our advisor was hardly there and we were left to ourselves to do things. I think if we had an actual clubroom to go to, where people could drop-in…that would be cool. I also think that maybe having more than one staff member doing intervention would be a good thing. I found that when we wanted to organize gender-neutral washrooms because

> we had two trans people in school, they weren't represented at all. Our school just flat out rejected it. We had no say in the matter at all.

One student, Chloe, was unhappy about the fact that climates of schools were so different from each other within one board and how unfair it was that some schools were doing better at supporting their LGBT students than others. She declared:

> The school I was educated in before I transferred to my new school was very, very conservative and very regressive. The school admin actually wasn't going to allow the HPV vaccine because they said "oh it's going to make girls promiscuous", and all that bull crap. But that actually got a big enough backlash from the parents that they had to relent. If it had been in another school in a more progressive area…with more progressive administrators…the initial decision might have been completely different. This is how some administrators respond to requests for stuff in support of LGBT kids too. I really don't think it's fair, because as a student, you don't really get to choose where you're born, where your parents choose to live, or where they choose to send you. So I don't think that the policies and the way schools are run should be so disparate. I don't think that's fair…

Some students mentioned that certain school officials did not seem to get the idea that although bullying issues involved other bases of bias such as race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status, the harassment and discrimination most prevalent in schools disproportionately involved bias against one's sexual orientation and gender identity. They confided that for a long time their school teachers, staff and administrators were not

doing enough to create a safe environment for them, and that the general anti-bullying policies their schools implemented were not specific enough to keep them safe and promote acceptance of sexual and gender minorities. Advocates for LGBT youth also asserted that it was not enough that LGBT issues were saddled along general respect and diversity school initiatives.

The Need for a Comprehensive Approach to Addressing LGBT Youth Issues

Many of the participants believed that generic anti-bullying programs and policies were too non-specific and did not do enough to create safe school climates accepting of LGBT youth. Depending on the timing of their interview (as some interviews were conducted within the three months before the passing of Bill 13 and others were conducted within the three months after) some participants admitted that they were aware that the programs and policies of their schools within the WRDSB already had sexual orientation and gender identity elements explicitly included in their content. Some of them also admitted that their schools were quite proactive with ushering in LGBT-affirming initiatives, which were beginning to reap positive results. However, this was not the case for participants from the school affiliated with the WCDSB, because although they knew their school had already made great strides in coming up with campaigns and other programs for supporting LGBT youth, as far as most of them were aware, their board still had no specific inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in their policies.

Apart from the issue of specificity and openly recognizing LGBT topics in their schools' initiatives, participants were also concerned about using the most ideal approach

to addressing the needs of LGBT students. As one teacher put it, "We don't want people to talk about LGBT issues only in the context of bullying and discrimination. That's where it becomes significant to integrate it into school culture. Not just negative stuff, but positive things about LGBT people." The school administrator who has advocated for human rights issues in schools in different capacities for over the last decade said, "It's not enough to be against something [like homophobic bullying], you have to be for something too." She meant that it was important to promote positive elements in school as well – elements such as equity, inclusion, diversity, acceptance, and kindness. One of the board trustees recommended something that many of the participants tried to say in a roundabout sort of way:

> I've read some articles that were pretty clear that initiatives acting in isolation are much less effective than initiatives in the context of a broader, comprehensive approach. So that's the type of approach that makes the most sense. Maybe not every school would want to use a GSA; maybe they would want to go a different route. But if you do believe in that comprehensive approach, you should really not tie the hands of our teachers and our students, and let them have all the programs and policy tools that are proven in literature to be effective.

Similarly, a staff member from the public school board remarked, "The effort to support has to be at all levels, from the teachers and personnel who are with the youth daily, to the trustees who establish policies at the board level. All levels need to get with the program." One of the service providers suggested that it would be best for school boards to implement "multiple concurrent strategies, programs, and policies, which may

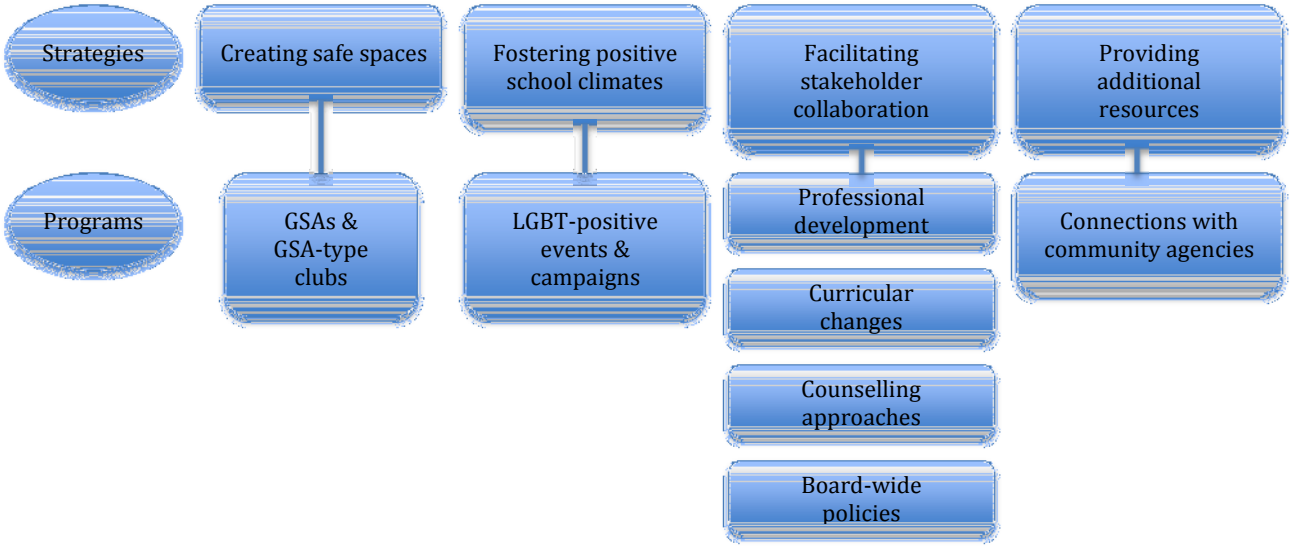
have different immediate objectives, but are meant to achieve the same end goal, which is to help LGBT youth." The service provider also added:

> School boards should provide opportunities for all representatives of the board, different school staff, and students to work together on various projects and initiatives that would promote camaraderie and instill a sense of community among the people who are working together in making the school climates better for LGBT youth. They've already started by creating ties with OK2MBE to provide the youth with a local network that have resources to help, but there are a lot of other agencies in the community that could provide valuable assistance too.

Based on the participants' responses, utilizing a *comprehensive approach* to support the LGBT youth in Waterloo Region meant schools would have to implement several strategies, programs, and policies that involved as many members of the school community and the different levels of the school board (Figure 2). They suggested strategies such as creating safe spaces for LGBT youth and their allies in schools, fostering school climates more accepting of LGBT individuals, facilitating stakeholder collaboration by carrying out much needed programs that would create opportunities for coalition building, and providing additional resources outside of the schools' capacity. The respondents claimed that apart from mandating the establishment of GSAs, school boards and their schools needed to establish programs that support events and campaigns designed to promote awareness of LGBT concerns, train personnel on LGBT youth rights and needs, incorporate LGBT topics in their curricula, apply innovative counselling techniques appropriate for LGBT issues, develop and implement board-wide policies with

specific inclusion of protections for LGBT students, and reach out to community agencies with expertise in helping sexual and gender minorities.

Figure 2 *A Comprehensive Approach to Addressing LGBT Youth Issues*



While discussing the value of a comprehensive approach to addressing LGBT youth issues in schools, certain participants felt the need to underscore the vital role of supportive administrators and board-level representatives for the comprehensive approach to succeed. They hinted that even with the tireless work LGBT students, their allies, teachers, and other school personnel put into promoting safe and inclusive climates in their schools, efforts to make substantive changes would not go very far without the cooperation and backing of their school administrators and board representatives. Sara was quite sure that the improvement in the climate of her school was due to the fact that one of their vice-principals has the promotion of diversity and inclusion as one of her priorities in her school agenda. One of the teachers from the Catholic school board revealed that efforts to help LGBT youth were much easier to carry out with the school

administration's leadership and support:

> It's been made very clear to us that our role here goes beyond just teaching in the classroom and our specific subject material. So we're fortunate in that sense that we have an administration that would certainly back us. Twice I've talked to admin about particular issues concerning the [LGBT] kids and they were on it right away.

A board trustee said that because administrators were the most accessible decision-makers within the school premises, they were the representatives from the board that could singularly set the tone of the school atmosphere, and thus, had an enormous capacity and responsibility to ensure the safety and positive learning experiences of all students. One of the staff members from the board had a similar view about the role of administrators, commenting:

> Each administrator is going to have a different view and value system, as well as different experiences with dealing with sexual minority issues. So, it's not like we are able to change everybody's value systems or beliefs to make them do something, right? But, I think the administrators are the most important people to consider as far as setting the climate of the schools. They are the people who have the most influence in schools, and are the ones who need to undergo specific in-service professional development training the most, so they could feel comfortable with supporting LGBT issues.

Another trustee, however, believed that the huge responsibility of setting positive climates in the schools could be shared at the board level if a clear and unified message

for supporting LGBT youth came not only from school administrators, but also the superintendents and trustees as well. He said if such a message were delivered, other stakeholders of the school community would be able to exert efforts to support LGBT students more comfortably and with less fear of reprisals.

Endorsing Different Perspectives to Bolster the Comprehensive Approach

To bolster the comprehensive approach that would involve as many members of the school community and different levels of the board, as well as develop and implement multiple concurrent strategies, programs, and policies to support LGBT students, the respondents recommended three different ways for advocates to convince more people to participate in efforts to create positive climates for LGBT youth in their schools. The most popular way that the respondents believed how advocates could convince other members of the school community to support their advocacy was for the advocates to present the concern for the welfare of LGBT students as an important safety issue. Although it is not a new perspective for many long-time LGBT advocates, the safety of youth who are already recognized to be at risk for harm is an important cause that many people would be willing to support, including people who see LGBT issues as part of an unacceptable "lifestyle that should not be condoned". Because the safety of young people from impending harm is a goal that is important to many people of different cultures, ideologies, and beliefs, many of the respondents felt that it was probably the best way to present the issue of imperilled LGBT youth in schools. This is perhaps the same kind of thinking that provincial policymakers had when they conceived of earlier bills and policies to support LGBT youth, which is to place emphasis on safety as a priority in schools. The importance of safety was stressed by the participants in the interviews,

particularly in the form of the promotion of safe and inclusive language to prevent harm.

The vast majority of the participants believed that at a minimum, LGBT youth should be kept safe from harm, and that the rest of the work can start from there. One teacher shared a story of how the argument for keeping vulnerable students safe changed their principal's mind on doing something about their toxic school climate, and moved him into becoming one of their biggest advocates for LGBT youth safety in their school:

> You know, getting away from homophobic bullying… our principal decided to interrupt during class time and he made a very heartfelt, impassioned talk, about using the words "fag" and "that's so gay", and how these things are intolerable and how much harm they cause…and then made the connection that all kinds of bullying are intolerable. For our kids to hear their principal, on the blower, giving them that sanction of support…they were really impressed a lot, and it meant a lot to them to hear that. He read me his little speech. I wish I had it to show you. I just burst into tears. Five years ago, we would never have heard of an administrator coming right out and using that language on the PA system and saying "This will not be tolerated" and then segueing into stuff like "We want to keep everyone safe"…"If this is happening to you"..."Here's what you can do as an ally"…"Here's who you can tell"…"Here's where you can get help"…

Another way the participants thought advocates could convince other people into supporting LGBT youth issues in schools is by presenting the concern for the students as a human rights and social justice issue. Most of the respondents believed that if the

initiative to stand up for marginalized and oppressed young people in a minority status is presented along with the importance of respecting and upholding human rights, many people would be swayed into supporting such a cause. Although many of the students expressed this viewpoint in the interviews, it was at the level of the school board where most of the respondents discussed how the human rights and social justice perspective could be used as leverage for recruiting more advocates to support LGBT youth. One of the trustees noted, "You can easily notice that a lot of the teachers who have taken on the responsibility of being GSA advisor are the ones who are very passionate about human rights issues." Similarly, the superintendent noted that the majority of school personnel who become involved with LGBT-positive initiatives are the teachers and staff who already have a record of supporting students' social justice and diversity clubs.

The third point of view respondents thought would be useful for helping other people understand how important supporting LGBT youth in schools is the perspective of prioritizing mental health. Many of the participants felt that a lot of members of the greater community place value in maintaining supports for mental health. Whether people are genuinely concerned about the mental health of their fellow human beings or the high costs that mental health issues place on our healthcare system, the participants believed that people are also passionate about mental health concerns. Mike conveyed his school's experience and his thoughts on this perspective:

> Mental health is really a big issue because the area I grew up in had the highest prevalence of mental health problems, probably in the entire municipality. So that was an issue that the school took very seriously. That was a focus throughout my last couple of years in high school when a

> number of students attempted to commit suicide. A number of other students they saw were seeking help and there wasn't enough support in those areas because, unfortunately, the government often pumps in a lot of money into urban centres, and rural communities are left underfunded.

One of the teachers explained how the mental health frame has helped with promoting understanding and sympathy from co-workers at school and students' parents:

> We were definitely dealing with lots of people with particular ideas about what kids should and shouldn't be learning in school. Getting through them and helping them understand that what we're really doing is trying to safeguard the rights of all of our students, and just as importantly, their mental health. So that's kind of where we've ended up as a result of that and I think the board has met us in the middle. The focus, which is very interesting, has turned out to be mental health.

Strategies, Programs, and Policies for Addressing LGBT Youth Issues and Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health and Well-Being

The publicly-funded schools in Waterloo Region exerted efforts to establish and implement different strategies, programs, and policies that involved various stakeholders from the school community and different levels of the board. Although there were varied levels of success among the different schools affiliated with both the WRDSB and WCDSB, it was apparent from the responses of the interviewees that, not only were sincere and strong attempts made to advocate for LGBT youth, but considerable progress was also achieved in notable ways.

Creating safe spaces for LGBT youth. Although the participants of the study readily admitted that their schools still had a long way to go and so much to do to sustain positive climates for LGBT students, many of them were not reluctant to boast about the fact that compared to school boards of other municipalities and school districts, their school boards were many steps ahead in terms of successfully advocating for and meeting the needs of their sexual and gender minority youth. Among the LGBT-positive initiatives they started, their schools were pioneers in the creation of safe spaces for LGBT youth even before they received mandates from their board to establish GSAs.

Gay-Straight Alliances and GSA-type clubs in schools. Because their schools were all different and unique, it was no surprise to discover that there were differences between school GSAs just from the participants' descriptions. While Sara revealed, "I often found that the straight kids were never really inclined to join our GSA", Helen described her GSA as a club mostly composed of allies. While one teacher claimed that their GSA was perceived by youth as "open, welcoming, and inviting" and "a great space to learn from lots of LGBT material", another teacher not only said that the membership of their GSA was "mostly white straight girls who want to advocate for a cause", she further described it as a group with "no resources and no support".

Some of the participants were eager to point out that a GSA in one school could have different compositions, interests, resources, and levels of enthusiasm, support, and accomplishments from year to year. Members, student leaders, advisors, and supportive administrators could come and go, graduate or retire, and move on to other initiatives from one academic year to the next. Funds from sources such as Speak Up grants were awarded one year and denied in another, and the amount of funds varied depending on the

budget that sources had annually. Despite all these differences, most of the participants agreed that GSAs, or in the case of the Catholic schools, GSA-type clubs such as PRISM, were important spaces to have in schools.

As far as serving as safe spaces, the GSAs and PRISM provided a refuge for most of the LGBT students. Ariel expressed how important it was for her to have that space where she had "allies who understood her and sympathized when she needed support". Mary, one teacher GSA sponsor, and the school administrator all pointed out how safe it made students feel knowing that they could be in a group of people where they did not need to identify as LGBT and that no one expected anyone to come out within a certain period of time. Mary expounded on this sentiment saying, "Our GSA helps LGBT students come out only when they are ready and it's great to know other kids will stand up for you."

Some of the advocates revealed that they later heard back from students after they graduated. They learned that even though the students never attended a single GSA meeting when they were in school, they always appreciated the fact that "The GSA was just there anytime they needed it to feel safe."

Aside from the purpose of providing a safe space for LGBT youth, the respondents noted that the GSAs served other purposes based on their own experiences and witnessing the experiences of the students. Alice described their GSA as "a place to educate us on homophobia, heterosexism, and the use of words that hurt others". Similarly, a teacher shared "It's not only there for emotional support, the kids are in the GSAs learning about human rights and social justice issues too." Another teacher simply said that the GSA was

a place that allowed the youth to be themselves.

Advocates from the Catholic school board echoed similar observations about how their club, PRISM, was producing positive effects for their LGBT youth. A teacher noticed that the LGBT youth in their school no longer walked around together as much for safety because they had gained more confidence by being a part of the club. Another teacher remarked, "The level of comfort they have in the school environment this year…I see such growth…with their increased attendance in their classes…relaxed attitudes…and not feeling uptight as they walk through the halls." The school administrator commented:

> We've definitely seen the benefits, even physical differences. Kids that were sort of slumped over with their hair over their eyes, got their hair cut, and they're standing up straight now. We can't get over changes that happened in under a year, the difference in some of the kids coming to that group. It's been absolutely phenomenal.

Fostering school climates that promote respect and acceptance for LGBT individuals. In other Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools, particularly those affiliated with the secular board, LGBT-affirming changes that advocates lobbied and pushed for prior to the proposal of Bill 13 did not necessarily start with the creation of GSAs. In fact, their GSAs were established later as part of their school board's efforts to standardize support for LGBT students by mandating the creation of GSAs in every school and have them organize under the Equity and Inclusion Office of the board. For some, earlier initiatives in the schools began with the celebration of LGBT-positive events and the promotion of LGBT-positive campaigns in attempts to foster school climates that

promote respect and acceptance for LGBT individuals. For many other schools, the events and campaigns developed along with the establishment of GSAs.

LGBT-positive events and campaigns. The most popular LGBT-positive events that the schools celebrated were Pink Shirt Day, Purple Ally Day, Anti-Homophobia Day, and Anti-Bullying Week with a focus on homophobic bullying. Although these events were only either one day or one week out of the entire academic year, it was the start of efforts to raise awareness on LGBT rights and other LGBT topics in schools that have never acknowledged the presence of sexual and gender minorities before, even in their activities celebrating diversity. Alice narrated her experiences in previous years:

> Every year we did Pink Shirt Day and the Anti-Bullying Week and we usually put a spin on it where we do talk about what words you can't say, or shouldn't. We put up posters because most of the school really don't know we exist. We're trying that so by the end of the year, more people know about LGBT concerns other than the 17 people who work on those events.

One of the teachers who support the annual events described why in some way a single day or week of celebration could mean so much to LGBT youth:

> One day we did like a Purple Ally Day to celebrate the support of allies and encourage more people to step up as allies. We had all these purple ribbons we tied around school that did not seem a lot. But for the kids, it's an activity that they could plan. One tiny little thing that we did that really worked well was we got the OK2BME lanyards with purple straps. We got those, and no other schools have done this…and we did our presentation to

> the staff that day, and talked about being a visible ally. We encouraged them at the end of the meeting…we didn't walk around and give them one…we had a little pile of those lanyards and we said, "If you just so much as wear your keys on these, that tells your kids something. That tells them that you're an ally…that you're there…you're someone they can talk to." Well, I think, pretty well every person in the whole building had one. I don't remember who took one and who didn't, but I know we ran out of those lanyards. I do remember that I had almost enough for everyone, but I had to get more. People were emailing me and asking me for more. When you walk around this building, almost everyone is wearing that rainbow lanyard with purple strap, especially on their school keys. Just something simple like that means a lot to the kids, knowing that the adults in the building get it.

One teacher shared that in a previous academic year they started a social media campaign to raise awareness and increase visibility of LGBT issues important to youth. They took to Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites and phone apps to talk about homophobic bullying and safe language both in school and online. She also mentioned that the LGBT youth and their allies came up with different campaigns every year. One year they had a poster-making contest with an anti-homophobia theme, and in another, they created a display cabinet that showcased LGBT material they chose as a group. The campaigns cultivated their creativity and raised awareness in school because some of the people who did not engage with them got to see what they had to say.

The participants from the Catholic school also had a lot to share regarding events and campaigns they sponsored that promoted acceptance for sexual and gender minorities.

Due to their efforts, a school was able to celebrate Anti-Homophobia Day with the blessing of their Catholic school board, probably a first in the province of Ontario. One of the teachers described how special that day was for the LGBT youth, their advocates, and the rest of the school:

> On May 17 [2012], we celebrated Anti-Homophobia Day at our school. We had a panel discussion that filled the auditorium with kids and classes who signed up weeks in advance to participate in the event. We had different speakers that included a current student who identified as a sexual minority, a recent graduate who also identified, a parent of a sexual minority student, and a teacher who was part of PRISM. Out of that spun an additional group, which we now call "Us", and that group is actually students who do identify as a sexual minority. The real success we saw just last week was our first meeting of this school year. We had an alumnus return and 8 additional students were at that meeting.

The advocates in the Catholic school realized that it took more than GSA-type clubs to support sexual and gender minority students. They felt that in order to provide more support to them, the entire school climate needed to improve. The advocates decided that there was no better way to carry out this strategy than by promoting a humane value that many Catholics espouse. Hence, they launched their *Kindness Matters* campaign. The administrator who spearheaded the campaign explained:

> We started our campaign last year and we're continuing it this year. I would say that our community is pretty clear that it's not okay to say homophobic

> statements…it's embedded in them now. We just kept putting it out there and now we've got a growing consciousness that nothing that is mean and that excludes people is okay in this school.

Facilitating diverse stakeholder collaboration in school efforts to support LGBT students. As schools worked hard to accomplish more immediate goals by simultaneously implementing professional development in-service training (i.e. prepare staff for LGBT issues), curricular changes (i.e. incorporate LGBT topics), innovative counselling techniques (i.e. respond to LGBT youth conflicts), and board-wide policy amendments (i.e. explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity), they also facilitated opportunities for collaboration and coalition building among the stakeholders working on those programs, and ultimately contributed to the achieving end goal of the comprehensive approach (i.e. supporting LGBT youth).

Professional development. There was an overwhelming support for the idea that teachers and school personnel should have regular professional development in-service trainings related to LGBT topics throughout the academic year. Almost all the teachers emphasized the importance of the trainings, which they believed produced many benefits not only for the staff, but also for the rest of the school. One teacher pointed out how the in-service trainings helped them become better equipped with handling circumstances that were related to LGBT concerns and conflicts, while another teacher said it trained them how to make the school climate more inclusive and safe. A trustee underscored the value of trainings in teaching educators the use of safe language, which the teachers themselves can share more confidently with their students.

One of the representatives from the board who work closely with teacher GSA sponsors emphasized how professional development opportunities were able to help make the link between the role of school curricula and advocacy more apparent, and encouraged teachers to incorporate LGBT topics into their lesson plans. One teacher mentioned something related to this point, "We've had in-service on how to incorporate diversity and inclusion into lesson plans. Last year there was information sent to staff on tips to broach certain topics. The understanding is that you shouldn't just be sticking to old habits."

One teacher made a very good argument for continued professional development training because he believed that the in-service activities were excellent opportunities to win over what he called "fence-sitters" from the staff, who either had no feelings and thoughts about advocacy for LGBT youth or were indifferent to the cause simply because they knew nothing about it. In other words, he thought that the trainings were a good place to convince people about their goals, recruit more advocates, and collaborate with colleagues on initiatives important to all of them. On this point, a Catholic teacher shared their school's experience on such capacity building:

> As far as education of staff, we've put a real effort here at our school around doing a lot of communication with staff at staff meetings and in different professional development opportunities, just to educate around what PRISM is all about. What sort of framework of how we can support students who may turn to us, who are of a sexual minority…I think now there's a much clearer path. We've had situations where the teachers are taking the initiative, and introducing that student to the PRISM group directly. I've

> been really pleased with how the staff has bought into that, and really supported the students in a number of cases. I think the in-service trainings had a lot to do with that. We're big believers here that it needs to start with the staff first. There's no sense rolling this out to the student population if you don't have the staff doing the job correctly.

One of the service providers who conduct professional development in-service trainings and workshops for schools from both boards commented on her role in providing LGBT-specific education to teachers and staff:

> I get calls from principals or teachers to go into classes or attend the professional development day. I will be invited to a school to do workshops. So I've done that for teachers, either individually or as a group, and they don't have to be connected to GSAs at all. But then, I also explain about GSAs and go through the LGBT language, terminology, and definitions. We talk about safe space and inclusivity, and brainstorm on new ideas for projects we can work on together. Teachers and staff members have come to appreciate it and have extended their gratitude repeatedly.

One specific topic in the conversations on professional development that stood out was related to provincial legislation and the agenda of the recent Ontario government. This was the need to emphasize teacher and staff education on the principles of progressive discipline and restorative justice in the in-service trainings. The idea was to instill in school personnel the understanding that progressive discipline and restorative justice meant that homophobic and transphobic bullying by repeat offenders no longer

required automatic suspensions, at least not without any prior attempt by teachers to convert their behaviour into teaching moments. One teacher reported:

> It's having an opportunity to sit down with any student that would be in a [bullying] situation like that and educate. Let's use these incidents as learning experiences. There may be discipline that has to go with it, but first and foremost, let's examine and correct the behavior, and provide support.

Curricular changes. There was a lot of discussion in the interviews regarding the content of the current curricula in the participants' schools. The vast majority of respondents felt that there was not enough inclusion of LGBT topics in their curricula. Most students revealed that if there were any discussions related to LGBT in class for the entire academic year, it would be very minimal. Depending on the student, they would say that a lesson on homosexuality, sexuality in general, or sexual orientation would be part of one unit of a Health and Physical Education, Sociology, Psychology, or English class for the semester.

Some students claimed that the topics would only come up at designated year levels within their four-year stay in high school. Mary said their curriculum hardly had any incorporation of LGBT topics and that most lessons were geared in reference to experiences of white, straight populations. Helen clarified that the reason why she believed more LGBT topics should be included in lessons is because she could not identify with most of what was being taught in class. Mike asserted that non-heterosexual sex should be explicitly included in the sex education classes, particularly in the discussion of safe sex and the health risks involved with unprotected sex. He also insisted

that the addition of more LGBT topics in the curriculum would be an excellent way of stomping out ignorance about intimacy among sexual and gender minorities. Sydney recommended that discussions do not always have to be about non-heterosexual sex and that talking about non-heterosexual love is just as important. Jaime suggested that there are other ways of incorporating LGBT topics and issues in the school curriculum, including highlighting LGBT culture in Literature classes and LGBT contributions to society in History classes. The school administrator had similar thoughts on the matter and underscored the importance of supporting teachers who made efforts to incorporate more topics featuring sexual and gender minorities:

> Just today, the head of one of the departments called me in because he wanted to put a number of frameworks and lenses to go through English literature . . . and he wants to put the gay-lesbian lens as one of the lenses to choose from. So if they want to, students can choose to discuss a tale through the lens of LGBT studies. So I said, "Absolutely, go for it"…we need to get much better at that. As I said to the teacher today, "These kids need to see their lives visible somewhere."

One teacher also believed that LGBT students should be able to see more of themselves in the lessons that they learned, while another believed that in order to make more of a difference in educating youth about diversity, respect, and acceptance, changes essentially had to be curricular. One Catholic teacher pointed out that LGBT topics were never brought up in Religion class and related topics were just avoided altogether. He conceded that the difficulty of incorporating such topics in Religion class is a great challenge, but also felt that it was not an impossible task to do. Some teachers revealed

that changes in their curricula have been happening in their own schools, which gave them some hope that LGBT topics would be incorporated even more in the future. One teacher in particular was proud to tell me that their curriculum already integrated LGBT topics not just in Physical Education, but also in five other mainstream classes. Another teacher shared that their faculty had become more LGBT-inclusive with their lesson plans, pointing out incorporations of LGBT topics in their History, Family Studies, and Math classes.

A teacher GSA advisor told me a story of how the staff from their school library helped with bringing in more LGBT material to their school. She was delighted by the opportunity to collaborate with the library staff and have books and DVDs on documentaries about gay culture and transgender experiences. Their collaboration led to the inclusion of LGBT books and magazines in a project that had a monthly rotation of educational materials on specific topics showcased in a special library section. Two of the public school teachers emphasized the importance of applying for Speak Up grants annually to raise more funds to support projects that would help incorporate LGBT topics into the school curriculum.

The trustees had thoughts about the inclusion of LGBT topics in curricula too. A trustee from the public school board remarked that “education on diversity and inclusion in one unit of Physical Education or Health class is not enough and that the Ministry of Education needs to step up in order to make the inclusion of more LGBT lessons in board curricula mandatory”. A trustee from the Catholic board had another issue in mind, saying that parents do not have to worry about the incorporation of LGBT topics into school curricula because inclusion of materials can be done in an age-appropriate way.

Counselling approaches. Some of the participants mentioned the benefits of having appropriate counselling available in both their school and in the community. Students who availed of counselling services appreciated having a choice between seeing their school's guidance counselor for one-on-one sessions or visiting KW Counselling Services to meet with service providers and counsellors who offered individual and group counselling. Keith was pleased to know that the load of having to counsel many students about homophobic bullying, coming out, and different sexual preferences did not fall on the shoulders of a single guidance counsellor or child and youth worker, and that outside help was accessible in the community. Helen believed it was just as important for school counsellors to have in-service trainings or workshops on LGBT topics and the principles of progressive discipline and restorative justice so that "bullies who do not know any better get a chance to learn how and why they need to modify their attitudes and behaviour". Chloe confessed that before she joined her GSA, she also needed to be counselled on the use of safe language and other LGBT issues herself. She thought that it would only be fair that everyone else got a chance to learn about diversity and acceptance of minorities from school counselling.

Ariel is one of the students in the study who has availed of services from KW Counselling. She liked the idea of having group counselling as an option as it allowed her to speak and share experiences with youth "who had the same issues and problems as I did". One of the service providers who earned years of experience counselling LGBT youth described their group counselling sessions as "opportunities for us all to learn from each other in a safe space with an organized structure".

A trustee from the Catholic board shared that sexual and gender minority students

from their schools also had a choice either to seek advice and guidance from professionals at KW Counselling in the community or from staff in their schools' pastoral care offices. He admitted that he was "pleasantly surprised to learn how much some sexual minority students enjoyed speaking to their pastors" for counselling about their concerns.

Board-wide policies. When the topic of existing school policies relevant to LGBT youth came up, I could not help but notice that most of the students and even a few teacher GSA advisors were either unaware of any specific policies or uncertain of policy details. For the most part, their awareness of policies were restricted to the knowledge that there were general school policies on bullying and harassment, and that there would be disciplinary measures involved with any offenses. To be fair, most of them got it half right based on the information that was provided by the more knowledgeable respondents from the administration level of the board. According to the representatives from the school board administration, their boards had: a Bullying Policy, a Harassment Policy, a Progressive Discipline Policy, a Safe Schools Policy, an Equity and Inclusion Policy, and a Discrimination Policy. The contents of these policies were very similar for both the public and Catholic school board versions, as the two boards worked closely and synchronously on the creation of policies, administrative procedures, and guidelines for their schools over the years.

A few students still thought their schools had zero tolerance policies for bullying, but most other respondents were aware of the fact that their boards had what many of them considered "blanket" policies on bullying, harassment, and discrimination that promoted progressive discipline. Some were aware that the school policies included

gender and sexual orientation buried in a long list of bases for biases involving bullying offenses. A few participants were accurate when they expressed that they were sure that none of their school policies included gender identity in them at the time of their interviews. Although several of the participants confessed to knowing that some policies included sexual orientation as a basis for bias-based harassment, many of them felt very strongly that the policies did not have enough explicit details for the protection of LGBT students. Specifically, even though they agreed that the anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies covered homophobic offenses, they believed that the intent and content of the policies were not explicit enough, especially because they were originally designed to be more punitive than preventive or protective.

One teacher recommended that there should be a specific policy that would mandate professional development in-service training for staff so that not only would they be more comfortable with addressing issues involving LGBT youth, but they would also be able to "lead by example in the establishment of safe and inclusive climates in their schools". What many of the respondents really wanted, however, was the creation of policies specifically dedicated to addressing issues involving LGBT youth. As an example, Shaun suggested that a policy be created to address the issue of designating gender-neutral washrooms at certain areas of the school.

For some other participants, their greater concern was not so much on the creation of new policies, but the implementation of current ones, and how they can be more successfully enforced. As one of the staff members from the board who has worked for years on equity and inclusion initiatives with other school advocates explained:

> I think that with the many policies that we already have, I don't think that we need to add more policies. I just think that more awareness and implementation is necessary. Awareness is always one of the major factors that move an initiative forward. So, we can have all the policies that we want, but if we're really not trying to…not really intentionally moving them forward board-wide, then sometimes, nobody ever really looks at them. So, I don't think we need more policies. I just think we continue to do what we're doing to educate administrators and teachers about the importance of implementing current policies.

A trustee echoed this position by saying that upholding the current policies is what the board and the schools need to work on. She told me that having more explicit policies would be good, but she believes that the schools already have policy tools to cover them and work with in order for them to make real changes for LGBT youth.

Providing additional resources to LGBT youth outside of the school's capacity. Nearly all the participants gave kudos to the merits resulting from the connections made with community partners outside of their own schools. Those merits resulted from numerous connections that developed organically over the years thanks to the efforts of many of the pioneering advocates for LGBT youth from the different Waterloo Region schools. The connections that were almost always mentioned first by the respondents were the early collaborations between the students and teachers from across the different schools, who exchanged ideas, planned events together, and eventually became officially connected through their affiliation with the WRDSB's plans to create GSAs in every school and the support of their board's Equity and Inclusion

Office. These events occurred almost simultaneously with the beginning of the schools' relationship with KW Counselling's OK2BME Program. Through the cooperation and combined efforts of the WRDSB's Equity and Inclusion Office, OK2BME, and the advocates from the schools leading the way for safe school climates, GSAs were eventually formed in each of the 16 schools affiliated with the public school board. Their collaboration and coalition building resulted in the creation of a local GSA network that created numerous benefits for the LGBT youth of the Waterloo Region.

For LGBT students and their allies who have long been seeking support and friendships with peers, the creation of a local GSA network meant that an extensive source for possible connections was made available to them. The school administrator commented, "It's made such a difference in their world. It was exciting to know that kids were feeling connected…feeling a sense of belonging and not feeling they're the only ones out there in their own little island." A teacher pointed out that, "Even though some GSAs only had three to four kids, once their GSA connected with the other GSAs, they suddenly gained access to meeting dozens of other kids from other school GSAs."

Apart from providing new opportunities to make new friends, the collaboration of OK2BME, the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, and the different school GSAs also provided new venues for their LGBT youth and their allies to learn new things, socialize, and take on leadership roles. This resulted from the organization of retreats, dances, parties, and conferences sponsored by OK2BME and the WRDSB each year. Jaime lauded the efforts of the collaboration, and expressed, "by providing social networking opportunities that led to strong connections with the community, OK2BME and the GSAs ensured that kids didn't have to feel alone when they graduated from high school."

Another advantage that the community coalitions provided to the youth is access to physical resources that were not available in their schools. One of the service providers stated that OK2BME had different kinds of materials that contained LGBT information not found in the school libraries such as books, magazines, audiotapes, and DVDs. She also revealed that the collaboration of community coalitions led to the creation of other projects that were important to the LGBT youth. One such project was the creation of the Waterloo Region GSA Network website that was a virtual space for the youth to connect and provide support to each other. Most of the students who participated in the study claimed to have previously used the online resource to connect with new friends. Another project that the collaboration worked on and was very proud of was the creation of the Out Loud video for the GSA Network and the schools affiliated with WRDSB. One of the service providers described the experience of creating the video in collaboration with partners from WRDSB and OK2BME:

> We had the Out Loud video, which was broken down into 14 sections. Everything from coming out, to homophobia, to terminology, and the idea was that an accompanying manual, a resource guide, would follow. The manual would be implemented in schools for teachers to use. It would have questions and activities they could use in the classroom, so that outside of that one class, perhaps Health class, where they learn something on LGBT topics, a teacher in History, Social Studies, or Family Studies could say, today we're going to learn about LGBT and diversity, and use the manual. I had the opportunity in the summer of 2011 to help create that manual, and it has been distributed throughout the schools at the high school level, and

hopefully later, at the senior elementary level.

It did not take long for the advocates from some of the Waterloo Region Catholic high schools to jump on board and join the community coalitions already comprised of the WRDSB's Equity and Inclusion Office, OK2BME, and the public school GSAs. The LGBT youth and their advocates from the Catholic high schools began to attend the yearly GSA conferences and dances, and then connect with advocates from the already established community coalitions. One teacher was quick to share, "Last year, we were so surprised and delighted to see representation from three Catholic schools in the conference. It was great to have them participate. This year, I wouldn't be surprised if they'll have representatives from all five Catholic schools from their board!"

Aside from praising their connections with OK2BME, teachers from both the WRDSB and WCDSB also made it a point to voice out their deep appreciation for the support they have received over the years from their respective unions. According to the GSA advisors, both the Ontario Secondary School Teacher's Federation District 24 and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association Waterloo Unit have been tremendous sources of encouragement for them, particularly during times when they had to stand up to the more conservative forces within their own systems and the greater community.

Summary of Findings

One of the purposes of this study was to examine the school experiences of LGBT youth in Waterloo Region, the impact of those school experiences on their mental health and well-being, and the initiatives that were carried out by the key stakeholders of the region's publicly-funded schools to address LGBT youth issues. The findings of the study

revealed that, similar to many LGBT students in other schools in North America and other Western countries in the world, the LGBT youth in both the public and Catholic schools of Waterloo Region experienced homophobic and transphobic bullying and harassment, as well as the effects of pervasive heterosexism and heteronormativity in their schools. They encountered challenges with coming out and identifying as sexual and gender minorities in their schools. Their mental health, social behaviour, and academic performances were adversely affected by negative school climates, and they desperately needed help from those who could advocate for them. The findings of the study also revealed that, although there was notable advocacy and appropriate initiatives developed and implemented for LGBT youth's needs in Waterloo Region schools, the levels of success in promoting positive school climates and supporting LGBT mental health and well-being in each of the schools of the two publicly-funded boards were not uniform, with some lagging significantly behind with their support compared to others. From the feedback the participants provided, it was apparent that advocates for LGBT students needed to carry out a comprehensive approach to addressing LGBT youth issues that would utilize different perspectives to reach and unify a greater portion of the community, as well as use multiple concurrent strategies, programs, and policies that would synergistically and systematically improve the climates for LGBT students in *all* the schools affiliated with the two Waterloo Region school boards.

Chapter 5

Findings II:

Perspectives of Waterloo Region LGBT Youth and Their Advocates on Bill 13

First Impressions

Before I embarked on this research study for my doctoral dissertation, I had very little idea what kind of supports for LGBT youth were available in the Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools. Based on my limited knowledge, my first impression was that the schools affiliated with the WRDSB and WCDSB were going to be just like most schools affiliated with other school boards in Ontario by reputation, and that advocacy for the rights and needs of LGBT students in their schools would be close to non-existent. After all, save for the documented advancements made by advocates for LGBT youth in the Toronto District School Board (Goldstein et al., 2005, 2007; McCaskell, 2005; McCaskell & Russell, 2000; Rayside, 2008), there was hardly any published information that would lead me to think that schools affiliated with other Ontario boards would have made any progress in creating positive school climates accepting of LGBT individuals.

After my first three interviews for the study, not only was I astonished to learn how much advocacy for LGBT youth had already taken place in the publicly-funded schools of Waterloo Region, I was also impressed by how much LGBT-positive support had been established in a span of several years. I was very pleased to discover just how wrong my first impression was about the schools affiliated with the WRDSB and WCDSB, and I felt very privileged to have met and interviewed some of the most

courageous and determined advocates of the region who were responsible for creating substantive changes in the lives of the LGBT youth in their schools.

From the information and experiences they shared, I discovered that all 16 schools affiliated with the WRDSB had actively running GSAs; professional development in-service trainings on LGBT topics for their teachers and personnel; close collaborative connections with OK2BME and the board's Equity and Inclusion Office; and policies, administrative procedures, and guidelines from their board that explicitly included sexual orientation as one of the bases for bias-based harassment and offenses related to discrimination. Additionally, several of the schools that the respondents belonged to also had LGBT-positive events and campaigns every year; notable inclusion of LGBT topics in their curriculum; and available counselling for LGBT concerns. I was happy to know that at least two of the schools affiliated with the Catholic board were not far behind with their supports for their own LGBT students at that time.

Learning that supports for LGBT youth in Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools were not as paltry as I initially thought they were, I realized that the perspectives of the participants on advocacy for LGBT issues were going to be based on their lived experiences as key stakeholders who actively engaged and challenged their school systems in order to successfully establish much needed changes. What this essentially meant was, the respondents providing their perspectives were not going to be just a collection of individuals who have been waiting for the provincial government to do something about the circumstances of LGBT youth in their schools, but they were going to be representatives from community coalitions of proactive advocates who had to rise above challenges and overcome struggles to make significant differences in the plight of

the sexual and gender minorities of their schools. Their perspectives were not just going to be opinions based on information that they read or heard, but views that developed from years of experiencing marginalization and advocating for LGBT youth's needs and rights. This realization made me even more curious to find out what their first impressions and specific perspectives were going to be like on Bill 13 and its legislation.

"It's about time!" The first comments of the participants on Bill 13 could only be described as an overwhelmingly positive response. Although there were elements of discernible initial concern in some, most were full of anticipation and hope with what the proposal and legislation of Bill 13 could bring. Since the respondents were from a pool of LGBT youth and advocates who have been working on getting LGBT-positive initiatives established in their schools for years, it did not come as a surprise to me that only one student among all the participants had not known about Bill 13 prior to hearing about it from the recruitment phase of the study.

Most of the students were very enthusiastic with the thought of having a law that would set up protections for LGBT youth in schools, and some teachers expressed that they thought it was about time something like Bill 13 was proposed. Sara was quite proud of the fact that Ontario was the first province to propose such a bill, "Ontario is one of the more powerful and influential provinces. I'm sure it will lead the way when it comes to this kind of legislation and then other provinces will eventually follow." One of the teachers got somewhat emotional when she shared her initial reaction upon hearing about Bill 13:

If we want to see consistent change at a ground level, it has to be legislated

> and supported by the government. In Ontario, and in Canada, that means it has to have the legislative chops to be able to act and say, "You're doing this because it's the law". It's so that people can then say, "We're doing this because it's people's civil rights. And in Canada, we believe that people have those rights and these are how they are encompassed." I think that when someone like the Premier of Ontario says, "I don't really care what your religious beliefs say, when there is something we must do to save our children's lives, we do it." I think that sends a huge message to the general public that says, "Kids and their lives are more important than that wall you've got up over there and whatever hanky-panky is going on behind it."…And that you don't get to say, "We will not support the law."

Although she felt optimistic about the bill's impending legislation like many of the other participants, and was in full support of Bill 13, another teacher still had a little scepticism about what a law can actually accomplish:

> Well, it's amazing. I think it's amazing and it's about time right? I think that it's great, but I also think that we've had anti-racist stuff for a long time, and very often, I don't see that leading to any change at the school level. So, if it leads to change at the school level, then that will be even better. I think it's useful for us because for us doing the work in the schools, we know we're totally supported now. It's a lot easier to say, "Well this is what we have to do, at least the government says it is."

One of the service providers shared this scepticism saying that it will take a lot of

time after legislation for change to happen, but also commented that she was in support of the bill, "There's a real need for it, and we know it." Two of the trustees had positive feedback on Bill 13. One of them remarked, "It's a good piece of legislation and people should not be afraid of any possible pushback. There's always going to be some gripe for every new law." The other trustee expressed:

> The legislation's great. Bill 13 is well written. It's simple and clear. It's straightforward. I don't have many issues with it. The reason why this legislation needed to be specific to the LGBT community is because that's where the work was needed, and that's what they focused the bill on.

Reputation earned. As the discussion on Bill 13 went further in the interviews, it became more apparent during the analysis of the responses that the bill had already earned a reputation for being a statute that was proposed specifically to force publicly-funded school boards in Ontario to allow the formation of GSAs in their schools if there were students who requested them. Nearly half of the participants had very little idea about the rest of the contents of Bill 13 and were surprised to hear that it had more amendments to the *Education Act* that required specific tasks from the Education Minister, the school boards, and the school principals of Ontario, which addressed more needs of LGBT students.

More so, for those respondents who thought that the bill was mostly about coercing Ontario publicly-funded schools to support GSAs, and even for some respondents who did know that there was more to the bill, Bill 13 earned the reputation of being the statute that was proposed specifically to target Catholic schools. Chloe was one

of the students who believed that the *Accepting Schools Act* was passed deliberately to force the hand of Catholic school boards:

> I do think the law sets important groundwork for students and gives them some sort of coverage where maybe they didn't have that, especially in Catholic schools. From what I've heard of public schools, at least in the city I grew up in, they do try to be progressive, and they do try to protect students in that regard. It's just that, ah, I think it's just different in Catholic schools. This is based on what my friends and I who go to Catholic school know. I think the bill was created with Catholic schools in mind. And I think that it gives Catholic school students some coverage or something to fall back on, so that we don't feel like we're completely alone…that we don't feel like we're being completely ignored and subject to the whims of whatever authority figures we have in the Catholic schools.

Jaime, who recently graduated from a Catholic high school, completely agreed with Chloe's sentiments:

> I definitely think that was a huge part of the bill, especially the wording of it. Like I said, when I tried to start a GSA in my final year, there were infinite roadblocks. They were saying you couldn't do that, you're not even allowed to use the word "GSA". Just having that, it was very evident that the bill was proposed for Catholic schools because they were banning that term, much less the concept behind it.

These notions were likely related to the contentious debates that went on for

months around the time Bill 13 was being legislated, which were documented by mass media reports. Proponents from the two opposing sides felt very strongly about the use of the word "GSA" or the words "Gay-Straight Alliances" in Catholic schools (Lewis, 2012; Nonato, 2012; Perkel, 2012). But it was not just students and teachers who felt that the bill was created to put conservative Catholics in school boards in their place. One trustee from the Catholic school board who spent a lot of time studying the bill very carefully came to a similar conclusion and retorted:

> I'm disappointed that the bill had to be legislated in the first place. I think it showed a real failing of the Catholic school boards. I think the reality is that, that's where the legislation was targeted at, and we were the ones who pushed back on this.

However, not all respondents believed that Bill 13 was proposed and legislated based on a mission to target Catholic schools. Several participants believed to the contrary. One of the representatives from WRDSB who has had several occasions to work with members of WCDSB on initiatives meant to support minority youth thought the opposite:

> I honestly don't think it was developed just to give Catholic school boards specific direction. I mean there's lots of Ontario public school boards, non-Catholic, that have not done a lot in this area either, so this is for them as well. I hope this isn't seen as a law for Catholic school boards, I mean, it's for everybody involved.

Mike also thought that bill was not just meant to help LGBT youth in Catholic

schools. He pointed out that many others apart from LGBT students would benefit from the amendments proposed by Bill 13:

> I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about it because a lot of the pushback comes from people who believe that this is a gay celebration document almost, and only focus on that one issue. It actually works to address this really important issue and it seeks to address the growing number of students who are struggling because of pushback to their sexual identities. But it also talks about other forms of bullying that are on the rise, such as cyber-bullying. So I think that there needs to be a lot more awareness about what this actually does and how it doesn't seek to give special privileges to gay youth in Catholic schools. It just seeks to, you know, better support them in an environment that's particularly harsh to them. It also seeks to address other forms of bullying and forms of abuse that weren't necessarily issues when the earlier policies were created.

For a few respondents who were not quite as familiar with the contents of Bill 13, the notion that the bill had more punishments for bullies and other offenders in schools became a concern. Sydney conveyed this concern, saying:

> Well, it would definitely provide deterrents for any of the bullies who are getting caught and got caught repeatedly. Especially if they are given notice when they get caught. I think that to an extent, excessive punishment…more punishment for the bullies will not do anything, but it's better than nothing. I would much rather the bullies have a place where they can go for

counselling or treatment, so that they aren't actually bullying anymore.

Shaun had similar thoughts about having fewer punishments in policies and noted, "The punishment would always be detention, but I've actually never seen counselling. Maybe the bullies should go talk to someone…that'd actually be really good." Although their opinions revealed a genuine concern for bullies who may just be misunderstood, the truth of the matter is, they had misconceptions of what advocates for Bill 13 were trying to accomplish since there were mandates for progressive discipline measures in the bill.

Strengths of Bill 13 as a Proposed Statute

Because the participants had an overwhelming positive response to the legislation of Bill 13, it was no surprise that many of them found certain aspects and components of the bill personally appealing and relevant. For example, a lot of the participants found the section of the bill that explicitly forbade Ontario boards and principals from prohibiting the establishment of LGBT-affirming clubs in schools as an important amendment in the bill. More so, respondents appreciated the fact that the section also specified that boards must allow students to name their clubs "Gay-Straight Alliances" if they desired to do so. Prior to the legislation of the bill, some advocates felt that the provincial government allowed Catholic boards to get away with suppressing the needs of LGBT youth. As one of the trustees expressed with frustration:

> The law is only as good as the people prepared to enforce it. And quite honestly, before Bill 13, the provincial government was not ready to enforce it, or at least push the envelope. It didn't matter that they had policies on safety and progressive discipline; they still allowed our coterminous board,

> the Catholic school board, to prohibit students from forming GSAs. They still allowed the Catholic school board to indulge with discriminatory practices, and I think it was for political reasons. It's about time they legislated something like this!

The other two trustees commented that they believed it was appropriate for the bill to mandate boards to allow students to call their clubs by any name they wanted. One trustee from the Catholic board elaborated:

> I think fundamentally, the real issue was "What name are we going to use?" That was what the opposing sides within the Catholic school system started fighting over. And the reason why that becomes important, is not because the name necessarily matters, it's because the name becomes a symbolic issue that is either saying "We're okay with the word 'gay'." or "We're not okay with the word 'gay'."…And by extension, we're not okay with you coming to our school if you're gay. My sense is more, if you let kids call it what they want, then it encourages them. Whatever language they find that's most affirming to them, you give them the freedom to use it. I think if we [in the Catholic board] had said that from the beginning, "Of course GSA is a fine name", if you want to call it that. But if you want to call it something else, that's fine too. I think most clubs would have probably called it another name because kids like to be creative and come up with creative names. I don't think that's the issue though. The real issue was basically saying yes or no to what the clubs stood for than allowing that name. Because as soon as you're putting those types of restrictions on it, you're setting the subtle

message that “We don’t want that”.

Another aspect related to this point that respondents found very important was the language used in the bill. Many of the interviewees were pleased that the language used was strong yet open and flexible enough to back advocates up in terms of letting them create LGBT-positive initiatives suited to their schools’ needs and settings. Because they found that their circumstances were not always necessarily the same or ideal as those in other schools, many respondents were relieved to see that the verbiage used in the bill gave them enough freedom to be creative so that they could navigate the challenges in their own schools. One teacher explained:

> There’s enough flexibility within that legislation, I think, to respect the conservative and religious beliefs or specific issues of different people, but also respect the fact that these are our students and they have real problems. These are young people who need our attention and support. And it’s just been too long that we’ve turned a blind eye to their suffering.

A third element in the bill that participants liked was how it encouraged schools to come up with initiatives that would improve school climates to become inclusive and supportive of students of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, or disability. This clearly meant that the bill was not solely providing special treatment for LGBT youth in the way some conservative critics claimed. One service provider pointed out that many members of the community seemed to forget that Bill 13 was developed to support all marginalized youth in schools, but

added “We all know that LGBT kids need it the most.”

Several of the respondents conveyed their interest in the idea that the bill mandated the establishment of new and more specific surveys and reports on bullying and issues connected to negative school climates every two years, on top of surveys and reports already being implemented. They felt that if the right people implemented the surveys and responded to its findings on a regular basis that there would be a consistent form of assessment of the initiatives that schools were implementing. As one of the service providers commented:

> The other piece that I found really interesting was that there’s going to be a new survey required that’s supposed to be done every two years and that would track what schools have been doing in response to the directives of the bill. That would be a cool way to impose a check and balance.

Other components of the bill that participants believed were assets to the overall strength of Bill 13 as a statute proposing new amendments to the *Education Act* included: 1) the explicit addition of cyber-bullying in the description of bullying offenses for schools to address; 2) the specific duties and responsibilities of the Education Minister, school boards, and principals that were laid out in detail; and 3) the increased focus on the importance of observing the principles of progressive discipline, particularly with regards to involving parents and members of the community in the rehabilitation of repeat offenders, and placing the provision of necessary supports for youth such as counselling at par with attention to disciplinary actions. Some of the respondents said that the bill was able to raise the observance and respect for the principles of progressive discipline and

restorative justice to a higher level.

Weaknesses of Bill 13 as a Proposed Statute

Some participants found certain aspects and components of the bill weak. For one, although some participants found the section of the bill that mandates Ontario boards to support the formation of LGBT-affirming clubs in schools to be a strong part of the bill, other participants criticized the bill for not specifically insisting that all the clubs be named "Gay-Straight Alliances". For some, it was very important to them that schools acknowledged the word "gay" by accepting the name "GSA"; while for others, it was just as important for advocates to acknowledge the word "alliance" because it honoured the solidarity that straight allies show in the clubs. One of the representatives at the board level shared her views on this particular issue:

> There was just the one word in that section. That part where it says that students "may" call them GSAs, but to me it wasn't strong enough. I can't remember exactly how all the wording was written…but my stand is…if they are GSAs, then they should be called GSAs. They shouldn't be called something else. That's what we hear from our students. We don't have that problem in our board, but in other boards that aren't allowed to call them GSAs, like in the Catholic board, they're saying, "Okay, what…what is it?" They call them equity groups or something that they're not, and they don't really feel like they're being honoured when they're being called something different.

Another criticism participants had of Bill 13 was that none of the sections that

mandated schools to come up with initiatives to foster accepting and inclusive climates mentioned anything explicit about promoting supports for teachers and staff advocating for marginalized youth. Although the respondents conceded that the bill was primarily conceived to address the needs of minority youth, they pointed out that if the bill had specific mandates that encouraged or required supports for advocates in the schools, the youth would have indirectly but significantly benefited too. In the earlier part of their interviews, many of the respondents – students, teachers, administrators, board-level representatives, and service providers alike – extoled the merits of students having adult role models who identified as LGBT in their schools. The participants said that the bill missed an opportunity to help LGBT youth in that manner, by failing to explicitly add amendments that would ensure protections for school employees if they decided to identify as LGBT. Some of the respondents also said that advocates in the schools were in sore need of additional resources and reprieve from compassion and carer fatigue brought on by years of struggle and continued advocacy. They criticized the bill for not including strong enough elements and perspicuous directions that would promote positive climates in support of hard-working advocates for LGBT students in the schools. One teacher clarified how an inclusion of support for advocates in the bill would have helped:

> There have been people who said, I know the teachers who run the GSAs are getting burnt out. So I think we need more supports, we need more release time to go and do some training for us around the more difficult issues. We do have kids that have a higher rate of suicide attempts and depression in our clubs than other clubs. I think if you want these things to keep going, you have to support the people who are passionate about it by

> giving them the skills that they need to deal with these kids' issues because I know some amazing people that have stepped away from this club. You need a larger skill set than just being a nice teacher who gets the issues, right?

Lastly, some participants felt strongly that Bill 13 should not merely be mandating Ontario boards to allow the creation of GSAs in schools if students requested for them. For these participants, the benefit of having GSAs in schools has already been well documented and that the government should no longer be giving schools the option to wait for students to ask for them. Instead, these respondents believed that the bill should already be unequivocally directing all district boards in the province to create GSAs in each of their schools. A trustee from the Catholic school board had much to say about this point:

> If you look at the public system, every single public high school in Waterloo Region, and even some of the senior elementary, has a GSA. In Waterloo Catholic, we have 5 of the largest high schools in the region, and only two of them have a club like a GSA. The implementation approach that we're taking is if students ask for them, we'll permit a GSA. The reality is, these are vulnerable students. A GSA is a policy tool that works. The fact that every public school has one, and we're among the largest, shows that the demand is there. The argument that we're waiting until somebody comes up and asks for one to show that there's actually a need for it, just doesn't make sense. It's the type of club that needs some sort of encouragement. And the problem that I come back to often is that trustees and senior admin need to

> play a leadership role. We're not playing that leadership role. I've chatted with teachers in our system. The Catholic teachers' union is in support of GSAs. A lot of teachers have no problem with it. Most don't have a problem with it that I've chatted with. The problem is that leadership is sending the direction of the system. In this case, it's about moral leadership, more than anything. So it's not necessarily standing up, saying that you have to follow this in this case. Just by actually standing up and saying "This is great! These clubs should be encouraged." would be enough. It would change things dramatically. It would change things quickly because you don't always need to use the policy. All your usual policy lovers do, but sometimes, verbal statements and encouragements are enough.

Benefits Resulting from the Legislation of Bill 13

When the topic of potential benefits resulting from the legislation of Bill 13 came up, many of the respondents began to get excited during the interviews. It seemed that the prospect of positive outcomes resulting from *the Accepting Schools Act* was something that inspired and stimulated the key stakeholders. For the majority of respondents, there were going to be obvious benefits to the legislation and enactment of Bill 13. The most obvious would be, that for advocates like them, they would have the unqualified legal backing to carry out strategies and programs that they knew were effective in supporting LGBT youth. Not only would they be able to carry out current work that helped LGBT students without trepidation, but they would also be able to initiate new LGBT-positive strategies and programs in their schools with more confidence. For advocates who had doubts or fears of repercussions when others questioned their efforts, they would have the

sanction they need to reinforce their positions.

One representative from the administration level of the board indicated that school boards would then have all the justification they needed to support minority youth. She quipped, "I didn't know how much longer the Liberal government was planning on staying subtle. I'm glad they finally did this." Another representative from the administration level of the board pointed out that the legislation of the bill would not only provide stakeholders more backing, but it would also give boards the strong push they need. For advocates in schools who have already been quietly working under the radar to help LGBT youth, opportunities might come up for them to officially work on their projects as boards would have to find ways to respond to the mandate to develop more positive school climates. A few teachers admitted to feeling safer knowing that the law would be behind them and no one could question their motivations. Other teachers, on the other hand, said that the new act would provide them greater motivations to work harder on their advocacy for their LGBT youth.

Ariel remarked, "The bill's enactment will show that the government is in support of tolerance, acceptance, and equality. It's also an indication that society is changing and that our leaders are responding to the change." The superintendent commented that the passing of Bill 13 is "a public endorsement that cannot be ignored", and added, "schools should take advantage of the message the government has conveyed".

Some participants sounded more assured and confident than the rest with the idea that with explicit mandates of the new law, advocates would certainly have what they need to make their efforts count even more. Alice commented that the advantage of

having Bill 13 passed is "it will tell teachers and school staff where they should stand". Sara interjected, "At least now, students will know their school will have to follow the law." Although she knows that things are not necessarily as simple as school boards automatically following all the dictates of the law, the school administrator still remarked, "It's non-negotiable now. The law will be there to hold schools accountable."

Mary felt that the *Accepting Schools Act* would give more voice to the sentiments of marginalized LGBT youth and their advocates – "a voice that can no longer be silenced by religious conservatives". When the legislation of Bill 13 was imminent, a trustee from the Catholic board who was upset about the controversy on using the name "GSA" retorted, "Okay, call it a GSA, don't call it a GSA, but let's get something started in the schools. You've got the support from the province now. Let's make that happen." The school administrator shared this sentiment as well, "Whether it will be called PRISM or not…I know one of the other schools wants to use our name PRISM…we're going to get some form of group in every Catholic high school in Waterloo Region by next year."

Rallying the troops. Several of the respondents thought that Bill 13 would be able to act as an accelerant to the advocacy efforts of the stakeholders in Waterloo Region. Whereas before its legislation, efforts to form GSAs or similar clubs and implement LGBT-affirming strategies and programs were bogged down by administration concerns of parental pushback and complaints, advocates now believed that the *Accepting Schools Act* can help fast-forward initiatives started by community coalition members in schools.

There was also the notion among the interviewees that with Bill 13 passed as law,

there would be more opportunities and confidence to rally other school personnel to become new advocates for the cause of supporting sexual and gender minority youth. One of the public school teachers pointed out that it seemed that, in the past, the bulk of school staff refused to get involved because of fears of repercussions. He believed that with approbation from the government, more teachers, counsellors, and other employees would be able to step up and offer their support in their own ways:

> Before Bill 13 was passed, we were on an island and we didn't know what the next action to support these kids was going to be because we could get into a whole heap of hot water with the board. There was nothing in line to say this is what we were supposed to be doing. So then I think, what happened was, about 80% of the staff that were in the middle, who were on the fence, just sat there and said, "I'm not getting involved." Whereas now, we have the freedom to say, if you're in that 80%, get involved and help!

Another teacher emphasized that the law would sanction more activities related to finding new ways to support minority youth in schools, which would provide new advocates different options to choose from so that they could offer support at their comfort level. More importantly, she believed that long-time advocates could take advantage of the opportunities provided by Bill 13 to educate more individuals within and outside of the school community about LGBT needs and rights because more people would likely be more open to persuasion with the new law in place. She was convinced that there would be more opportunities to get more advocates for their cause without having to force anyone into changing entire belief systems. A teacher from a Catholic school had similar ideas when she expressed that the new act would provide occasions for

recruiting people who have been "on the fence for a long time", and that with successful recruitment, "There would be more people on board."

Supporting existing initiatives and jumpstarting new ones. Several interviewees pointed out that with the new act, there will no longer be a risk for existing GSAs and LGBT-positive programs facing opposition in their schools from being removed or abolished. They thought that with the government mandate, struggling GSAs and LGBT-positive programs could at least have a better chance of getting more support in terms of leadership from teachers, staff, and administrators, as well as funding from their schools. With certain sections of the bill that were general and open enough to allow for greater flexibility and creativity in the establishment of initiatives that would promote school climates inclusive and accepting of all pupils, LGBT students and their advocates saw the potential for them to be able to develop new strategies, programs, and policies that would address persistently existing, as well as emerging, issues and concerns.

Sydney wondered, "Maybe now we can get gender-neutral washrooms set up on some floors." Ariel underscored the fact that the new act was not just about pushing schools to establish or support GSAs but also encouraging them to come up with more ideas on how to make the school climates safer, more inclusive, and accepting. Helen, who is part of an active GSA, hoped that their school administration would ask their teachers to include more LGBT history and culture in their curriculum.

One teacher commented that advocacy in the various schools affiliated with the two boards of Waterloo Region looked very different from one school to the next because each school was unique and had distinct circumstances. However, she conceded that

some schools were more advanced with their success in helping LGBT youth, while others definitely needed help with getting their initiatives going. Another teacher revealed:

> Many of the existing GSAs are still struggling. Perhaps this directive from the government could breathe new life to those GSAs. There are teachers and child and youth workers out there who have needed support to help these kids. Everyone could certainly use more resources too. So there's still more room for improvement with the GSAs we already have.

Since Bill 13 would sanction any initiative that would help promote positive school climates inclusive and accepting of all students, its legislation inspired new ideas from the participants who thought that there could still be so much that could be done in Waterloo Region even if all 16 of its public schools already have GSAs. One idea that many of the participants shared was the creation of more GSAs in their senior elementary (middle) schools. Mary had very strong feelings about this idea:

> I think that the most important part now is that there could be a safe space in every single school. So no child or student is feeling alone, or that they don't have anywhere to go in school. I think some parents might not like the idea of GSAs being in middle school, or even younger possibly, if they want to start one. They might have a problem with that, "Oh, my kid's too young to find out about gay people" and they may not like that LGBT material is being taught at a relatively young age. But tough, really, they just have to suck it up. We've been the ones at the tail end of things for so long. They

> should realize that it's about the kids, not them. They think they know better, but really, they don't. The law will even things up for us now and that's just great.

One teacher confessed, "For me personally, the next step is going lower. We should have GSAs or something…some sort of program in elementary schools that show how we connect, regardless of our differences." Another teacher shared her thoughts about expanding LGBT-affirming initiatives to middle schools:

> You know, we've had a GSA here for 5 years and there are maybe only two or three others that I know that run at the [senior] elementary level. So even though they run it, I know one school, a few schools in particular, they don't get many kids out, or they just get white, straight kids. So people come to our school and say "Wow, you're allowed to say that in class when you talk about gay marriage? You read novels with characters that are gay?" I really think more schools should be able to do much more at the [senior] elementary level. So with this new bill, I hope things will change.

Both representatives from the public board who have been working on equity and inclusion projects for years also had thoughts about new opportunities to help younger students that could stem from the enactment of Bill 13. One representative said, "With our board, it will help us expand and start GSAs in more of our senior elementary schools. With the other board, well, they don't have clubs yet in their Grades 7 and 8. So we'll see." The other representative revealed:

> We've heard from teachers how some students in middle schools love

> talking to older kids from high school about starting up GSAs. Maybe we can even network GSAs between middle and high schools so that the older kids can mentor and support the younger ones even more.

The superintendent mentioned that cross-grade interactions would be encouraged if their current GSA network would have more GSAs in their senior elementary schools. One of the service providers who was responsible for maintaining the Waterloo Region GSA Network website confirmed that these interactions were already ongoing online and that the younger students really appreciated the chance to be able to reach out to slightly older youth who could mentor them.

A more obvious idea that many of the participants expressed was the notion that with the new act, students in the three remaining Catholic high schools in Waterloo Region would be able to form their own clubs similar to PRISM, as well as celebrate LGBT-positive events and campaigns, with the support of the advocates from their schools. Shaun, Ariel, and Sydney all mentioned that they had non-Catholic friends who studied at Catholic high schools and it was a relief to know that their friends could finally start their own GSA-type clubs and request for LGBT-focused activities.

Mike made a point to emphasize that it was his hope that with the creativity and flexibility that the *Accepting School Act* inspired and allowed, schools in rural areas would also be able to begin looking into new ways of establishing LGBT-positive initiatives such as incorporating inclusive material in their curricula, as well as create connections to community agencies with LGBT-specific knowledge and resources for isolated youth. One trustee shared that his hope was that the new act would encourage

schools to want to do more than just be able to "tick off the box and claim that they have already fulfilled what the law has required of them" and not just execute the bare minimum.

Dialogue drawing attention to the cause. Participants saw that the proposal and legislation of Bill 13 already resulted in an unintended outcome that from their perspective was actually something positive. Many of the respondents, especially the teachers and the administrator, thought that despite the tension that was raised by the debates on Bill 13 between the conservative and liberal factions of the larger community, it was gratifying to know that it also raised intelligent conversations and awareness about LGBT issues in the process. One teacher said that the more dialogue the bill's legislation produced, the higher the profile it created for LGBT human rights and the importance of keeping our sexual and gender minority youth safe in schools. Another teacher was giggling when she commented:

> I didn't think I'd ever hear the Archbishop of Toronto ever say the word 'gay' because the conservatives in the Catholic Church always want to use awkward terms like 'same-sex attracted' or something. But there he was on broadcast radio, talking as if he was still on a pulpit, and he kept using the word 'gay' over and over. I thought it was hilarious! I'm sure there were people out there listening who realized how backward, narrow-minded, and stubborn some religious people could be. I bet that his message got a lot of heated conversations going. I'm sure all that discussion brought attention to the plight of our LGBT students, which for me was certainly a plus.

Challenges Resulting from the Legislation of Bill 13

There were moments in the interviews that highlighted the participants' concerns about potential challenges that could result from the legislation of Bill 13. Among the different challenges that they could foresee, the one that many respondents were concerned about was how the mandates of the bill were going to be implemented, particularly the sections that did not have explicit details with regards to implementation. This is what Helen implied when she asked, "Like all of a sudden the bill is supposed to make kids feel safe once it's passed?" She was concerned that having such a law might make some people become complacent instead of inspired to make use of the opportunities that the law would present. One teacher noted that people should remember that there has to be a change at the school level once the law comes into effect. She cited, "certain policies on curricular changes that were established in the early 2000s that were never really implemented in our school". She was afraid that this new act would not bring in any significant change unless advocates remained vigilant and remembered to consistently make the most out of its directives. Another teacher could not curb her cynicism and retorted, "It doesn't solve everything though. It will depend a lot on how it is disseminated and enforced." One of the representatives from the administration level of the public board was more proactive in her outlook and said, "The implementation of the act will look different in each school. That's just the nature of legislation and policies. People will really have to go for it once the bill's passed as law."

Some participants' concerns on the implementation of the mandates of the *Accepting Schools Act* were more specific and practical. One teacher remarked, "One of the big challenges for us is choosing the right people who would become involved with

the planning and implementing of initiatives meant to help students. It's important that we look into their background, attitudes, qualifications…even lived experience." Her statement was very similar to a comment of another teacher who wanted to make sure that when it came to the implementation of LGBT-positive activities in school, the personnel who would lead and take responsibility for the activities not only need to have the appropriate credentials and experience, but also the right values and convictions to do the work. The superintendent commented that choosing the right people for specific leadership roles was just as important for the purposes of safeguarding the "sustainability of the school's efforts".

Another specific and practical concern regarding the implementation of the mandates of Bill 13 involved the procurement and management of resources. Some of the respondents felt that the bill did not pay particular attention to this concern, and that without specific provisions to resources, advocates would have a difficult time carrying out initiatives. There was no doubt that the scarcity of resources was an issue for almost all of the advocates from the school community, the different levels of the school board, and the external agencies who provided additional support to the Waterloo Region LGBT students. Students, teachers, and service providers in particular, all expressed the need for resources in order to carry out much-needed initiatives. One teacher remarked, "Even with the enthusiasm of the students and the manpower provided by the faculty and staff who devote their time and energy after school hours, without the necessary resources, efforts are limited and people become demoralized." One of the service providers was already anticipating an increased demand for their support once the bill passes, "Schools know that they can come to us for additional counselling, professional development

training and workshops, books, DVDs, and the use of the GSA Network website. Once Bill 13 becomes law, there will be more demand and limited supply." One of the representatives from the board who is perpetually involved with work dedicated to GSAs offered some optimism by suggesting that, because lack of resources is an issue for everyone, people will have to find ways to be more creative, flexible, and resourceful:

> The funds aren't always there. Like for myself, I know that we don't have a very big budget at all, like at all. There are lots of initiatives and we have to be careful about how we want to be equitable about how our budget is distributed. But you know, we support the dance financially. We support the conference too. In different ways as well, it isn't always financial. We try to support schools in different ways. Now in schools, they can get money for student activities. So I always encourage our GSA leaders to approach their vice-principal for student activities and ask them for some funds if they want to run an event because that's their right, the students pay for that in their fees as well…and they're entitled to reaping those benefits. School budgets don't always have to go sports, and the arts, and all those great things. But if they want to do some sort of initiative, like get a speaker, or even just have something for their GSA…if they want an outing or do something. They need some money, they should ask their school for it.

One of the trustees had a near identical suggestion as a solution to the problem of scarce resources for implementing activities, "Funding's always an issue in the education environment. You can say that about special education students, about infrastructure funding, it's always an issue. But students can ask for money from their administration's

budget if they really need it."

A trustee pointed out that the allocation of resources for amendments and specific mandates of education legislation are really not included in the bill itself and that it usually follows later in other documents created by the Ministry of Education based on a budget, so details of how resources would be allocated for directed initiatives in the content of the bill are not something people should actually expect. However, he does understand that what advocates were likely looking for were directives on the bill specifying that the Education Minister should allocate resources for supports required by its other mandates and not just more directives to create more policies for school boards.

Apart from the need for more resources and having the right people involved in the establishment of GSAs and the implementation of LGBT-affirming programs in response to the legislation of Bill 13, another challenge associated with implementation that the respondents noted was the proper evaluation of school boards' efforts to create positive climates for minority youth. One teacher raised the question, "How exactly does the government intend to check if the act is being enforced?" Some participants were not convinced that additional biennial surveys specifically conducted to evaluate efforts in response to the mandates of Bill 13 would be enough to track significant changes over time. Although other participants had related doubts about performance and response evaluation, they also felt that it was everyone's responsibility to ensure and check that the directives of the act were followed, and not just the government's.

In relation to some participants' concerns and apprehensions about the lack of specific details and explicit directions regarding the implementation of initiatives in

accordance to Bill 13's mandates, several of the respondents from the school board level were careful to point out that these details and directions are usually specified and outlined in the creation of documents containing procedures and guidelines that follow after the legislation of a bill. They also noted that many times, policymakers purposely hold back on adding specifics in certain aspects of a bill in order to allow key stakeholders to customize their initiatives or solutions to the context of their own settings.

One last major challenge that participants anticipated with the enactment of the bill was the possibility that the heated debates and confrontations between members of society with opposing opinions on Bill 13 would escalate. There were already months of building tension due to the pushback from the conservative sector of the community against the liberal government's proposal to require all publicly-funded school boards to support LGBT-affirming clubs in schools and allow students to call them "Gay-Straight Alliances" if they chose to do so. The religious sector of Ontario claimed that the bill was part of the government's agenda to push their liberal ideas in schools (Lewis, 2012; Nonato, 2012; Perkel, 2012). However, it was noticeable that it was the participants interviewed before the bill was passed who mostly expressed this apprehension. The concern about more pushback and greater tension building significantly diminished among the participants who were interviewed after the bill was enacted as law and a statement released by the bishops of Ontario announcing that they were not going to promote or tolerate any form of civil disobedience to the new law (Mann, 2012).

Responses to the Indignation of Catholic Conservatives Towards Bill 13

The part of the interview where participants became visibly emotional was when I

asked them about their views on the indignation that Catholic conservatives showed towards the proposal and legislation of Bill 13. Over half of the participants had very strong views on how to respond to the concerns of Catholic conservatives and were not shy to express them. Sydney remarked, "I think it's important to have a safe school environment and it's more important than having religious beliefs. They're like getting money from the government, that means they have to follow the laws of the government." Mike was very ardent when he expressed his own beliefs:

> If they have a desire to educate students a certain way that's different from what the majority of people want, they shouldn't be taking taxpayer dollars so it doesn't limit their freedom to teach kids the way they want to teach them. I'm glad Bill 13 is telling them exactly what they can and can't do. They can't ban gay kids from forming clubs that kids need for support, and they shouldn't stop kids from calling their clubs "Gay-Straight Alliances".

Three teachers had the same ideas as Sydney and Mike. One teacher said:

> If they're publicly-funded, well hello, LGBT people are part of the public! So they better provide a better place for our kids. Because bottom line is, our kids are dying! They can be whatever religious persuasion they want to be, but for me, if you care about kids, and that's what you're in the business of doing while taking public tax dollars, you better be saving some lives because that's what these clubs are doing. And they are, I believe they are.

A second teacher commented, "When the Premier says 'This is more important than your need to not say 'gay'.' It's a very clear-cut message. If you want Ontario's

money, then you will do these things that we say you must do." Another teacher was just as passionate about what she thought should be done if Catholic conservatives insisted on blocking Bill 13:

> So my attitude is this. You know what, this is public education. So, if we are funding it with public dollars, which is tax dollars, then we should promote the equity and inclusion that has helped build this nation. If that offends certain people, then they should find a specialty school system that deals with that specifically and not take taxpayers' money. Do I think that LGBT issues should be jammed down the throats of those people? Yes! I do believe we should jam it down their throats because we don't have equity within our school systems yet!

Two students from a Catholic school revealed their feelings about how Catholic schools should be run. Chloe felt that it would be better if Catholic school systems did not get any public funding just like other religious school systems. She added that she believes that only one publicly-funded secular school system should exist and that it is only just that no religious school system should get any special consideration for public funding. Jaime had even more ideas about how things should work in a Catholic school:

> Teachers should be there for the students, and that should be their priority. Being in a Catholic school, they should use those Catholic values to, you know, be dependable resources. If students get kicked out of their house for being gay, the first step [for teachers] should be, "Let's try to find you a place to stay," not "Okay, let's pray for you." Like using those Catholic values to understand what their role is without having to shove ideas that

> students don't believe in down their throats. I think within the Catholic school system, a big step is understanding that the majority of students now do not believe in what the Catholic faith is teaching them [on this issue]…but still using those Catholic values to help. I've never bashed the Catholic system because they gave me great values throughout school.

One Catholic schoolteacher confessed that she could not get over how some of her colleagues could be so rigid in their thinking and how they could not get past their tunnel vision ways of looking at issues. The school administrator explained that she had other priorities over spending time arguing with stubborn conservatives:

> It seems to me that over the years, trustees have lost power as a governing body. So I don't overly concern myself with their gripes to be honest. I'm in the trenches with the kids and my mandate is to keep a safe school for all kids. So if they have their adult struggles around the bill, I see that as their issue, not mine. If some of them say, "We're a Catholic school", then all the more reason to believe that if we're people of the gospel, we know that Jesus sought out people from the margins, not the priests and the high officials of that time period. That's our calling, and we're not doing any more or any less than doing what the gospel tells us to. If they have struggles with Bill 13, that's their issue to figure out. We're too busy keeping the kids safe here.

One of the trustees from the Catholic board also had a lot to say regarding the direction that their board needs to take and what their schools have to do:

As a Catholic school system, if we're going to maintain our legitimacy, we have to be willing, in the province of Ontario, to be a little bit flexible on some of things around Catholic dogma. I'm not saying that we need to reject the church's teaching, I think there's an appropriate place for us to teach those teachings, I'm sure the classroom is fine. But I think, when we start getting pressure from the bishops that isn't in the interest of our students, it's going to make a less safe environment, and it's going to put some students in a position where they don't have all the supports they need. It's going to put our school system in the light of saying, "We're pushing up against the Human Rights Code. We're pushing up against the consensus of Ontario society about being a safe space for all." I [also] think, we as a Catholic school system, if we are serious about maintaining legitimacy and our Catholic funding, then we need to be able to say to the bishops, "This is Ontario, we need to go on a little bit different route." We need to recognize that the Catholic Church and the Catholic school system may not always line up perfectly if we're going to fit effectively as a [publicly] funded institution. I think the Catholic Church is ready to move to a certain degree, but the Catholic school system needs to be able to move further than the Catholic Church. You don't have a billion Catholics to think about in the school system. We have the students to think about. We also have the local Catholic community to think about within the Waterloo Region. So if Bill 13 explicitly tells all publicly-funded schools in the province to do something, then we should make sure we follow.

Summary of Findings

Although none of the participants believed that Bill13 was a perfect or flawless piece of legislation, most of them expressed it was a very important statute that needed to be legislated and passed as law. Many of the participants appreciated the fact that Bill 13 explicitly mandated the implementation of certain initiatives in publicly-funded schools, most of which were already being successfully implemented in the two school boards of Waterloo Region. Other participants were pleased that there were elements of the bill that provided allowances for schools to implement initiatives that could address their specific needs in the distinct contexts of their own schools. The participants noted that many benefits could be expected from the legislation of the bill, particularly the legal support, backing, and endorsement they needed to continue implementing strategies, programs, and policies that were questioned or thwarted by others who opposed their efforts. The participants also noted that some challenges could be anticipated before the bill was passed. They were mostly concerns and questions about the actual implementation and evaluation of initiatives in schools that were mandated by the bill.

Chapter 6

Findings III

LGBT-Affirming Waterloo Region Initiatives After the Legislation of Bill 13

WRDSB and WCDSB Response to Bill 13 Mandates

The perspectives that the participants provided around the time that Bill 13 was being legislated was important because they represented the views of stakeholders who were actively advocating for initiatives to address LGBT youth issues in Ontario publicly-funded schools, as well as to promote positive school climates that were safe and inclusive for all students, at a very significant moment in time when the potential to create monumental social change for the benefit of LGBT students through legislation and public policy could potentially happen. However, because the data from the interviews then represented only perspectives from that significant moment in time, I was naturally curious to know what the actual response of the Waterloo Region school boards was to the legislation of Bill 13. More recently, I wanted to explore what actually transpired within the two and a half years that have passed since the enactment of Bill 13.

Short of conducting new interviews to satisfy my curiosity as a researcher, I decided to investigate on how the two Waterloo Region school boards responded to the mandates of Bill 13 in the last two and a half years by performing two new tasks. First, I conducted a document search on the websites of the two Waterloo Region school boards. I used the search function of their websites to seek and identify and electronic information or documents that contained any new events and initiatives implemented in the last two ad

a half years that can be construed as adherence, compliance, or a positive response to the mandates of Bill 13, particularly the mandate to promote positive school climates safe and inclusive of all students. From this electronic document search, I was able to review and harness important information from the school boards' *Director's Annual Reports* for the last three years that were all available to the public. Second, I initiated correspondence with a representative from each of the two school boards whom I knew would be knowledgeable about the new information I sought. I spoke to both representatives briefly over the phone, mainly to inquire if they knew of any other initiatives that their respective school boards implemented since June 2012, in addition to the ones that I have already discovered and identified from my electronic search. This second task was mostly to verify the new information I uncovered from their school boards' websites and to discover if there were any other initiatives, which were ongoing or being planned but were still not accessible to the public on their websites.

There were several initiatives implemented in the two Waterloo Region school boards in the last couple of years that could readily be interpreted as direct adherence to the specific and explicitly stated mandates of the act. The most obvious ones implemented in the WRDSB were related to the establishment of GSAs in their schools. By the end of 2014, all 16 high schools affiliated with the board still had actively running GSAs. The number of senior elementary/middle (Grade 7-8) school GSAs increased from four to nine in the last two years. There were also two new junior elementary (JK-Grade 6) school GSAs created in the past year. All of the clubs were named "Gay-Straight Alliances", and are currently part of the local GSA Network that was established by the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office and OK2BME several years ago (WRDSB Equity and Inclusion

Office, personal communication, February 18, 2015). Prior to the legislation of Bill 13, there were only two high schools affiliated with the WCDSB that had GSA-type clubs, both of which were called "PRISM". After the enactment of the bill in 2012, the three remaining high schools affiliated with the Catholic board also formed GSA-type clubs of their own (WCDSB PRISM, personal communication, February 26, 2015). In terms of positive outcomes, the presence of these GSAs and GSA-type clubs in the many schools that established them at the very least ensured safe spaces, the support of allies and teacher advisors, and access to community networks for their LGBT students.

In the last two years, both school boards provided their schools' staff with professional development in-service trainings and workshops on diversity, inclusion, equity, and specific topics related to LGBT issues; created equity and inclusion education directives to incorporate LGBT material in their schools' curricula; provided suitable guidance/pastoral counselling services to bullies and bullied students; and amended or added policies, administrative procedures, and guidelines dedicated to the promotion of safe, accepting, and inclusive school climates (WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, personal communication, February 18, 2015; WCDSB PRISM, personal communication, February 26, 2015; WRDSB, 2012, 2013, 2014). These initiatives synergistically contributed to addressing LGBT youth issues in the schools that implemented them.

As an adjunct to their existing *Equity and Inclusion Policy*, the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office has been recently working on creating a new administrative procedure that would be dedicated to establishing accommodations for persons who identify as transgender in their schools (WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, personal communication, February 18, 2015).

After a thorough review of all the policies and administrative procedures memoranda available on the WCDSB's website, I noted that there was hardly any LGBT-affirming content in their policies and procedures prior to the legislation of Bill 13. There were no references to LGBT students or issues in the administrative procedures memoranda on *Bullying Prevention and Intervention* [APC034] (WCDSB, 2010a), *Suicide/Depression and Self-Harm* [APH019] (WCDSB, 2008), and *Suspected "Child in Need of Protection" Reporting* [APS020] (WCDSB, 2004). There were brief references to sexual orientation and gender identity as part of a long list of characteristics that offenders may have biases on in the *Sexual Health Referral Protocol* [APC032] (WCDSB, 2005), *Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour* [APC035] (WCDSB, 2010c), and *Equity and Inclusive Education Policy* [APC037] (WCDSB, 2010b) memoranda. To be fair, the *Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour* [APC035] memorandum contained the categorical statement, "Homophobia, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour must be addressed" (2010c, p.3), and indicated homophobia as a cause of behaviour that may require progressive discipline.

One significant item that was notable during my review of the WCDSB's policies and procedures was the addition of a recent memorandum, issued on October 2012, a few months after the legislation of Bill 13. Presumably as a genuine and timely response to the specific mandate of the *Accepting Schools Act* to create policies and procedures for the promotion of safe and inclusive school climates, the WCDSB released the *Supporting Students of a Sexual Minority: Criteria for Activities and Organizations that Promote a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment* [APC041] (WCDSB, 2012) memorandum that

took into account recommendations from both the "Respecting Differences" document of the Ontario Catholic school system and the provincial government's Bill 13.

Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain any information on whether the schools affiliated with the two school boards were able to implement the specific mandates of Bill 13 on the role of principals in the investigation of bullying incidents and the use of the principles of progressive discipline in the last two years. I was also unable to obtain any information related to statistics on school offenses related to cyber-bullying, the use of additional surveys that were supposed to be implemented every two years, and the completion of yearly reports on bullying and harassment incidents that were supposed to be submitted to the Education Minister.

The advocates in the two Waterloo Region school boards were also able to implement new and creative initiatives in their schools that resulted in positive outcomes. Based on the three WRDSB *Director's Annual Reports* from 2012 to 2014 that were available on the public board's website (WRDSB, 2012, 2013, 2014), several new initiatives were implemented by the board in the last two and a half years. Beginning 2012, the public board initiated and maintained information sessions they called "equity conversations", which they held at the school board four to five times a year. The equity conversations were open to all members of the boards' school communities, particularly to provide a venue for stakeholders to learn about information on equity and inclusion they were interested in or concerned about, and for advocates to raise issues that involved different members of the school communities. The equity conversations were established to build staff capacity in the areas of equity, inclusion, and diversity, which the board believed was integral to fostering safe learning environments. The sessions provided

elementary and secondary administrators, teachers, educational assistants, child and youth workers, and other staff the opportunity to share their experiences and strategies, ask questions, explore ways to address equity issues in school, and liaise with community members and Board staff (WRDSB, 2012).

Also initiated in 2012, the public board began to create more community partnerships for the purpose of providing additional networks and resources to students, and encourage them to develop healthy connections outside of their schools. The WRDSB partnered with agencies such as the Partners for Safe Schools Committee, the Cambridge YMCA Cultural Diversity Program Advisory Committee, the Alliance for Children and Youth, and several other groups from the community that had similar missions and goals. Just like the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office's partnership with OK2BME, the new partnerships set out exciting projects, which included LGBT-affirming events for the youth (WRDSB, 2012).

In 2013, the public board increased the focus on LGBT concerns and issues in their annual Youth Equity Leadership Camp, a project that was started in 2010. The Youth Equity Leadership Camp provided opportunities for students to contribute and offer insight to inclusive learning environments that support student learning. It also encouraged student dialogue to facilitate discussion around equity related issues in a safe and supportive environment (WRDSB, 2013). The board believed that these opportunities helped build leadership capacity for students to initiate and become involved in the promotion of awareness on LGBT and other minority rights and needs in order to contribute to a safe and caring environment that supports student learning.

On top of the annual professional development in-service trainings that Bill 13 specifically mandated school boards to provide to their teachers and staff, the WRDSB set out to provide increased opportunities for their school personnel to learn more on how to promote school climates accepting and inclusive of all students by scheduling additional workshops for the year 2015 (WRDSB, 2014). The board tapped Harmony Movement, a leading provider of education programs promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in Ontario, to facilitate a special Educators' Equity Workshop that would train their schools' program and special education consultants and other key stakeholders. The intention is for the workshop to lead educators through experiential learning activities, and encourage them to question their own beliefs and practices through activities that could also be used in the classroom with students. The board also arranged for Egale Canada Human Rights Trust to conduct a total of four workshops for administrators, teachers, educational assistants, and child and youth workers throughout the year. The purpose of the workshops is to explore language and definitions to increase awareness related to LGBT issues, and understand the impact that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia can have on student success and performance.

The advocates for LGBT youth in the schools affiliated with the Catholic board likewise took advantage of the direction and sanctions that Bill 13 provided. One such initiative that they first quietly started in 2012, and then continued every year afterwards, was the celebration of Anti-Homophobia Day in their schools with panel discussions and invited guest speakers on different topics that youth chose collectively (WCDSB PRISM, personal communication, February 26, 2015). The panel discussions provided opportunities for students to ask questions from guest speakers with lived experiences and

personal knowledge on LGBT concerns and issues. Another activity that the advocates from the Catholic board organized every year since 2013 was a board-wide retreat that involved the active participation of teacher club advisors and many students from all five high schools affiliated with their board (WCDSB PRISM, personal communication, February 26, 2015). The retreats were opportunities for the participants to have a healthy acknowledgement and discussion of concerns that affected sexual and gender minorities, and a celebration of their friendships and solidarity. By 2014, some schools from both the public and Catholic boards of Waterloo Region found ways to set up gender-neutral washrooms and other accommodations for the needs of their transgender students. This was an initiative that many of the advocates from both school boards have been attempting to carry out prior to the legislation of Bill 13 (WCDSB PRISM, personal communication, February 26, 2015).

Summary of Findings

Based on the data that I derived from the document review I conducted using the search function of the respective websites of the WRDSB and WCDSB, and the correspondence I had with knowledgeable board representatives, the two Waterloo Region school boards not only implemented the specified mandates of Bill 13 for them to accommodate requests for GSAs and GSA-type clubs in their schools, provide professional in-service training for their school staff, create equity and inclusion education policies to incorporate material on diversity that included LGBT topics into their curricula, and provide appropriate counselling services to students who were bullied and engaged in bullying, but they also developed, created, and arranged for new initiatives in their schools to promote positive climates that are safe and inclusive of all their students.

Chapter 7

Discussion

At the beginning stages of this research study, I had two general assumptions about what I was going to discover in Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools once I started collecting data. First, I expected to learn that the schools affiliated with the two Waterloo Region boards were going to have negative environments that allowed, tolerated, and maybe even promoted bullying, harassment, and discrimination of LGBT youth. This was not a far-fetched or unlikely preconceived notion because it has been documented in research studies that many schools across North America and other Western countries have negative school climates that are particularly toxic to LGBT youth (Goldstein et al, 2005, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2014; McCaskell, 2005; McCaskell & Russell, 2000; Minton et al., 2008; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008; Sherriff et al., 2011; Short, 2008; Walton, 2004). Second, related to this first assumption, I anticipated that there was going to be hardly any advocacy or signs of support for LGBT youth in the schools in terms of initiatives to keep them safe and provide them with environments conducive to learning and thriving. This was also an assumption that was not necessarily implausible or unfair since researchers have chronicled in peer-reviewed journal articles that not enough schools have taken a proactive stance in supporting LGBT youth, particularly with efforts to implement strategies, programs, and policies that have been found to be empirically sound and historically successful in addressing equity and inclusion issues, as well as improving LGBT youth mental health, social behaviour, and academic outcomes (Fisher et al., 2008; Van Wormer & McKinney, 2003).

By the time I finished gathering the data for the study, I was actually pleased to admit to myself that I was incorrect with at least one of my assumptions. Although there were some schools affiliated with the WRDSB and WCDSB that still had overtly negative climates with issues concerning heteronormativity that adversely affected the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth, there were more schools that had climates that have changed over the years in order to support their sexual and gender minority students. The *why* and *how* these changes happened in their schools were of course due to the significant efforts of different key stakeholders in the region, who not only worked with the students to create change, but also collaborated with each other to implement a comprehensive approach to address LGBT youth issues in schools, as well as build community coalitions within the different levels of the school boards and greater Waterloo Region community.

I was amazed to learn that not only did all 16 of the schools affiliated with WRDSB have established GSAs, they also had regular professional development in-service trainings for their teachers and staff; policies, administrative procedures and guidelines that included sexual orientation and gender identity specified in their content; and strong connections with both OK2BME and their board's Equity and Inclusion Office, which were responsible for forming the local GSA Network for Waterloo Region. Several of the schools also had incorporation of LGBT-inclusive material in their applied curricula; counselling services dedicated to addressing LGBT issues; and yearly LGBT-positive events and campaigns to raise awareness on LGBT rights and needs. I was thrilled to know that two of the five high schools affiliated with the Catholic board also had stakeholders actively advocating for their LGBT youth and establishing similar

initiatives to create more accepting and inclusive school climates. They also had GSA-type clubs; inclusion of LGBT topics in some of their classes; similar in-service training and workshops for school personnel on LGBT issues; pastoral care for youth devoted to concerns of sexual and gender minorities; and LGBT-affirming campaigns, celebrations, and panel discussions on Anti-Homophobia Day.

It was particularly salient to recognize that the advocates for LGBT youth in the two school boards were actually already successful in establishing certain strategies, programs, and policies in many of their boards' schools even prior to the legislation of Bill 13. The creation of GSAs and GSA-type clubs in their schools were important to promote the greater safety (Currie et al., 2012; Fetner & Kush, 2007; Griffin et al., 2004), improved mental health (Heck et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2011), improved academic performance (Lee, 2002; Toomey & Russell, 2011; Walls et al., 2010), increased sense of community (Currie et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2010; Mayberry et al., 2011), supported identity development (Macgillivray, 2005; Mayberry, 2007; Poteat et al., 2013), and cultivated empowerment (Craig et al., 2008; Doppler, 2000) of their LGBT students.

The annual celebration of events such as Anti-Homophobia Day and Bullying Awareness Week, and campaigns such as *ThinkB4YouSpeak* and *Kindness Matters*, were central to promulgating efforts to raise awareness on LGBT rights among students and staff, as well as make their schools more welcoming and safe for minority youth (Griffin et al., 2004; Kosciw et al., 2010; Poteat et al., 2013; Szalacha, 2003). The delivery of professional development and other types of in-service training were necessary to increase the availability of sympathetic and supportive school staff who would be competent and confident enough to manage LGBT-related issues (Goodenow et al., 2006; Russell et al.,

2001). The incorporation of LGBT material into their school curricula were paramount in helping decrease homophobic and transphobic remarks among the general student population, as well as increase feelings of safety in LGBT youth (Kosciw et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2006). Perhaps most notably, the establishment of board-wide anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies that had explicit considerations for bias against sexual orientation and gender identity were vital to helping decrease the victimization of their sexual and gender minority students in schools (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Kosciw et al., 2013; Szalacha, 2003).

It did not take long for me to recognize that there was actually a lot going on in the Waterloo Region school boards and their schools with regards to addressing LGBT youth issues, and supporting student mental health and well-being in terms of creating changes to make school climates safer and more inclusive, certainly much more than I anticipated. The participants of the study were all part of an ecological system where, as advocates, they united to achieve a common goal, mobilized resources, and collaborated at different system levels in order to develop, implement, and evaluate strategies, programs, and policies that would benefit their communities' marginalized LGBT youth.

I realized from the interviews that I was very fortunate to have enlisted the involvement of the most proactive advocates for LGBT youth in the region. It became apparent to me that the perspectives they shared were based on their knowledge, expertise, and lived experiences, which were invaluable to the richness of the data I sought to collect. I did not just get opinions from individuals who were idly waiting for changes to happen or expecting government agencies to create change; I gathered perspectives from key stakeholders who worked hard for years to support LGBT youth in schools and faced

different challenges that required patience and perseverance. Knowing what they knew, I felt very fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview them and gather their perspectives on a piece of legislation that was purportedly proposed to address issues that marginalized and oppressed LGBT youth.

Different and Unique Schools, Same Basic LGBT Youth Needs

One theme that became prominent early on in the analysis of interview responses was the fact that participants made it a point to remind me that each of the schools in the two boards was different and unique. Each school had a different demographic of students, teachers, and administrators; different mix of belief systems; different climate towards LGBT youth; different responses to LGBT issues; different resources; and many other distinctions from other schools that made them unique. Looking deeper into what the participants were saying, I realized after reflecting on their nuanced descriptions and stories that what they were actually trying to tell me was that each school had a different level of institutional homophobia and heterosexism; different set of attitudes and behaviour manifested towards LGBT youth; different levels of student, teacher and staff agency; different degrees of advocacy for LGBT individuals; different groups of administrators and levels of support; and different implementation of strategies, programs, and board-wide policies to respond to the issues affecting their sexual and gender minority students. Whereas some schools may have had LGBT students, teachers, and staff who were courageous, creative, patient or persistent enough to advocate for their beliefs and initiate change in their environment, other schools may have had LGBT students, teachers and staff who were afraid, stymied, suppressed, or discouraged so much that they could not muster advocacy for change. Whereas some schools may have had

open-minded, dynamic, and supportive administrators with abundant resources, others may have had narrow-minded, stubborn, and/or ignorant administrators with limited budgets at their disposal. The bottom line was, each school was different so it was not unexpected to discover that they had different levels of advocacy and success in addressing LGBT youth issues and supporting their LGBT students.

As much as I recognized why there were discrepancies in their levels of success in helping their LGBT youth, I also realized that despite these differences between schools, the most basic needs of the minority students from these schools, remained the same. In order to improve their mental health and well-being, they all needed a safe space in school so they would not feel vulnerable and isolated. They all needed a safe space where they can make friends, learn new things about themselves, develop leadership skills, and become better students. They all needed a school climate that fostered acceptance and understanding of their realities, which included supportive teachers, staff, and administrators, class lessons that portrayed their lives and informed others of their humanity, counselling services specific to their concerns, and policies that had explicit protections for them as sexual and gender minorities. They also all needed additional support and a sense of belonging and connectedness to the community outside of their schools. Essentially, even if each school was different in many ways, their LGBT youth fundamentally had the same basic needs for cultivating and nurturing their mental health and well-being.

I noted from the interviews that, in response to these circumstances and facts, advocates from the different schools affiliated with the two boards and the service provider agencies gathered together to collaborate and find ways to make supports

available for all LGBT students in Waterloo Region. This meant that, in order to accomplish this goal, their help had to "level up" from a microsystem setting to a mesosystem one (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Trickett et al., 1972). They realized that since they all shared the same goals that gathering together to build coalitions would be beneficial because they could share best practices, resources, and even motivations for pursuing their goals.

Specifically, advocates had to systematically collaborate, mobilize political action, and pool ideas, efforts, and resources to form community coalitions that would have a unified goal within their ecological system, in order to be able to offer support to all the LGBT youth in their region's two school boards, and thereby effectively address their basic needs (Fetner et al., 2012; Fetner & Kush, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; McEntarfer, 2011; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Community Coalitions Coming Together to Collaborate: From a Microsystem to a Mesosystem Level of Advocacy for LGBT Students

I believe that the social changes in support of LGBT student mental health and well-being that occurred in the schools affiliated with the two Waterloo Region publicly-funded boards in the last 15 years have been nothing short of phenomenal. The inspirational stories behind the changes that the participants shared in the interviews were testaments to the fact that substantial change could actually happen in local communities, particularly in ways that can be explained through the lens of both the social movements (Fetner et al., 2012, Fetner & Kush, 2007; McEntarfer, 2011) and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Trickett et al., 1972) theories.

As proponents of social movements theory would argue, social movements to create change usually root from a combination of factors such as suffering and deprivation, consciousness-raising, congealing events, and political opportunities (Fetner et al., 2012; Fetner & Kush, 2007; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). According to the participants, for many years, LGBT students in Waterloo Region schools suffered from homophobic and transphobic bullying and harassment, and were deprived of positive school climates where they could feel safe and included in the local community.

It took courageous LGBT youth, their allies, and staff who advocated for them to raise consciousness on LGBT rights and needs in their school communities. Community coalitions composed of LGBT youth, student allies, staff advocates began to organically come together within individual schools as more advocates stepped up in support of addressing LGBT youth's needs. The LGBT students, allies, and teachers who first decided to organize GSAs and annual LGBT-positive events and campaigns to raise awareness in their schools were the actual pioneers in the community. After applying for Speak Up grants to fund their consciousness-raising activities year after year, and creating the first GSAs in their entire school board to promote greater safety, the students and teachers from these schools began connecting with each other informally to share experiences and ideas on how to make their school climates safer and more inclusive. Not surprisingly, these congealing events provided political opportunities that eventually led to their social networking with other coalitions in the community such as the OK2BME Program of KW Counselling and the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, who were also independently working to advocate for LGBT youth mental health and well-being in their region's schools. From an ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), prior to

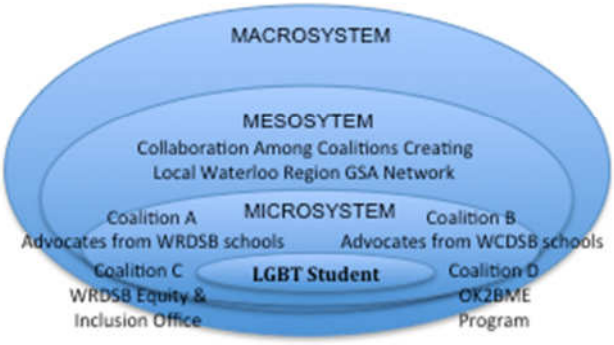
initiating collaboration with each other, each of the coalitions (i.e. group of advocates from individual WRDSB schools, group of advocates from individual WCDSB schools, OK2BME, and the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office) who were independently working to support LGBT students in their school communities, were actually functioning only at a microsystem level (i.e. direct interactions with LGBT youth) of advocacy.

When word reached the rest of the WRDSB on how advocacy efforts were beginning to grow in some of their schools, representatives from the administration level of the board provided support in different ways. By 2006, the *WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Policy* incorporating protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity was approved, which led to the commissioning of an *Equity Audit Report* the following year. The report later recommended the creation of an Equity and Inclusion Office that would have representatives from the board working specifically on minority youth issues, including those that concerned LGBT students.

It did not take long for the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office to start collaborating with OK2BME, which was already doing a lot of commendable work in the community to support LGBT youth. Together with the groups of advocates for LGBT youth mental health and well-being from the individual Waterloo Region schools, they established GSAs in all 16 schools affiliated with WRDSB, and then created a local GSA Network that connected the GSAs from each of the schools. According to social movements theory, as highly functioning community coalitions that were unified to ensure supports for Waterloo Region LGBT youth, the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, OK2BME, and the groups of advocates from the individual schools found congruent interests, combined multiple sources of support, developed communication

networks, established organizational effectiveness, and mobilized resources in their collaborative efforts to muster political action and substantive change (Fetner et al., 2012; Fetner & Kush, 2007; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). From their coalition-building and subsequent collaboration, they were able to establish small- and large-scale social changes, from the establishment of GSAs in individual schools to the creation of a local GSA network that combined all the GSAs from Waterloo Region. As each of the community coalitions began to collaborate with one another to achieve a common goal, it was evident that they began to work at mesosystem level (i.e. interactions between agents from a microsystem level) of advocacy (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in order to achieve greater success (Figure 3).

Figure 3 *Microsystem to Mesosystem Level of Waterloo Region LGBT Student Advocacy*



I also soon discovered that apart from welcoming the coalition of advocates from the schools of the Catholic board into their collaboration, they subsequently created strong connections with the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group, which was an alliance of representatives from different minority blocs of the Waterloo Region community established to provide input to the public board on behalf of minority students. It became apparent that with more coalitions from the schools and community working

together, advocates were able to accomplish much more than what they could have on their own.

This was a classic example of progress attributable to dynamic interactions working in an ecological system that evolved from a microsystem level of advocacy initiatives to a mesosystem one (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Trickett et al., 1972). The logical question that emerged after identifying this evolution that generated progress in Waterloo Region was "What role can a macrosystem factor such as legislation like Bill 13 play in efforts to support LGBT youth within their more immediate settings?" Most of the key stakeholders from the different community coalitions had their perspectives on how this question might be answered already set even before they participated in this study.

The Prospect of Legislation Promoting Greater Change: The Enactment of Bill 13 as a Macrosystem Level of Advocacy for LGBT Students

According to McCaskell (2005), any strategy or program dedicated to combatting marginalization and oppression, particularly in school systems, could only be effective if it combined three important determinants: education, rules with consequences, and political action. If this assertion were accurate, it would make education legislation an ideal intervention to fill the bill.

Fetner and Kush (2007) previously endorsed the development of legislation and public policy favouring LGBT students and their rights to promote transformative change in school systems. They argued that if anti-discrimination policies were combined or added on to anti-bullying policies, it would not only provide protections for LGBT

students, but it would also send an important message to society in support of LGBT rights. Robinson and Espelage (2012) reinforced this message by directing this appeal to progressive political leaders who they believe are pivotal for securing a higher level of change in society. The participants of this study could not have agreed more in their interview responses, asserting that legislation is the next important step to ensuring that efforts to create positive school climates for LGBT youth are both legally mandated and made socially sustainable.

To return to the set of questions I posed earlier in the Background section discussing the importance of legislation and public policy in supporting LGBT youth, it is essential to ask again: What exactly is the role of legislation in promoting social change in schools? What is the role of public policy in making schools safer and more inclusive for LGBT youth? More specifically, how does legislation and public policy affect the relationship between school climates and LGBT youth mental health and well-being?

Although researchers have expressed the value of legislation and public policy in the advocacy for LGBT youth mental health and well-being in schools (Fetner & Kush, 2007; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Russo, 2006), not that many discussions are available in published academic literature that have explored the role of legislation and public policy in such advocacy, leaving its implicit value mostly still unexamined, unexplored, and undefined. Published academic literature has already examined and explored how change happens in schools so that advocacy and action to support LGBT youth mental health and well-being can be initiated and even sustained (Fisher et al., 2008; Goodenow et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007). The role of the strength of the commitment of advocates and the implementation of strategies, programs, and policies that have been documented to be

empirically sound and historically successful in providing supports for LGBT youth have been extensively discussed in peer-reviewed journal articles (Goodenow et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007; Hunter, 2007).

In their study on how to make school climates in Ontario safer and more inclusive, Kitchen and Bellini (2013) found evidence that legislation and positive policy direction from government are critical in advocating for the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth in schools, supporting claims and arguments that push for LGBT-affirming education legislation made by other Canadian researchers (Anderson, 2014; Liboro et al., 2015; McCaskell, 2005; Rayside, 2014; St. John et al., 2014). In the analysis of their interviews of 41 educators working with GSAs, their data suggested that Ontario policy had a positive impact on school climates for LGBT students.

For this study, it was important to explore how Bill 13 was perceived by the key stakeholders of Waterloo Region who advocated for LGBT students because it was a bill that was purported to be a piece of legislation that was strategically developed to engender positive change in the climates of Ontario publicly-funded schools. It was important to acquire their views on Bill 13 because its legislation was reputedly meant to help them as LGBT student advocates, and therefore, their perspectives could prove to be particularly useful in determining whether success in addressing LGBT youth issues in schools could be achieved with the authority of its mandates. If they believed that the mandates of Bill 13 were not going to be useful, practical, and implementable in their schools, then its mandates needed to be amended or changed entirely in the future. As the key stakeholders who have worked at the very ground level of LGBT youth advocacy, their perspectives were the most important for determining if the contents of Bill 13 reflected their needs as

advocates, as well as the needs of the LGBT youth they are advocating for in schools.

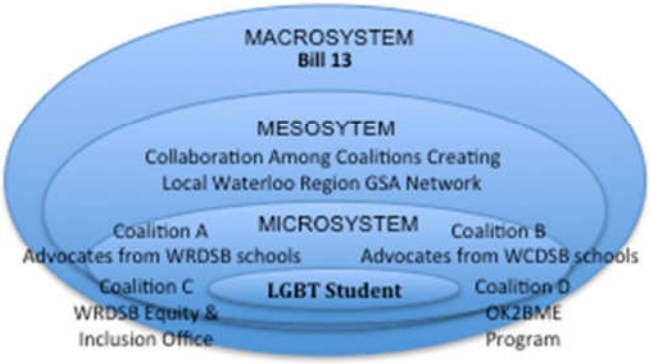
It was vital to investigate their perspectives so that the aspects and components of Bill 13 that they deemed were strengths of the statute could be reinforced in future policies, and conversely, the aspects and components that they deemed were weaknesses of the bill could be removed or amended accordingly. It was also vital to investigate their perspectives on what they believed were going to be the benefits and challenges that would result from the *Accepting Schools Act* so that both advocates and policymakers could work toward reaping the benefits from the bill, as well as anticipating and overcoming the challenges that lay ahead. Lastly, it was important to explore their perspectives on Bill 13 because their perspectives could help inform us of what is sorely needed in public policies and legislation that could potentially guide advocates and policymakers in establishing new LGBT-positive bills and statutes in the future.

Over other people's opinions, the perspectives of the stakeholders who have worked unremittingly for LGBT students for years needed to be heard, documented, and valued in this study so that future bills and public policies would potentially have a better chance at helping LGBT youth. As important as it is to remember how the evolution of the human rights advancement, LGBT advocacy, and the legislation of previous LGBT-positive bills and public policies in Ontario history have paved the way for the successful enactment of Bill 13, it is just as important to remember the potential impact Bill 13 may have on the enactment of new Ontario LGBT-positive bills and policies in the future.

The participants of this study believed that, as macrosystem level factors, provincial legislation and public policy could hold as much influence on the beliefs,

values, and behaviour of people in society, as other macrosystem level factors such as homophobia and transphobia, heterosexism, and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. For them, legislation and public policy have the potential to turn the tide when it comes to influencing negative public opinion on LGBT human rights and needs. Although it was their understanding that many people believe that schools have the moral obligation to provide positive school climates that are safe and inclusive of LGBT youth, from their perspective, provincial legislation and public policy would make this obligation a legal one that school boards would be mandated to obey. They also believed, that as a macrosystem level factor, legislation such as Bill 13 has the power to enforce what needs to be done to support LGBT youth mental health and well-being in schools by mandating the implementation of strategies, programs, and local or board-wide policies that have been documented to be empirically sound and historically successful in doing so (Figure 4). Education legislation and public policy will legally allow and support them as advocates not only to do what they have already been doing to address LGBT youth issues in schools without question and interference, but also initiate more customized and tailored interventions for the specific needs of their LGBT students that they were unable to do before.

Figure 4 *Bill 13 as a Macrosystem Level Factor for LGBT Student Advocacy*



The participants expressed that Bill 13 was a much-needed, much-awaited policy that would serve as a facilitator and tool for social movement that opponents against LGBT-positive change cannot disobey and should not ignore. For the participants, Bill 13 was an important piece of legislation that untied the bonds that prevented them from extending the benefits of creating GSAs and GSA-type clubs, demanding for professional development in-service training on LGBT topics, incorporating LGBT material into their lesson plans, providing LGBT-positive counselling services, and establishing board-wide policies that have explicit considerations for sexual orientation and gender identity to more of their schools and minority students. They saw Bill 13 as a public policy that had the capacity to help them as advocates change school climates that adversely affected the well-being of LGBT students into school climates that could produce positive outcomes with regards to sexual and gender minority student safety, mental health, social behaviour, and academic performance.

The notion that legislation and public policy as a macrosystem level factor that can influence the beliefs, values, and even behaviour of people in society is not really new. However, as some of the responses in the study prove, there are people who are sceptical about the actual influence that legislation and public policy can have on the day-to-day efforts of advocates for different causes, including those who advocate for LGBT youth in schools. Perhaps, instead of thinking of public policies as statues that can never be perfect or simply full of compromises, researchers, scholars and people from the community can think of the creation or amendment of bills as an endeavour to obtain the maximum amount and best quality of positive outcomes achieved through the pursuit of an optimal balance between specifying the implementation of initiatives that have been empirically

documented to support LGBT students in the past, and providing opportunities for advocates to establish new initiatives that are more customized and suited to address needs that have not been addressed by previously implemented initiatives. By viewing the use of public policies through this lens, people can then think about problems faced by LGBT youth in schools as problems that can either be addressed by already established initiatives that are explicitly mandated, or by new initiatives given flexible sanction by public policy.

By examining the perspectives of the key stakeholders from Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools, this study made a significant step forward to learning how legislation such as Bill 13 can actually help advocates for LGBT youth in schools create much-needed change. This study was able to make that step forward by identifying elements that are needed to make education legislation effective and useful to advocates at the grassroots level. It contributed new knowledge to LGBT advocacy research and practice in the social and health sciences, particularly on the significant role of legislation and public policy in addressing LGBT youth issues and supporting LGBT student mental health and well-being. It confirmed the notion that carefully researched and strategically crafted policy like Bill 13 can generate substantial change, as it was perceived by the study's participants, and presumably, as the bill's policymakers intended it. The substantial change that Bill 13 brought about was in the form of positive implementation outcomes – the implementation of strategies, programs, and policies that have been documented by empirical research and personal experience to successfully support LGBT students, as well as the implementation of new initiatives meant to address persistent or emerging LGBT student issues that have not been addressed by previous initiatives.

There are a couple of lessons that we learned from the key findings of the study that policymakers should know about. For one thing, based on the perspectives of the people that the legislation of Bill 13 was meant to help, it was very important that the bill explicitly mandated specific initiatives that have been documented by research and proven by experience to help minority youth stay safe and thrive in schools. Initiatives such as professional development in-service trainings, counselling approaches, and education, anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies that specifically considered the promotion of safety, diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools. Another fact key stakeholders appreciated a lot from Bill 13 was that some its aspects allowed for enough flexibility for stakeholders to carry out its less explicit mandates in new ways. For example, advocates in Catholic school boards found ways to provide students opportunities to interact with positive LGBT role models outside of their classrooms through venues such as retreats and panel discussions. Advocates from the public board were able to create gender-neutral washrooms and more accommodations for youth who identified as transgender.

There is something to be said about how well written and crafted Bill 13 was in the sense that, if one looks carefully into what the participants shared, it was a bill that had enough balance to ensure that initiatives that are already known to help minority youth were specifically mandated for school boards to implement, and yet it was still able to sanction the creation of new and innovative ways for advocates to support the needs of minority youth that have not been resolved in the past. If policymakers would take this balance into consideration in future legislation and public policies, then proposed and amended bills would stand a better chance at supporting key stakeholders with their efforts to promote positive school climates that are safe and inclusive for all students.

Valuing a Dichotomy in Stakeholder Perspectives

In the analysis of the participants' perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the different aspects and components of Bill 13, as well as on the potential benefits and challenges that could result from its legislation, a distinct dichotomy in standpoints became discernible on further scrutiny. While there were many occasions when participants appreciated the *specificity* of certain aspects and components of the bill because they believed it was completely necessary for it to be effective, there were other times when they underscored the merits of having some of the bill's aspects and components stated in a more general manner to allow for *flexibility* so that stakeholders could be more creative in coming up with strategies and programs that were more suited or customized to the needs of their LGBT youth, settings, and circumstances. On one end of the dichotomy, respondents emphasized the importance of *specificity* in the verbiage of the legislation so that desired outcomes could be achieved promptly; on the other end, they also made a point of noting how useful it is for parts of the bill to allow for *flexibility* that would permit advocates to tailor initiatives in their efforts to navigate challenges encountered along the way.

Specificity. Participants lauded several aspects and components of Bill 13 because of their *specificity* and explicitness, which the participants believed significantly contributed to the strengths of the statute. They particularly respected the fact that the bill specifically forbade school boards and principals from prohibiting students to form clubs that promoted safety, diversity, equity, and inclusion, including LGBT-affirming groups. They also especially appreciated the bill's explicit mandate that school boards and principals unconditionally allow students to call their clubs "Gay-Straight Alliances" if

they chose to do so. These directives were clear and non-negotiable, and provided the necessary sanctions for LGBT youth to create GSAs and other clubs that they felt would provide them safety and acceptance in their schools.

Participants were happy to know that new surveys were going to be implemented that would specifically monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school boards' policies and programs related to the bill's new goals. Apart from the already existing surveys to examine school climates, these new surveys were going to be implemented particularly to track the progress of the schools' initiatives in response to the other mandates of the bill.

Students were comforted to know that Bill 13 explicitly added cyber-bullying as an offense that warranted disciplinary action under the bullying section of the bill because they knew more than anyone else how rampant online harassment could be as it was mostly done covertly and insidiously. In relation to disciplinary actions, many participants expressed praise for the increased focus on the principles of progressive discipline in the specified and detailed duties and responsibilities of the Education Minister, school boards, and principals that were distinctly outlined in the bill. They noted how important it was to explicitly mandate in the bill that school employees who inform principals of any reportable incident must be included in the discussion on the subsequent steps to be taken in the investigation process of the incident. They also noted the importance of including the parents or guardians of both the student they believed was bullied, and the student they believed to have engaged in the bullying, in these discussions. Consequently, they recognized the value of the bill's specific inclusion of the community's role in the implementation of progressive discipline and rehabilitative measures.

Participants praised the specific mandate for principals not only to pay close attention to the corresponding disciplinary actions warranted in bullying incidents, but also to the provision of supports such as counselling for the students who were bullied, witnessed the bullying, and engaged in the bullying. They believed this not only showed concern for justice but also for the welfare of all students involved.

Knowing from their responses how much they strongly believed in the merits of the LGBT-positive strategies and programs they developed and established in their schools, it was likely that the participants would have also appreciated other aspects and components of Bill 13 that explicitly endorsed the LGBT-affirming initiatives they have worked on in the last several years. Apart from mandating support for the creation of GSAs in schools, Bill 13 also explicitly included directives for school boards to provide annual professional development in-service trainings and workshops for staff on bullying prevention and the promotion of positive school climates; create equity and inclusion education policies that would address the incorporation of elements promoting diversity in school curricula; provide counselling services using the expertise of psychologists, social workers, and other professionals who can address conflicts related to bullying of all kinds; and submit annual reports to the Education Minister with respect to suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions related to bullying, harassment, and discrimination. It was obvious from their responses that the participants truly believed that certain mandates needed to be expressed as explicitly as possible. The more specific certain aspects and components of the bill were, the less room for excuses and negotiation in their implementation in schools. The participants just as clearly emphasized this appreciation for explicitness when they expressed disappointment in the lack of *specificity*

in certain sections of the bill.

One major disappointment among the advocates for LGBT youth was the fact that they did not find enough elements in any of the sections that outlined mandates for providing supports in schools that specified increasing resources for school staff who devote their time and energies to fostering positive school climates that are safe, accepting, and inclusive for all students. It was their hope that in some way policymakers would recognize that by supporting minority students' advocates they would indirectly but effectively be supporting the students too. Save for the mandate on requiring school boards to provide annual professional development in-service trainings for school staff, the participants were not aware of any other supports that were specified to help advocates with their efforts. Issues concerning protections for staff who openly identify as sexual and gender minorities, and providing more adult role models for youth, as well as compassion and carer fatigue, were brought up and the obvious lack of any mandates to address these issues served as a source of frustration for some of the participants.

Two related aspects of the bill that some participants found lacking *specificity* were the sections that allowed for the creation of LGBT-affirming clubs in schools and the naming of these clubs "Gay-Straight Alliances" *if* students desired to do so. Apparently, although some participants found these aspects specific enough to provide necessary supports for LGBT students as previously discussed, others thought that simply forbidding school boards from prohibiting students from forming LGBT-affirming clubs and calling them "Gay-Straight Alliances" was not quite specific enough. For these participants, it would have been ideal if Bill 13 explicitly mandated all school boards to create GSAs in all their schools, and made sure that they were all specifically called

"Gay-Straight Alliances", and not by any other name.

These differences in perspectives created a dichotomy that raised the question on where policymakers should draw the line on being specific in the language and content of their proposed bills. Some participants argued that there was also the value in keeping certain aspects and components of the bill general enough to allow for some *flexibility* so that some stakeholders could devise creative solutions to navigate the challenges that they encounter in their own particular settings. Depending on the reasoning of a particular stakeholder, a strong argument could be made for either of the opposing perspectives.

Flexibility. Several participants believed that the more general and encompassing certain statements of Bill 13 were, the more *flexibility* they afforded to the stakeholders who were expected to implement initiatives developed to adhere to the bill's mandates. For example, although respondents noted that the sub-section of the bill that mandates school boards to "promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils" goes on to specify "including pupils of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability" (OLA, 2012, p.3), they still believed that the statement was general enough to allow for *flexibility* because it did not go on to say exactly how school boards were supposed to promote a positive school climate. This statement was not only specific enough to establish that the mandate was not just directed for the benefit of sexual and gender minority youth in schools, squashing the nonsensical claim of conservatives that the bill was proposed solely for the purpose of providing LGBT individuals special treatment; it was still general enough to afford the *flexibility* required to allow some room for individual creativity and customization on the

part of school boards' implementation of initiatives to respond to the bill's mandate. This *flexibility* that allowed for customization in the implementation of initiatives to respond to the bill's mandate was also passed down to individual schools, which as many participants repeatedly pointed out, were different and unique from one another in so many ways.

For the participants who saw the merit of having some aspects and components of Bill 13 affording *flexibility* in the implementation of initiatives to support LGBT youth, the prospect of being able to more freely develop and establish different strategies and programs that could stimulate the interest of new advocates into joining any of the community coalitions working towards the promotion of positive school climates was a welcome advantage. They believed that with more opportunities to create a greater variety of LGBT-affirming strategies, programs, and policies, there would be more for prospective new advocates to choose from that would suit their convictions and beliefs, available time and resources, degrees of commitment, and comfort levels. These participants also saw this *flexibility* as a quality that would permit them enough leeway to find creative ways to implement certain much-needed or sought-after initiatives, such as the establishment of gender-neutral washrooms in schools, which did not necessarily fall under any of the specific mandates of Bill 13.

Another example the participants gave to support the merits of having certain aspects and components of Bill 13 affording *flexibility*, and some degree of openness to interpretation, is the aspect where the bill made it clear that its mandates were created for "all publicly-funded schools" to follow. Although many of the participants chose to interpret this general statement in the same way that most of the Ontario public chose to interpret it, which was that it was to include Catholic high schools, some participants

chose to interpret it as a directive and reason to extend their efforts to help LGBT youth in elementary and middle schools. Some Waterloo Region stakeholders chose to interpret this mandate as a push to create more GSAs and implement more LGBT-affirming programs in their elementary and middle schools.

Based on the participants' responses, they believed that affording *flexibility* in the language and content of the bill was just as important as exercising *specificity* when it was needed. Although these views typically represent the opposite ends of any important deliberation, I argue that such a dichotomy in perspectives need not be perceived as an issue, but instead can be used as basis for presenting a new theoretical framework that would provide a balanced foundation in the proposal and legislation of statutes and public policies dedicated to upholding causes for minority populations. This framework would be able to look into the merits of each of the opposing ends of the dichotomy and utilize them accordingly in the formulation of mandates to attain maximum benefits and positive outcomes. Its strategic use would also be able to systematically minimize risks by anticipating sources of strengths and weaknesses in a policy or a bill, as well as expect challenges in implementation of mandates so that they could be avoided. Policymakers would have both the freedom and responsibility to utilize the framework to create the necessary balance in a proposed policy or bill.

The merits of exercising *specificity* in the verbiage and contents of the bill would not necessarily preclude the merits of affording *flexibility* in some of its aspects and components. The merits from each end of the dichotomy are not exclusive of one another, and the dialectical nature of the framework would only enhance the rigour in the process of determining the most beneficial times to exercise *specificity* over *flexibility*, or afford

flexibility over *specificity*, in certain aspects and components of a policy or bill. This would be particularly true if the bill was carefully developed and constructed to contain both *specificity* and *flexibility* in different parts of its entirety. I recognized that such a dichotomy in perspectives is essential to establishing balance in a bill and propose a *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* that could be useful for preparing and evaluating policies and legislative statutes, particularly on issues involving mental health, social justice, and human rights.

Applying the Specificity-Flexibility Dialectical Framework

Nearly three years after I began working on this research study, I have had the opportunity to track changes that have occurred in both the WRDSB and WCDSB, particularly changes that could be interpreted as positive outcomes resulting from the school boards' adherence to the mandates of the *Accepting Schools Act*. From the wealth of information available to the public on the websites of the two Waterloo Region school boards, and the knowledge I derived from personal correspondence with staff affiliated with the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, and a WCDSB PRISM club, I was able to gather data that could attest to the positive implementation outcomes resulting from Bill 13. Using this data, I intend to posit a viable theoretical interpretation based on the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* of how positive outcomes resulted from the legislation of Bill 13.

By examining the changes that have occurred in the WRDSB and WCDSB in the last three years from the data I gathered, I was able to surmise using the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework*, which positive outcomes resulted from the aspects and

components of Bill 13 that the participants believed had enough *specificity* for stakeholders to directly follow, and which positive outcomes resulted from aspects and components of the bill that the participants believed afforded *flexibility* so that stakeholders could establish new, creative, ingenious, and different LGBT-affirming initiatives that were not explicitly specified in the bill's mandates.

There were several initiatives implemented in the two Waterloo Region school boards in the last couple of years that could readily be interpreted as direct adherence to the specific and explicitly stated mandates of the act. The most obvious ones implemented in the WRDSB were related to the establishment of GSAs in both their elementary and high schools. All of the clubs were named "Gay-Straight Alliances", and are currently part of the local GSA Network that was established by the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office and OK2BME several years ago (WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, personal communication, February 18, 2015). Prior to the legislation of Bill 13, there were only two high schools affiliated with the WCDSB that had GSA-type clubs, both of which were called "PRISM". After the enactment of the bill in 2012, the three remaining high schools affiliated with the Catholic board also formed GSA-type clubs of their own (WCDSB PRISM, personal communication, February 26, 2015).

In the last two years, schools from both boards provided their staff with professional development in-service training on specific topics related to LGBT issues; incorporated LGBT material in their curricula; provided counselling services to bullies and bullied students; and amended or added policies, administrative procedures, and guidelines dedicated to the promotion of safe, accepting, and inclusive school climates (WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, personal communication, February 18, 2015;

WCDSB PRISM, personal communication, February 26, 2015; WRDSB, 2012, 2013, 2014). As an adjunct to their existing *Equity and Inclusion Policy*, the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office has been recently working on creating a new administrative procedure dedicated to establishing accommodations for persons who identify as transgender in their schools (WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office, personal communication, February 18, 2015). After a thorough review of all the policies and administrative procedures memoranda available on the WCDSB's website, I noted the important addition of a recent memorandum, the *Supporting Students of a Sexual Minority: Criteria for Activities and Organizations that Promote a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment* [APC041] (WCDSB, 2012), issued on October 2012, a few months after the legislation of Bill 13. This addition could readily be interpreted as a positive response to the bill's enactment.

I was unable to obtain any information on whether the schools affiliated with the two school boards were able to implement the specific mandates of Bill 13 on the role of principals in the investigation of bullying incidents and the use of the principles of progressive discipline in the last two years. I was also unable to gather information on statistics on school offenses related to cyber-bullying, the use of additional surveys that were supposed to be implemented every two years, and the completion of yearly reports on bullying incidents that were supposed to be submitted to the Education Minister.

However, even without such information that I was unable to gather, I believe that I gathered more than sufficient evidence to conclude that because of the *specificity* in some of the aspects and components of Bill 13, the advocates of Waterloo Region were able to either continue implementing strategies, programs, and policies that they had already been

implementing with success prior to the bill's legislation, or implement the same strategies, programs, and policies in even more schools in the region. Either way, because the initiatives that were explicitly mandated in Bill 13 were mostly strategies, programs, and policies that have been tried and proven to support LGBT youth based on the advocates' own experiences, significantly more students in Waterloo Region were reached and helped by the adherence of schools to those specific directives of the bill.

The advocates in the two Waterloo Region school boards were also able to implement new and creative initiatives in their schools that resulted in positive outcomes, thanks to the *flexibility* that was afforded by some of the less specific aspects and components of Bill 13. Based on the three WRDSB *Director's Annual Reports* from 2012 to 2014 that were available on the public board's website (WRDSB, 2012, 2013, 2014), several new initiatives that were not explicitly mandated in Bill 13 were implemented by the board in the last two and a half years to promote positive school climates accepting and inclusive of all students. Beginning 2012, the public board initiated and maintained information sessions they called "equity conversations", which they held at the school board four to five times a year. Also initiated in 2012, the public board began to create more community partnerships for the purpose of providing additional networks and resources to students, and encourage them to develop healthy connections outside of their schools. The WRDSB partnered with agencies such as the Partners for Safe Schools Committee, the Cambridge YMCA Cultural Diversity Program Advisory Committee, the Alliance for Children and Youth, and several other groups from the community that had similar missions and goals. Just like the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Office's partnership with OK2BME, the new partnerships set out to accomplish much-needed

projects, which included LGBT-affirming events for the youth (WRDSB, 2012).

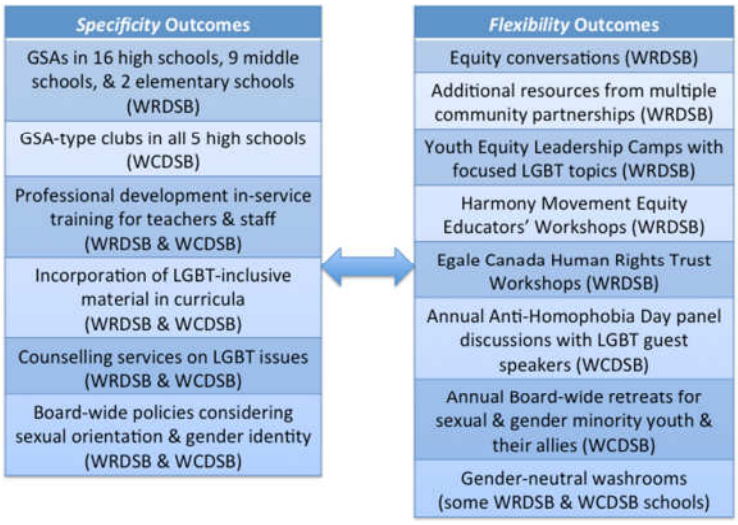
In 2013, the public board increased the focus on LGBT concerns and issues in their annual Youth Equity Leadership Camp, a project that was started in 2010 (WRDSB, 2013). On top of the annual professional development in-service trainings that Bill 13 specifically mandated school boards to provide to their teachers and staff, the WRDSB set out to provide increased opportunities for their school personnel to learn more on how to promote school climates accepting and inclusive of all students by scheduling additional workshops for the year 2015 (WRDSB, 2014). The advocates for LGBT youth in the schools affiliated with the Catholic board likewise took advantage of the direction and sanctions that Bill 13 provided. Since 2013, they had annual celebrations of Anti-Homophobia Day in their schools with panel discussions and invited sexual and gender minority guest speakers on different topics that youth chose collectively. They also organized annual board-wide retreats that involved the participation of teacher club advisors and many students from all five high schools affiliated with their board. By 2014, some schools from both the public and Catholic boards of Waterloo Region found ways to set up gender-neutral washrooms and other accommodations for the needs of their transgender students, which they were strategically able to arrange due to the *flexibility* that was afforded by the less specific aspects and components of Bill 13, such as broad mandates to create bullying prevention programs and policies.

The newer and more creative initiatives implemented by the two Waterloo Region boards and their schools in the recent years were purposely tailored to address issues that have been neglected or unresolved by previously implemented strategies, programs, and policies, such as the need for gender-neutral washrooms in both public and Catholic

schools, and the lack of LGBT role models available to youth, especially in Catholic schools. By leaving room for *flexibility* in the implementation of the less explicit mandates of Bill 13 so that schools can navigate issues that still need to be addressed, key stakeholders were provided the policy tools to adopt new ways of providing sexual and gender minority students more customized answers and solutions to their needs.

In applying the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* to the data I gathered from the school boards' websites and recent correspondence with key stakeholders from the two boards, I posited a theoretical interpretation of how some positive outcomes resulted from the express implementation of specific mandates of Bill 13, and how other positive outcomes resulted from more flexible adoptions of less explicit mandates of the bill (Figure 5). From this theoretical interpretation, I recognized that many of the perspectives of the study participants on Bill 13 were foretelling of the actual benefits and positive outcomes that would later transpire from its legislation.

Figure 5 *Applying the Specificity-Flexibility Dialectical Framework on Bill 13: Implementation Outcomes*



It was apparent from the dichotomous perspectives of the participants, on which the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* was based on, that there were merits to both exercising *specificity* in certain parts of the bill, and affording *flexibility* in its other parts. It stands to reason that it was no accident that some aspects and components of Bill 13 were written with *specificity* in order to ensure that the implementation of carefully chosen and empirically proven initiatives in schools became imperative. It was also likely a deliberate choice of the policymakers who wrote Bill 13 to avoid explicit language in some aspects and components of the bill in order to allow for some *flexibility* in the implementation of new, creative, and customized initiatives designed to promote positive school climates accepting and inclusive of all students.

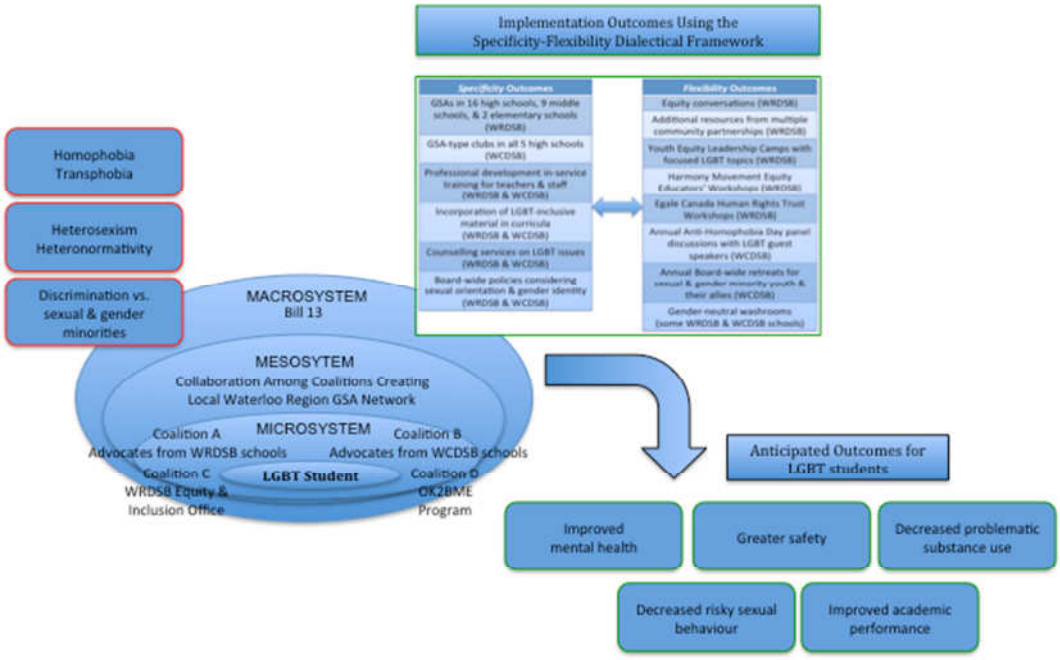
Although the participants had some criticisms and apprehensions about the *Accepting Schools Act* and the potential outcomes that could result from its enactment, they were generally pleased and impressed with how clear and well-written Bill 13 was, the explicitness of some of its amendments, and the opportunities it presented to implement new ways to help LGBT students. More than two and a half years after their participation in this study and the passing of Bill 13, the advocates for LGBT youth in Waterloo Region schools certainly proved that they were not going to waste any time in making the most out of what the provincial legislation was going to sanction and empower them to do. By persevering with the implementation of initiatives that they have utilized in the past to successfully help LGBT students, and creating new initiatives to address LGBT youth issues that they were not able to address before without the support of the mandates of Bill 13, the advocates of Waterloo Region inadvertently made their own predictions about the positive outcomes that could result from the legislation of Bill

13 into self-fulfilling prophecies.

Constructing an Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health and Well-Being

If the theoretical interpretation I posited of how the positive outcomes that occurred in the Waterloo Region schools could have resulted from the legislation of Bill 13 using the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* is hypothetically integrated with my discussion in this dissertation on how the coalition-building and collaborations of the region's key stakeholders were able to successfully create changes to support LGBT student mental health and well-being in the last 20 years, an integrated theoretical model that brings together all their conceptual elements can be constructed (Figure 6).

Figure 6 *Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health and Well-Being*



Such an *Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health and Well-Being* would include the previously shown figure (Figure 4) that illustrated the

amalgamation of ecological systems theory and social movements theory concepts explicating how Waterloo Region key stakeholders have been able to help their LGBT students in the last two decades. This figure showed that at a microsystem level of advocacy, different groups of advocates for LGBT students built their own coalitions and implemented strategies, programs, and policies in their own settings to directly provide support to the sexual and gender minority youth of their region. It also showed that at a mesosystem level of advocacy, these different coalitions collaborated with one another to create a unified goal, share best practices, mobilize resources, and establish a local GSA network that eventually brought together the LGBT students and allies of all the GSAs and GSA-type clubs from the Waterloo Region publicly-funded elementary and high schools so that the youth could garner more support from the merits of their collaboration. Lastly, the figure showed that a macrosystem level of advocacy, policymakers passed Bill 13 in order to provide positive policy direction in favour of LGBT student rights and needs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fetner & Kush, 2007; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). This macrosystem level part of the figure is connected to another previously shown figure (Figure 5), the one that illustrated the theoretical interpretation I posited of how positive implementation outcomes could have resulted from the legislation of Bill 13 using the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* that emerged from the analysis of the data I derived from the document review and correspondence with key stakeholders. Also connected to the macrosystem level part of the figure are other macrosystem level factors (e.g. homophobia, heterosexism, and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities) that are expectedly a part of any ecological system surrounding LGBT students.

Combined, these figures in this integrated theoretical model demonstrate the

immense value and potential of coalition-building, collaboration, and public policy at microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem levels of advocacy for LGBT youth in terms of establishing a comprehensive approach that creates strategies, programs, and local policies in schools, which have historically and empirically produced positive outcomes for supporting LGBT student mental health and well-being.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, I set out to accomplish three purposes. The first purpose was to heed Harper and Schneider's (2003) call to action for increasing research on LGBT issues in the field of Community Psychology. Before I immigrated to Canada, during a period that almost feels like another lifetime, I was a practicing general surgeon in the Philippines who had an occasional but strong yearning to do work that would be relevant to raising awareness and critical consciousness on LGBT rights and advocacy. I could not have imagined that five years after immigrating to my new home that I would discover Community Psychology and be given the opportunity as a researcher not only to fulfill that yearning, but also to heed a call to contribute to research on LGBT issues in the discipline that has given me a new sense of direction. I hoped that with this research, I was able to, even in some small way, accomplish my first purpose for this study.

The second purpose I set out to accomplish was to explore the definitive contexts in which the participants of the study would be coming from in order to have a clearer understanding of the factors and forces that significantly influenced their perspectives on legislation and public policy related to advocacy for LGBT youth in schools. This meant exploring the school experiences of the LGBT youth in Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools, how their experiences affected their mental health and well-being, and the kind of strategies, programs, and policies that were implemented by their schools in order to address any of their issues. It was a privilege to discover not only how much advocacy for LGBT student mental health and well-being had taken place in the Waterloo Region publicly-funded schools prior to the proposal and legislation of Bill 13, but also to find

out that the participants of the study were key stakeholders directly responsible for much of the success of the LGBT-affirming initiatives that have been implemented in the two school boards. It was a very satisfying revelation to learn that the members of the school populace and the greater community who agreed to share their views in the study were fierce advocates for LGBT youth mental health and well-being, with knowledge, backgrounds, personal histories, and lived experiences pertinent to the precise focus of the research.

The last purpose I aimed to accomplish was to examine the perspectives of the participants on Bill 13, particularly the features of the bill they found strong or weak in terms of mandating appropriate, pragmatic, and beneficial directives to Ontario school boards, and the potential outcomes that would result from the bill's legislation. It was gratifying to learn that the participants saw Bill 13 as an important piece of legislation that was going to help them create substantial change that would establish positive school climates that are safe and inclusive of all students, and consequently, support the mental health and well-being of the LGBT students of Waterloo Region. The resulting themes that emerged from the data pointed towards valuing the *specificity* of certain mandates of the bill that explicitly required school boards to implement strategies, programs, and policies that have been empirically and historically proven to support LGBT students, and appreciating the worth of having certain sections of the bill affording *flexibility* to key stakeholders in the implementation of tailored initiatives that would help navigate distinct challenges in each school as well as address issues that have been unresolved by previously attempted interventions. The dichotomous perspectives that emerged as themes in the participants' responses led to my proposal of a *specificity-flexibility dialectical*

framework, which I applied in this dissertation to posit a theoretical interpretation of how positive outcomes resulted from the legislation of Bill 13 using data I derived from the websites of the two Waterloo Region school boards and recent correspondences with key stakeholders affiliated with the two boards. The theoretical interpretation was able to support the idea that the perspectives of the participants on Bill 13 were to some extent foretelling of the actual benefits and positive outcomes that would later transpire from its legislation. The benefits and positive outcomes referred to in this dissertation are the establishment and implementation of LGBT-affirming strategies, programs, and policies in more schools in Waterloo Region that have been documented empirically and historically to support LGBT youth mental health and well-being, as well as the creation and application of new LGBT-positive initiatives that were designed to directly address issues that have been neglected or unresolved by previously used interventions.

By combining all the elements from the discussion of how the key stakeholders of Waterloo Region were able to support the mental health and well-being of their LGBT students through coalition-building and collaboration at microsystem and mesosystem levels of advocacy, and the theoretical interpretation of how the positive implementation outcomes could have resulted from the legislation of Bill 13 at a macrosystem level of advocacy using the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework*, I was able to construct an *Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health and Well-Being* that could have potential applications in a variety of advocacy research efforts.

Lessons Learned from Reflections on Participant Engagement: Community Psychology Concepts Embodied in Research Praxis

Before this dissertation is complete, I would be remiss as a budding community

psychologist not to share the personal lessons I learned from the conduct of my research in this study, particularly from my experiences as a Community Psychology researcher in the field. Upon critical reflection on my early experiences in my research process, I recognized that there were important lessons that I learned along the way. Reflecting on the first few months of my experiences in the community, I realized that there were fundamental researcher attributes described in published Community Psychology participatory research literature that I did not initially recognize that I adopted at that time in order to respond to obstacles I encountered during the research process.

Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) first introduced *cultural humility* when they proposed the concept as an attribute that they believed was more appropriate and respectful than cultural competence for promoting multicultural medical education. They claimed that *cultural humility* incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique to redressing power imbalances and to developing mutually beneficial, non-paternalistic clinical and advocacy partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations. *Cultural humility* has since been an attribute that has been recommended in Community Psychology participatory research literature for researchers to develop, not only for its value in reference to respect for ethnicity and race, but also for its importance in helping understand and address impacts of other cultures associated with different religions, politics, gender identities, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses (Minkler, 2005; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). During my interactions with the potential participants from the community, I learned that it was not enough that I was openly gay and genuine to community members for me to develop a meaningful connection with them. I also learned that I needed to embody *cultural humility* to establish

equity and collaboration between the Waterloo Region study participants and myself as a researcher from a university. I needed to accept the fact that they were the ones who knew the best ways for me to reach more GSA members and teacher sponsors, as well as other community stakeholders. Moreover, with *cultural humility*, I came to recognize the aspects of my own "insider-outsider" position within the research context in which I was embedded (Fine, 1994; Humphrey, 2007; Merriam et al., 2001; Minkler, 2004). I realized it served me best to acknowledge that I did not truly have as much of the "insider" status that I thought I had for being a gay man with experiences of being bullied in my youth, and instead, accept my "outsider" status since there was a distinct culture in the community I was engaging with that I still had to learn, understand, and embrace.

At that point, I recognized too that genuinely acquiescing to a state of *shared vulnerability* with the community while working through the challenges of developing my relationships with them was a means of establishing rapport, respect, and trust. Engaging the community with *shared vulnerability*, an attribute Maguire (2004) described, meant having the willingness to evaluate my deeply held beliefs and considering new ways of thinking about discrimination and heteronormativity. This meant that for me to forge an authentic reciprocal relationship with the participants, I needed to relinquish all my preconceived notions of what I believed their experiences were and be open to learning what they were willing to share with me about their needs and struggles.

In hindsight, I also practiced *reflexivity* after recognizing the necessity to make adjustments to my recruitment strategies. A staple in participatory research that is also a central tenet of the feminist research approach (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; England, 1994; Letherby, 2003), *reflexivity* is the awareness that the researcher and the objects of

study affect each other mutually and continually in the research process (Alvesson & Skoldburg, 2000), and is a methodological tool that has been endorsed by critical theorists (Lincoln, 1995; Watt, 2007). In order for me to be able to elicit more responses from prospective participants in the community, I needed to be reflexive about their personal dispositions from the very beginning of my study. Since I started recruiting participants closer to the end of their academic year, it was necessary for me to be more creative in order to reach more students who were preparing for their school break. Following the recommendations of my first few interviewees, I posted recruitment flyers at establishments affiliated with but outside of the OK2BME Program, actively used social media and local LGBT networks to respond to interest, and remained open to scheduling interviews to the convenience of interested parties. I was able to reflexively adjust to the needs of prospective participants and subsequently increase study participation.

After much contemplation, I realized that there were two other researcher attributes that I adopted during the process of modifying my strategies to respond to the diverse needs of the community members and the slightly changing contexts of my research praxis. Although these two researcher attributes were not specifically found in Community Psychology participatory research literature, I recognized that they were characteristics that scholars, especially graduate students, should consider when conducting Community Psychology participatory research in their dissertation projects. In order to increase participation and feedback from community members, scholars like me should develop an *academic assiduity* and *creative resourcefulness* in their process.

If researchers remained diligent and adopted an *academic assiduity* to their work in pursuit of social equity, they could demonstrate a persistence that could impress

prospective participants. For example, if members of the community expressed initial interest in the study by providing their contact information, but later on displayed reluctance about continuing to participate, it would highly be possible that re-initiating correspondences with them at considerate intervals, composing respectful messages, and emphasizing the importance of the study could reignite their interest in participating. During the recruitment phase of my research, once a week, I conscientiously emailed prospective participants who initially showed interest but seemed hesitant about being interviewed. I composed regardful, carefully thought out messages that directly responded to their concerns and needs within the bounds of my study parameters. I also kept in mind the specific "off the record" suggestions I obtained from the exchanges of ideas I had with earlier participants after their interviews.

To conduct the study with *creative resourcefulness*, I learned to better correspond with prospective participants in the medium of their preference such as emails, and instant- or text-messaging. I also learned to allow for more scheduling conveniences such as conducting interviews early in the morning, late in the afternoon, and even on weekends. I also gave participants the option to select interview venues of their choice as long as the location afforded privacy and confidentiality. I met participants at my office, their office, KW Counselling Services, the local LGBT community centre, and other locations, even if it meant an hour-long drive for me. I patiently rescheduled interviews even if the prospective participants had postponed repeatedly, and followed up with them as long as they continued to express interest in being interviewed. I believe that adopting these fundamental researcher attributes was vital to the recruitment process of my study and that they significantly contributed to increased participation in my interviews.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

One of the main strengths of this study was the abundant and rich data derived from the stories and perspectives of key stakeholders from Waterloo Region who tirelessly advocated for the welfare of the LGBT youth in their publicly-funded schools over the last several years. Because of their knowledge, background, expertise, generosity, and lived experiences, their insights proved invaluable to the extrapolation of themes and lessons learned in this study. The fact that the study included key stakeholders from different levels of the school board ensured that the perspectives that were gathered represented different contexts within the Waterloo Region school communities. The variety of views from students, teachers, an administrator, a superintendent, trustees, representatives from the board level who worked on equity and inclusion initiatives, and service providers from the community who regularly engaged with LGBT youth, allowed for triangulation of data that added robustness, trustworthiness, and rigour to the analysis.

Another strength of this study was the foundation in which its research process was based on from the beginning. Because of the strong connections between the ESH-HIV Research Group, OK2BME, and the groups of advocates from the two Waterloo Region school boards, the ability of this study to fulfill its purposes became possible. As active community coalitions in their own right, these groups working together to address LGBT youth issues within their region became a force to be reckoned with and a consistent source of organization, support, and inspiration in the peregrination of this study.

A third strength of the study was my commitment to conduct the 26 interviews and transcribe most of them myself. The advantage of this commitment was the intimate

knowledge of the data it provided me, as I was able to recognize the nuanced details in the participants' responses and recall the intention of the interviewees in their statements while transcribing, as well as reflect on the meaning of their perspectives in a consistent manner throughout the entire research process.

Because this study was able to gather data at a precise moment in history, only a few months before and after the legislation of Bill 13, its timing was auspicious and judicious in terms of capturing the perspectives of key stakeholders who were there at that pivotal point in time that was to likely going to determine the direction of advocacy for LGBT youth in Ontario schools. This timing proved to be both a considerable strength of the study in the sense that the key stakeholders' perspectives were going to be completely unique and contextualized to that momentous period in time, and also a limitation since perspectives can change over time, especially if expectations are not met with an acceptable degree of success. A study that would be able to compare perspectives over time would provide more information that would be useful to advocates for LGBT youth issues and policymakers who work on education legislation.

Another factor that could be viewed as both a strength and limitation of the study is the fact that because they were heavily engaged with advocacy efforts for LGBT youth rights, many of the participants of the interviews were highly informed about strategies, programs, and policies that have been documented in academic texts and research as effective initiatives for helping address issues of LGBT students. Many of them were consistently abreast of developments regarding public policy and legislation related to advocacy for LGBT youth in schools. As much as this factor seems like it can only be viewed as an obvious strength of the study, it can also be considered a limitation. Because

of the majority of participants' knowledge proficiency, it was possible that there could have been little representation of perspectives from key stakeholders whose views were not as strongly influenced by specialized and updated information.

Due to the sampling techniques and method employed to recruit participants in the study, one significant limitation that needs to be noted is the fact there was no or not enough representation of perspectives from important key stakeholders in the interviews. There was only one participant who identified as transgender, and therefore, there was very little representation of perspectives from transgender stakeholders. There were only two non-white student participants in the study so it is apparent that the voices of racialized LGBT students were not represented as much in the interviews. All the non-student participants were white. There were no straight allies among the student participants, so the youth perspectives were limited to the views of only LGBT youth advocating for their needs and rights. Because of the difficulty of obtaining a more diverse set of participants in the interviews, the perspectives of white, cis-gendered, self-identified gay and bisexual youth, and white, cis-gendered, heterosexual adults predominated the representation of perspectives in this study. It was unfortunate that there were no or not enough straight, transgendered and racial minority youth, and LGBT and racial minority adults who were available or willing to participate in the study.

One other item that researchers may consider as a limitation to the study is the inherent bias I brought into the interviews because of my personal perspectives on LGBT advocacy and the role of legislation, and the influence it may have had on the views of the participants. Although I remained cognizant of my potential influence on the views of

respondents during the interviews, there were likely moments that my personal perspectives were still a confounding factor despite my efforts to conceal them.

Implications for Future Research and Recommendations

The opportunity to have worked on a project that would potentially be a contribution to LGBT research in Community Psychology was a personally gratifying experience for me as a researcher. It is my hope that this study can inspire others to work more on issues that affect LGBT individuals and populations, especially the most vulnerable ones, using an approach that deliberately engages communities, and above all, would be highly collaborative.

Among the lessons that emerged from this study, it is also my hope that researchers who would have the opportunity in the future to influence policy more directly would consider the potential of the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* I proposed in this dissertation. Since I was only able to utilize the framework for positing a theoretical interpretation of how positive outcomes resulted from the legislation of Bill 13, I would be very interested to know if other researchers would be able to use it for more applied interpretations and practical applications. Perhaps research projects with more time, resources, and expertise could conduct studies in the future that would examine perspectives of key stakeholders on legislation and public policy addressing LGBT and other advocacy issues using the framework over longer periods of time.

Finally, again for future research, there is also the potential transferable applicability and usefulness of the *specificity-flexibility dialectical framework* and the *Integrated Theoretical Model for Supporting LGBT Student Mental Health and Well-Being* that I constructed and posited in this dissertation. The integrated theoretical model,

which brings together conceptual elements from ecological systems and social movements theories, as well as the dialectical framework, could conceivably be used as an evaluation, action, or intervention model that has transferability to other Community Psychology areas of research interest. These areas of interest could include advocacies for the mental health and well-being of Aboriginal, racial minority, immigrant and newcomer, food-insecure, and homeless youth. Apart from the model's transferability to other areas of interest examined by researchers from Community Psychology, the applicability and usefulness of the framework and model are also transferable to other areas of interest of other academic fields that utilize legislation and policy, as well as promote advocacy for human rights, and community mental health and well-being. Apart from researchers and advocates from the province of Ontario, researchers and advocates from other provinces and territories of Canada could adopt the applicability and usefulness of the dialectical framework and integrated theoretical model to find other action, intervention, and evaluation applications for them in their research and practice.

As an example of a prospective application for the framework and model that is specifically related to the research focus of this dissertation, future research can be done involving racialized LGBT students, who are often underrepresented in LGBT research studies. Racialized sexual and gender minority youth were not as justly represented in this study because the majority of the students who participated were white. Although adjustments and modifications based on the context of each specific setting would be necessary so that the framework and model could be appropriately applied to the type of advocacy being considered, I believe that the framework and model's future transferability and utility in academic research holds definite promise.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide for Discussing GSAs, other LGBT-affirming school initiatives, and the effects of public policy and legislation

Your GSA and you

1. What school do you attend?

2. How long have you been involved with your GSA? Please describe your involvement or role in your GSA. How big is your GSA?

3. What motivated you to participate in this interview?

4. In the previous phases of this study there was some discussion related to the role of GSAs especially in the promotion of a "safe school" environment, and particularly for LGBT students. Can you talk about the success of your GSA in promoting a "safe school" environment?

    a. Prompts: For you, what makes a school environment safe? How does your GSA help achieve this safety? Please talk about the programs your GSAs have that are successful in reaching this objective.

    b. Probes: Is safety mostly physical? Emotional? Psychological? Relational?

GSAs and other LGBT-affirming initiatives

1. Does your school have policies that reflect the values promoted by your GSA? Please give examples of these policies.

    a. Prompts: Does your school have policies that support the formation or maintenance of your GSA? Policies that require teachers, school staff or personnel to intervene when witnessing discriminatory language or acts of harassment? Policies that implement stricter sanctions or counseling for bullies, especially for repeat offenders? Can you describe any school policies that are specific for the different forms of LGBT bullying? What role has your GSA played in initiating or advocating for policies like these?

    b. Probes: What school policies do you think should be implemented?

2. What LGBT topics or issues are incorporated in your school curriculum that reflects the ideals of your GSA?

    a. Prompts: Topics in health class? Sex education class?

    b. Probes: What topics do you think should be included in school curricula?

3. What programs does your school have that are complementary to the programs

your GSA implements?

   a. Prompts: Continuing education and professional training of staff and personnel on the management of LGBT issues and bias-based conflict? Rehabilitation programs for perpetrators instilling diversity, inclusion, equality, and equity? Public awareness or outreach programs?

   b. Probes: What kind of programs do you think your school should implement that would be complementary to the programs that your GSA runs?

4. What advantages or disadvantages do you think there are in having other LGBT-specific school initiatives apart from GSAs?

5. Most importantly, is there anything else that you think needs to happen in addition to or instead of GSAs in order to create "safe schools"?

The Accepting Schools Act

1. Last December 2011, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty proposed an amendment to the Education Act, called Bill 13 or the Accepting Schools Act. This act will require all publicly-funded schools to support GSAs and implement several initiatives such as LGBT-positive school policies including stricter penalties for bullies, LGBT-inclusive curricula, and programs that will support goals of GSAs. What do you think about this new legislation?

2. Now that the OLA has passed the Accepting Schools Act, what do you think are the possible benefits to having it legislated? Prompts: Will it help with the further implementation of pro-LGBT school policies already in place but encountering resistance from different sectors of the community? How? How do you think it will affect or interact with other pro-LGBT interventions in the community that seek to help youth with the challenges they face on a daily basis? Do you think there will be risks or repercussions?

3. Likely not everyone is happy that the Accepting Schools Act has been passed and legislated. Certain sectors of society feel that schools should not be forced by law to go against their religious beliefs and be required to support GSAs and other pro-LGBT school initiatives, say for example, representatives of the Catholic School District Board. What can you say about this?

4. Some people would say that legislation like the Accepting Schools Act is exactly what is needed to strengthen GSAs and other initiatives that promote inclusion and diversity. Do you agree with this? Please explain.

5. Can you think of other issues that we have not mentioned that will affect Ontario school GSAs and LGBT youth now that the Accepting Schools Act has been passed and legislated?

APPENDIX B


Gay-Straight Alliances!
Understanding the role of GSAs in producing resilient LGBT youth –
Pilot Project Waterloo Region
Are you 16 years of age or older and an LGBT or ally current or recent member of a GSA in the last two years?
Are you a GSA teacher-sponsor?
You are invited to participate in a new phase of an ongoing study being conducted by Dr. Robb Travers and his research team from Wilfrid Laurier University in cooperation with OK2BME of KW Counselling
This new study phase aims to understand your thoughts, opinions, feelings and perspectives on the impact of GSAs on LGBT youth as well as the impact of the new law (Accepting Schools Act) that was recently passed to support GSAs and other pro-LGBT initiatives
If you are interested in participating in confidential one-on-one interviews before the Annual GSA conference in October, please contact Rainier Liboro via email libo0730@mylaurier.ca
Student participants will receive a $25 honorarium
OK2BME.ca

APPENDIX C

Script for Email Recruitment of Participants for Interviews

Gay-Straight Alliances: Understanding the role of GSAs in producing resilient LGBT
Principal Investigator: Dr. Robb Travers
Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University

Dear _____,

You are receiving this email because you have expressed interest in this research and given us permission to contact you using this email address for the purpose of providing you information about this the study on the role of GSAs in helping LGBT youth.

This study is an ongoing project with a new phase that is currently seeking participants who are interested in taking part in a one-on-one interview that will focus on what GSA students and teachers think about the recently passed pro-LGBT anti-bullying law/policy (Bill 13, The Accepting Schools Act) and how it might affect the day to day experiences of LGBT youth and their allies in school. Participants are not required to have any prior knowledge of the new law and general information about it will be provided during the interview. Dr. Robb Travers of Wilfrid Laurier University, and OK2BME, a division of KW Counselling, is carrying out this research. Approximately 10 to 15 students and 10 teachers are being interviewed throughout the study.

Interviews will take place after school at a community location outside your high school, and will last between 60 and 90 minutes. This phase of the study is an opportunity to discuss your positions, opinions, feelings, and insights on how public policies and other initiatives that have similar goals to GSAs affect you and others who are part of GSAs in the Waterloo Region high school system. The interview will be facilitated by the study's research coordinator, Alex St. John, or Renato "Rainier" Liboro, who is a member of Dr. Travers' research team. They will be audio recorded with your consent.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the interview without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you will otherwise be entitled.

We will appreciate your interest in participating in this new phase of the study, as it will deal with the timely and current policy climate changes that could significantly GSAs, LGBTQ youth and their allies. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email accordingly and we will send you a copy of the interview guide and informed consent. The informed consent form will be signed at the beginning of the interview.

Thank you,
Robb Travers and Team
rtravers@wlu.ca
(519) 884-0710 ext. 2577

APPENDIX D

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT – INTERVIEWS

Gay-Straight Alliances:

Understanding the role of GSAs in producing resilient LGBT youth

Principal Investigator: Dr. Robb Travers

Department of Psychology

You are invited to participate in a research study, whose purpose is to understand the impact that Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) have on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, allies (youth who do not identify as LGBT but support the LGBT community), and their high schools in Waterloo Region. Specifically, it aims to understand how GSAs help to support LGBT youth. Dr. Robb Travers of the Psychology Department at WLU and Carrie Greig at KW Counselling is conducting this study.

INFORMATION

We are giving you this information so that you can make an informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study. We are inviting you take part in this study so that we can gather in-depth information on the experiences of LGBT youth and allies involved with GSAs in Waterloo Region. We are interested in understanding the impact that GSAs have on your experiences on the high school environment. The interview guide is attached.

This portion of the study involves the completion of a questionnaire that will ask questions about your age, gender, ethno-racial background, and sexual orientation as well as other demographic information, and one-on-one interviews with participants (approximately 12-15 students and 10 teachers in total). It is necessary for the study to obtain demographic information so that a clearer description of the participant population can be made. Having the participants' demographic information will help the study construct the most accurate account of the participant's experiences and positions. Some demographic characteristics such as age range, ethno-racial identity and orientation will be important for understanding the experiences of participants with similar characteristics, as well as contrasting different participant accounts in terms of these aspects. It is especially important to gather this information from the participants so that the study can describe the experiences and opinions of participants with similar demographic characteristics as a whole, without describing them individually. For example, if a number of participants who all identify as straight, female student allies have similar experiences and opinions, it would be important to frame their stories from a perspective based on their similar demographic characteristics. It would also be interesting to find out if participants with similar demographic characteristics have different experiences and opposing views or if participants with different demographic characteristics have parallel experiences and similar views. The demographic information that will be collected will not be used to identify and describe each individual participant, but to illustrate findings as a whole.

Either Renato "Rainier" Liboro or Alex St. John will direct interviews. The interviewer will ask questions to find out what GSA students, teachers and other community stakeholders think about the new pro-LGBT anti- bullying law and how it might affect the day to day experiences of LGBT youth and their allies in school. Interviews and demographic questionnaires will be completed at a community location outside of the high schools. Any student or teacher that is part of a GSA or has attended the GSA conference at KW- Counseling is welcome to participate. Participants are not required to have any prior knowledge of the new law and general information about it will be provided during the interview. We'd like you to share your positions, opinions, feelings and insights to the extent that you feel comfortable doing so.

The interviews will take between 60 and 90 minutes.

Interviews will be audio taped so that we may construct a more detailed and accurate summary of the interview through transcription. Please note that audiotaping is an essential tool for our data collection. If you do not agree to allow us to tape the interview, then discontinue this process. Audiotapes will be accessed and transcribed only by members of the research team. We thank you for your time and consideration.

For participants who believe they know of GSA-affiliated students or teacher-sponsors who might be interested in participating in this portion of the study, a referral to the research team would be appreciated.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable physical risks to participating in this study. In participating in this interview, we do not anticipate that you will experience any major risks to your well-being. Some of the questions asked may be sensitive and you may find yourself becoming upset upon recalling certain experiences. These feelings are normal and should be temporary; however, you do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. It is also possible that you may regret disclosing personal information during the interview. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Due to the small sample size, and specific nature of the interviews being conducted, there is a potential loss of privacy because you will be revealing personal information about yourself.

BENEFITS

To this date there have been few studies examining GSAs in the Canadian context. This project will contribute significantly to the limited pool of information available by providing in-depth information focused specifically on the impact of GSAs on LGBT students and allies and the Waterloo Region high schools they are active in.

This research could lead to improvements in GSAs in Waterloo Region and could potentially have a direct benefit on the GSA you are a part of. This research could also serve as evidence to support the formation and sustainment of GSAs throughout Ontario and across Canada.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This research is anonymous. Your name will only appear on this informed consent sheet which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Travers' Sexual Health, Equity & HIV Lab at Wilfrid Laurier University and stored separately from demographic questionnaires and interview data.

Interviews will be taped on an audio-recorder. What is said will be typed up and the original audio recording will be destroyed. Copies of the interview transcripts will be kept on secure computers in Dr. Travers locked research lab at Wilfrid Laurier University. Only members of the research team will have access to the identifiable data. This will include Dr. Robb Travers, Lauren Munro, Alex St. John, Kate Klein, Brooke Fry, Tracy Joyce, Matt Tipan, Kathleen Simpson, Alexa Stovold, Barbara Dobes, and Renato "Rainier" Liboro. Undergraduate and graduate students in Dr. Robb Travers lab may have access to the unidentified electronic data from the study during the transcription phase in order to complete their thesis projects.

Quotations help to enhance the accuracy of research interpretations. Your de-identified quotations may be included in project publications for illustrative purposes. You will be referred to by pseudonym or descriptor rather than name in any write-up or presentations that result from this research. If there is anything that you or anyone else says that could reveal who you are, we will not use it in any report or publication. The demographic information you provide will not be directly linked to your quotations, but rather it will be combined with other participant demographics, to describe the entire group. Due to the small sample size, and the reporting of words rather than numbers, despite assuring you that we will take all reasonable steps to disguise your identity, we cannot fully guarantee anonymity. If this makes you uncomfortable, you can withdraw your participation or response to any questions at any point during the interview. Please note that audio-taping is an essential tool for our data collection. If you do not agree to allow us to tape the interview, then discontinue this process. We thank you for your time and consideration.

By September 1, 2017, all electronic and hardcopy data from this study will be destroyed by Dr. Robb Travers. As soon as are completed all identifying information, such as names, email addresses, tapes and consent forms will be destroyed by Dr. Robb Travers (no later than July 1, 2013).

COMPENSATION

Student participants will be given $25 cash upon completion of their participation in the interview. Student participants will still receive the honourarium if they choose to leave the interview early.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher, Dr. Robb Travers via email at rtravers@wlu.ca or by phone at 519-884-0710, ext. 2577. Additionally, if you feel distressed as a result of your participation, the research team

members can refer you to KW Counselling services. Referrals to KW Counselling can be made through Walk-In Counselling Clinic (Thursdays from 1-6 PM). If you are unable to attend the Walk-In Counselling Clinic please contact the intake team at 519-884-0000 or intake@kwcounselling.com.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 5225 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is complete your data will be removed. If you request to have your data withdrawn after data collection is complete, every attempt will be made to remove your data; however, this will not be possible once personal identifiers have been removed. You have the right to omit any question(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The study results will inform the development of a larger province-wide study that examines the role of GSAs in young people's lives and as a mechanism for increasing safety in the high school environment. The results will also be posted on the OK2BME web page by February 1, 2013, presented at conferences, and may also be published in the form of a journal article

If you are interested in receiving feedback about this study, please check the appropriate box and include your email address at the bottom of this form and information will be sent to you regarding the results of this study by February 1, 2013.

CONSENT

Participant consent - to be completed by participant, teacher or student aged 16 or older

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future, at the email address provided below, for the purpose of providing me with results from this study

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future, at the email address provided below, for the purpose of requesting me to return to clarify or explain further regarding my responses in the interview.

I am 16 years of age or older.

Participant's Name_____

Participant’s Email Address_____

Participant's Signature_____

Date: _____

References

Adams, N., Cox, T., & Dunstan, L. (2004). "I am the hate that dare not speak its name": Dealing with homophobia in secondary schools. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 20*, 259–269.

Almeida, J., Johnson, R. M., Corliss, H. L., Molnar, B. E., & Azrael, D. (2009). Emotional distress among LGBT youth: The influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 1001–1014. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-009-9397-9.

Alvesson, M., & Skoldburg, K. (2000). *Reflexive Methodology*. London, UK: Sage.

American Psychiatric Association [APA] (1973). The history of psychiatry and homosexuality. *LGBT mental health syllabus*. Retrieved from http://www.aglp.org/gap/1_history/.

Anderson, J. (2014). Providing a safe learning environment for queer students in Canadian schools: A legal analysis of homophobic bullying. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11*, 212-243. DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2013.879463.

Badari, A. (2010, July 22). *Egan v. Canada* (1995) – *Equity rights and same- sex spousal benefits*. *Centre for Constitutional Studies*. Retrieved from http://www.law.ualberta.ca/centres/ccs/rulings/Egan_v_Canada1995.php

Barber, H., & Krane, V. (2007). Creating a positive climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, *78*, 6–7.

Bayly, M. J. (2007). *Creating safe environments for LGBT students: A Catholic school perspective*. New York, NY: Harrington Park Press.

Bellini, C. (2012). The pink lesson plan: Addressing the emotional needs of gay and lesbian students in Canadian teacher education programs. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 9*, 373–396. DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2012.714178.

Berlan, E. D., Corliss, H. L., Field, A. E., Goodman, E., & Austin, S. B. (2010). Sexual orientation and bullying among adolescents in the growing up today study. *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, *46*, 366–371. DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.10.015

Bias, J. P., Conoley, C. W., & Castillo, L. (2005). Effective responses to teasing. *The Childcare and Development Journal, 3,* 15-39.

Birkett, M., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. (2009). LGB and questioning students in schools: The moderating effects of homophobic bullying and school climate on negative outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *38*, 989–1000. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-008-9389-1.

Bittner, R. (2012). Queering sex education: Young adult literature with LGBT Content as complementary sources of sex and sexuality education. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 9, 357–372. DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2012.714167.

Blake, S. M., Ledsky, R., Lehman, T., Goodenow, C., Sawyer, R., & Hack, T. (2001). Preventing sexual risk behaviors among gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents: The benefits of gay-sensitive HIV instruction in schools. *American Journal of Public Health*, *91*, 940–946.

Bochenek, M., & Brown, A. (2001). *Hatred in the hallways: Violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students in U.S. schools*. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch.

Boland, P. (2002). *Vulnerability to violence among gay, lesbian and bisexual youth*. Retrieved April 16, 2005 from: http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/neat_ vulnerability.html.

Bontempo, D. E., & D'Augelli, A. R. (2002). Effects of at-school victimization and sexual orientation on lesbian, gay, or bisexual youths' health risk behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 30,* 364–374. http://dx.doi .org/10.1016/S1054-139X(01)00415-3.

Bostwick, W. B. (2007, June). *Mental health risk factors among GLBT youth*. Arlington, VA: National Alliance on Mental Illness. Retrieved from http://www.nami.org/TextTemplate.cfm?Section=Fact_Sheets1&Template=/ContentManagement/ ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=48112.

Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report, 19*, 1-9.

Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., O'Brennan, L., & Gulemetova, M. (2011). *Findings from the National Education Association's nationwide study of bullying: Teachers' and staff members' perspectives on bullying and prevention*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development.

American Psychologist, 32, 513-531.

Brown, T. M. (2007). Lost and turned out: Academic, social, and emotional experiences of students excluded from school. *Urban Education, 42*, 432-455.

Callaghan, T. (2007). Contra/diction: How Catholic doublespeak in Canadian Catholic secondary schools furthers homophobia. *Canadian Online Journal of Queer Studies in Education, 3*. Retrieved from https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/jqstudies/article/view/3281

Callaghan, T. (2009). The policy polka and curriculum cotillion: How Catholic schools dance away from their obligation regarding sexual diversity. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education, 2*, 1–9.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC] (1967). *Interview with Pierre Elliot Trudeau*. Retrieved from http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/rights_freedoms/topics/538/.

Carter, S., Janzen, H. L., & Paterson, J. G. (1999). The psychopathology of school violence. In G. Malicky, B. Shapiro, & K. Mazurek (Eds.), *Building foundations for safe and caring schools: Research on disruptive behaviour and violence* (pp. 11–30). Edmonton, AB: Duval.

Case, K. A., & Meier, C. (2014). Developing allies to transgender and gender-nonconforming youth: Training for counselors and educators. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11*, 62–82. DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2014.840764.

Chamberlain v**.** Surrey District School Board No. 36, (2002). Supreme Court Reports 710,

2002 *Supreme Court of Canada 86*.

Chamberland, L. (2011). *The impact of homophobia and homophobic violence on school persistence and academic success: Key findings*. Montreal, QC: Université du Québec à Montréal.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory. In J. A. Smith (Ed.). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 81-110). London, UK: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2008). Grounded theory as an emergent method. In S. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.). *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp.155-170). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Chesir-Teran, D., & Hughes, D. (2009). Heterosexism in high school and victimization among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 963–975.

Chiseri-Strater, E. (1996). Turning in upon ourselves: Positionality, subjectivity, and reflexivity in case study and ethnographic research. In P. Mortensen & G. E. Kirsch (Eds.), *Ethics and responsibility in qualitative studies of literacy* (pp. 115-133). Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Conoley, J. C. (2008). Sticks and stones can break my bones and words can really hurt me. *School Psychology Review, 37,* 217-220.

Conway, T., & Crawford-Fisher, R. (2007). The need for continued research on Gay-Straight Alliances. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy 4*, 125–129.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cosgrove, L., & McHugh, M. C. (2000). Speaking for ourselves: Feminist methods and Community Psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 28*, 815-838.

Craig, S. L. (2013). Affirmative Supportive Safe and Empowering Talk (ASSET): Leveraging the strengths and resiliencies of sexual minority youth in school-based groups**.** *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 7*, 372–386. DOI: 10.1080/15538605.2013.839342.

Craig, S. L., Tucker, E. W., & Wagner, E. F. (2008). Empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: Lessons learned from a safe schools summit. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services: Issues in Practice, Policy, & Research*, *20*, 237–252.

Currie, S., Mayberry, M., & Chenneville, T. (2012). Destabilizing anti-gay environments through Gay-Straight Alliances: Possibilities and limitations through shifting discourses. *The Clearing House*, *85*, 56–60. DOI: 10.1080/00098655.2011.611190

Damianakis, T., & Woodford, M. (2012). Qualitative research with small connected communities: generating new knowledge while upholding research ethics. *Qualitative Health Research, 22*, 708-718. DOI: 10.1177/1049732311431444.

D'Augelli, A. R., Grossman, A. H., Salter, N. P., Vasey, J. J., Starks, M. T., & Sinclair, K. O. (2005). Predicting the suicide attempts of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behaviour, 35*, 646-678.

D'Augelli, A. R., Pilkington, N. W., & Hershberger, S. L. (2002). Incidence and mental health impact of sexual orientation victimization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths in high school. *School Psychology Quarterly, 17*, 148-167.

Denzin, N. K. (1989). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (3rd Ed). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Denzin, N. K. (2009). The elephant in the living room: or extending the conversation about the politics of evidence. *Qualitative Research, 9,* 139-160. DOI: 10.1177/1468794108098034.

Dessel, A., Woodford, M., & Warren, N. (2011). Intergroup dialogue courses on sexual orientation: Lesbian, gay and bisexual student experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *58*, 1132-1150.

Doppler, J. E. (2000). *A description of Gay-Straight Alliances in the public schools of Massachusetts*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Scholars Portal (UMI number: 9988779).

Dorais, M. (2001). *Mort ou fif: La face cachée du suicide chez les garçons*. Rev. et corr. Montréal: VLB éditeur.

DuRant, R. H., Krowchuk, D. P., & Sinal, S. H. (1998). Victimization, use of violence, and drug use at school among male adolescents who engage in same-sex sexual behavior. *Journal of Pediatrics*, *132*, 13–18.

Egan v. Canada. (1995). 2 S.C.R., *Supreme Court of Canada Record 513*.

England, K. V. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer, 46*, 80–89.

Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere [Egale] (2011). *MyGSA.ca: Equity and inclusive education resource kit for Ontario high schools*. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

Espelage, D. L., Aragon, S. R., Birkett, M., & Koenig, B. W. (2008). Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influence do parents and schools have? *School Psychology Review, 37,* 202-216.

Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Addressing research gaps in the intersection between homophobia and bullying. *School Psychology Review, 37*, 155-159.

Faulkner, A. H., & Cranston, K. (1998). Correlates of same-sex sexual behavior in a random sample of Massachusetts high school students. *American Journal of Public Health, 88,* 262–266. DOI: 10.2105/ ajph.88.2.262.

Fetner, T., Elafros, A., Bortolin, S., & Drechsler, C. Safe spaces: Gay-Straight Alliances in high schools. *Canadian Review of Sociology, 49*, 188-207.

Fetner, T. & Kush, K. (2007). Gay Straight Alliances in high schools: Social predictors of early adoption. *Youth and Society, 40*, 114–130. DOI: 1177/0044118X07308073

Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*

(1st Ed., pp. 70–82*)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fisher, E. S., Komosa-Hawkins, K., Saldana, E., Thomas, G. M., Hsiao, C., Rauld, M., & Miller, D. (2008). Promoting school success for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning students: Primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and intervention strategies. *The California School Psychologist, 13*, 79-91.

Foster-Fishman, P. G., Berkowitz, S. L., Lounsbury, D. W., Jacobson, S., & Allen, N. A. (2001). Building collaborative capacity in community coalitions: A review and integrative framework. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 29*, 241-261.

Garnets, L. D., & D'Augelli, A. R. (1994). Empowering lesbian and gay communities: A call for communication with Community Psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 22*, 447-470.

Garofalo, R., Wolf, R., Kessel, S., Palfrey, A., & DuRant, R. (1998). The association between health-risk behaviors and sexual orientation among a school-based sample of adolescents. *Pediatrics*, *101*, 895–902.

Getz, C. & Kirkley, E. (2006). Shaking up the status quo: Challenging intolerance of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community at a private Roman Catholic university. *College Student Journal, 40*, 857–869.

Goldstein, T. (1997). Unlearning homophobia through a pedagogy of anonymity. *Teaching Education, 9*, 115-124.

Goldstein, T., Collins, A., & Halder, M. (2005). *Challenging homophobia and heterosexism in elementary and high schools: A research report to the Toronto District School Board*. Toronto, ON: OISE/UT.

Goldstein, T. Collins, A., & Halder, M. (2007). Anti-homophobia education in public schooling: A Canadian case study of policy implementation. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 19*, 47-66. DOI: 10.1080/10538720802161540.

Goodenow, C., Szalacha, L., & Westheimer, K. (2006). School support groups, other school factors, and the safety of sexual minority adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*, 573–589. DOI: 10.1002/pits.20173.

Grace, A. P., & Wells, K. (2004). Engaging sex-and-gender differences: Educational and cultural change initiatives in Alberta. In J. McNinch & M. Cronin (Eds.), "*I could not speak my heart": Education and social justice for gay and lesbian youth* (pp. 289-307). Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.

Grace, A. P., & Wells, K. (2005). The Marc Hall prom predicament: Queer individual rights v. institutional church rights in Canadian public education. *Canadian Journal of Education, 28*, 237-270.

Graybill, E. C., Varjas, K., Meyers, J., & Watson, L. B. (2009). Content-specific strategies to advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: An exploratory study. *School Psychology Review, 38,* 570–584.

Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Boesen, M. J. (2013). Educating the educator: Creating supportive school personnel through professional development. *Journal of School*

Violence, 12, 80–97. DOI: 10.1080/15388220.2012.731586.

Griffin, C. (2004). The advantages and limitation of qualitative research in psychology and education. *Scientific Annals of the Psychological Society of Northern Greece, 2*, 3–15.

Griffin, P., Lee, C., Waugh, J., & Beyer, C. (2004). Describing roles that Gay-Straight Alliances play in schools. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 1*, 7–22. DOI: 10.1300/J367v01n03_03.

Griffin, P., & Ouellett, M. L. (2002). Going beyond Gay-Straight Alliances to make schools safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. *ANGLES: The Policy Journal of the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, 6*, 1–8.

Griffin, P., & Ouellett, M. L. (2003). From silence to safety and beyond: Historical trends in addressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender in K-12 schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 36*, 106-114.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Haas, A. P., Eliason, M., Mays, V. M., Mathy, R. M., Cochran, S. D., D'Augelli, A. R., . . . Clayton, P. J. (2011). Suicide and suicide risk in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *58*, 10–51. DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2011.534038.

Hackford-Peer, K. (2010). In the name of safety: Discursive positionings of queer youth. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 29*, 541–556. DOI: 10.1007/s11217-010-9197-4.

Hall (Litigation guardian of) v. Powers. (2002, May 10). Can LII 49475 (ON SC). *Superior Court of Justice*. Retrieved from http://www.canlii.org/en/on/onsc/doc/2002/2002canlii49475/2002canlii49475.html

Hansen, A. (2007). School-based support for GLBT students: A review of three levels of research. *Psychology in the Schools, 44*, 839–851. DOI: 10.1002/pits.20269.

Harper, G. W., & Schneider, M. (1999). Giving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and communities a voice in community research and action. *The Community Psychologist, 32*, 41-43.

Harper, G. W., & Schneider, M. (2003). Oppression and discrimination among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and communities: A challenge for Community Psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*, 243-252.

Hatzenbuehler, M. L. (2011). The social environment and suicide attempts in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Pediatrics*, *127*, 896–903. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2010-3020.

Heck, N. C., Flentje, A., & Cochran, B. N. (2011). Offsetting risks: High school Gay-Straight Alliances and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. *School Psychology Quarterly, 26*, 161–174. DOI: 10.1037/a0023226.

Heck, N. C., Livingston, N. A., Flentje, A., Oost, K., Stewart, B. T., & Cochran, B. N.

(2014). Reducing risk for illicit drug use and prescription drug misuse: High school Gay-Straight Alliances and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. *Addictive Behaviors, 39*, 824–828.

Holzhauer, E. A. (1993). The hidden minority: Lesbian and gay students in our schools. *School Social Work Journal, 18*, 1–8.

Hopkins, P. E. (2007). Positionalities and knowledge: Negotiating ethics in practice. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, 6*, 386-394.

Horne, A. M., Stoddard, J. L., & Bell, C. D. (2007). Group approaches to reducing aggression and bullying in school. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research and Practice, 11*, 262-271. DOI: 10.1037/1089-2699.11.4.262.

Horowitz, A., & Loehnig, G. (Eds.). (2003). *Safe schools manual*. Saint Paul, MN: Saint Paul Public Schools.

Humphrey, C. (2007). Insider-outsider: Activating the hyphen. *Action Research, 5*, 11-26.

Hunt, G. & Eaton, J. (2007. We are family: Labour responds to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender workers. In G. Hunt & D. Rayside (Eds.), *Equity, diversity, and Canadian labour* (pp.130-55). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Hunter, J. (2007). Introduction: Safe passage. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 19*, 1-8. DOI: 10.1080/10538720802161458.

Jeltova, I., & Fish, M. C. (2005). Creating school environments responsive to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender families: Traditional and systemic approaches for

consultation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 16,* 17–33.

Jordan, K. M., Vaughan, J. S., & Woodworth, K. J. (1997). I will survive: Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths' experience of high school. In M. Harris (Ed.), *School experiences of gay and lesbian youth: The invisible minority* (pp.17-33). Binghampton, NY: The Harrington Park Press.

Kajs, L. T. (2006). Reforming the discipline management process in schools: An alternative approach to zero tolerance. *Educational Research Quarterly, 29*, 14-28.

Kimchi, J., Polivka, B., & Stevenson, J. (1991). Triangulation: Operational definitions. *Nursing Research, 40*, 364-366.

Kirby, B. & Michaelson, J. (2008). Educating about homosexuality: What do Americans think? *Sex Education, 8*, 225–235. DOI: 10.1080/14681810801981282.

Kitchen, J., & Bellini, C. (2013). Making schools safe and inclusive: Gay-Straight Alliances and school climate in Ontario. *Canadian Journal of Administration and Policy, 146*, 1-37.

Kloos, B., Hill, J., Thomas, E., Wandersman, A., Elias, M.J., & Dalton, J.H. (2012). *Community Psychology: Linking individuals and communities* (3rd Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Konishi, C., Saewyc, E., Homma, Y., & Poon, C. (2013). Population-level evaluation of school-based interventions to prevent problem substance use among gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents in Canada. *Preventive Medicine, 57*, 929–933.

Kosciw, J. G. (2004). *The 2003 national school climate survey: The school-related experiences of our nation's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth*. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network.

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Bartkiewicz, M. J., Boesen, M. J., & Palmer, N. A. (2012). *The 2011 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network.

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Diaz, E. M., & Bartkiewicz, M. J. (2010). *The 2009 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network.

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J., & (2014). *The 2013 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network.

Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2013). The effect of negative school climate on academic outcomes for LGBT youth and the role of in-school supports. *Journal of School Violence, 12*, 45–63. DOI: 10.1080/15388220.2012.732546.

Lee, C. (2002). The impact of belonging to a high school Gay-Straight Alliance. *The High School Journal, 85*, 13–26. DOI: 10.1353/hsj.2002.0005.

Letherby, G. (2003). *Feminist research in theory and practice*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Lewis, C. (2011, December 14). Anti-bullying bill subverts Catholic curriculum group. *National Post*. Retrieved from http://life.nationalpost.com/2011/12/13/anti-bullying-bill-subverts-catholic-curriculum-group/

Lewis, C. (2012, April 18). Ontario Catholic school groups divided over accepting Gay-Straight Alliances on Campus. *National Post*. Retrieved from http://life.nationalpost.com/2012/03/14/ontario-catholic-school-groups-divided-over-accepting-gay-straight-alliances-on-campus/.

Liboro, R., Travers, R., & St. John, A. (2015). Beyond the dialectics and polemics: Canadian Catholic schools addressing LGBT youth issues. *The High School Journal, 98*, 158-180.

Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative research in education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 1*, 275-289.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lovett, I. (2011, July 15). California to require gay history in schools. *The New York Times*, p. A16. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/15/us/15gay.html.

Lugg, C. A. (2003). Sissies, faggots, lezzies, and dykes: Gender, sexual orientation, and a new politics of education? *Educational Administration Quarterly, 39*, 95–134. DOI:

10.1177/0013161X02239762

MacDougall, B., & Clarke, P. (2004). Teaching tolerance, mirroring diversity, understanding difference: The effect and implications of the Chamberlain Case. In J. McNinch & M. Cronin (Eds.), *"I could not speak my heart:" Education and social justice for gay and lesbian youth* (pp. 193–219). Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.

Macgillivray, I. K. (2005). Shaping democratic identities and building citizenship skills through student activism: Mexico's first gay- straight alliance. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *38*, 320–330.

MacIntosh, L. (2007). Does anyone have a Band-Aid? Anti-homophobic discourses and pedagogical impossibilities. *Educational Studies, 41*, 33-43.

Maguire, P. (2004). Reclaiming the F word: Emerging lessons from teaching about feminist-informed action research. In M. Brydon-Miller, P. Maguire, and A. McIntyre (Eds). *Traveling companions: Feminism, teaching, and action research* (pp.117-135). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Maher, M. (2004). Catholic high school students' attitudes toward homosexuality: A snapshot of incoming college freshmen. *Journal of Catholic Education, 7*, 4-11.

Maher, M. & Sever, L. (2007). What educators in Catholic schools might expect when addressing gay and lesbian issues: A study of needs and barriers. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 4*, 79–111. DOI: 10.1300/J367v04n03_06.

Mann, B. (2012, June 7). Catholic schools will follow Ontario's Gay-Straight club requirement. *Catholic News Agency*. Retrieved from http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/catholic-schools-will-follow-ontarios-gay-straight-club-requirement/

Marshal, M. P., Friedman, M. S., Stall, R., King, K. M., Miles, J., Gold, M. A., & Morse, J. Q. (2008). Sexual orientation and adolescent substance use: A meta-analysis and methodological review. *Addiction*, *103*, 546–556.

Mayberry, M. (2007). The story of a Salt Lake City gay- straight alliance: Identity work and LGBT youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education, 4*, 13–31. DOI: 10. 1300/J367v04n01_03.

Mayberry, M. (2012). Gay-Straight Alliances: Youth empowerment and working toward reducing stigma of LGBT youth. *Humanity & Society, 37*, 35-54. DOI: 10.1177/0160597612454358.

Mayberry, M., Chenneville, T., & Currie, S. (2011). Challenging the sounds of silence: A qualitative study of Gay–Straight Alliances and school reform efforts. *Education and Urban Society, 45*, 307–339. DOI: 10.1177/0013124511409400.

Mayo, C. (2008). Obscene associations: Gay-Straight Alliances, the equal access act, and abstinence-only policy. *Sexual Research and Social Policy, 5*, 45–55, DOI: 10.1525/srsp.2008.5.2.45.

Mayo, J. B. (2013). Critical pedagogy enacted in the Gay–Straight Alliance: New possibilities for a third space in teacher development. *Educational Researcher, 42*,

266–275. DOI: 10.3102/0013189X13491977.

McCaskell, T. (2005). *Race to equity*. Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.

McCaskell, T. (2012). The politics of common cause: Using "values framing" to understand the battle over bullying in our schools. *Our Schools/Our Selves, 21*, 45-78.

McCaskell, T. & Russell, V. (2000). Anti-homophobia initiatives at the former Toronto Board of Education. In T. Goldstein & D. Selby (Eds.). *Weaving connections: Educating for peace, social and environmental justice* (pp. 27–56). Toronto, ON: Sumach.

McCready, L. T. (2003). Some challenges facing queer youth programs in urban high schools. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 1*, 37–51. DOI: 10.1300/J367v0n03_05.

McEntarfer, H. K. (2011). "Not going away": Approaches used by students, faculty, and staff members to create Gay–Straight Alliances at three religiously affiliated universities. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 8*, 309-331, DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2011.607623.

McFarland, W. P. (2001). The legal duty to protect gay and lesbian students from violence in school. *Professional School Counseling, 4,* 171–178.

McGuckin, C., & Lewis, C. A. (2008). Management of bullying in Northern Ireland schools: A pre-legislative survey. *Educational Research, 50*, 9–23.

McGuinness, T. M. (2008). Hate crimes 101: Making the world (and school) safe for GLBT youth. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing, 46*, 8-9.

McLaughlin, K. A., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Xuan, Z., & Conron, K. J. (2012). Disproportionate exposure to early-life adversity and sexual orientation disparities in psychiatric morbidity. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 36*, 645–655. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2012.07.004.

McNinch, J., and Cronin, M. (Eds.). (2004). *"I could not speak my heart": Education and social justice for gay and lesbian youth*. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.

Mercier, M. (2009). Fighting to fit in: Gay–Straight Alliances in schools under United States jurisprudence. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *13*, 177–191.

Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M. Y., Lee, Y., Ntseane, G., & Muhamed, M. (2001). Power and positionality: Negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 20*, 405-416.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods* (2nd Ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mills, C. (2011). Students and parents want schools to act on cyber-bullying. *The Globe and Mail*, 21 October, A13. Retrieved from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/students-and-parents-want-schools-to-act-on-cyber-bullying/article558377/.

Minkler, M. (2004). Ethical challenges for the "outsider" researcher in community-based

participatory research. *Health Education and Behaviour, 31*, 684-697. DOI: 10.1177/1090198104269566.

Minkler, M. (2005). Community-based research partnerships: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Urban Health, 82*, 113-119. DOI: 10.1093/jurban/jti034

Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N.B. (2008). Introduction to community-based participatory research. In M. Minkler and N.B. Wallerstein (Eds). *Community-based participatory research: From process to outcomes* (pp.5-18). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Minton, S. J., Dahl, T., O'Moore, A. M., & Tuck, D. (2008). An exploratory survey of the experiences of homophobic bullying among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered young people in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies, 27*, 177-191. DOI: 10.1080/03323310802021961.

Mishna, F., Newman, P. A., Daley, A., & Solomon, S. (2009). Bullying of lesbian and gay youth: A qualitative investigation. *The British Journal of Social Work, 39*, 1598–1614. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcm148.

Murdock, T. B. and Bolch, M. B. (2005). Risk and protective factors for poor school adjustment in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school youth: Variable and person-centered analyses, *Psychology in the Schools, 42*, 59–72.

Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). The project of community psychology: Issues, values, and tools for liberation and well-being. In G. Nelson & I. Prilleltensky (Eds.). *Community Psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being* (2nd Ed.).

New York, NY: Palgrave.

Nichols, S. L. (1999). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth: Understanding diversity and promoting tolerance in schools. *The Elementary School Journal, 99*, 505-519.

NoH8 Campaign (2011). *Generation NoH8*. Retrieved from http://www.noh8campaign.com/article/gener8tion-noh8.

Nonato, S. D. (2012, February 3). Ontario, Catholic schools face off over Gay-Straight Alliances. *National Post*. Retrieved from http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/02/02/Ontario-catholic-schools-face-off- over-gay-straight-alliances/

Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC] (1986). *Part I – The context: sexual orientation, human rights protections, case law and legislation*. Retrieved from http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-discrimination-and-harassment-because-sexual-orientation/part-i-—-context-sexual-orientation-human-rights-protections-case-law-and-legislation?page=ori-Purpose.html.

Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC] (2011). *The Ontario Safe Schools Act: School discipline and discrimination: Executive summary*. Retrieved from www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion_consultation/SafeSchoolsConsultRepENG

Ontario Human Rights Commission Code (1990). *Revised Statutes of Ontario*. Retrieved from http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca /html/statutes /english /elaws_statutes_90h19_e.htm

Ontario Legislative Assembly [OLA] (2012). *Bill 13: Accepting Schools Act*. Retrieved

from http://ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=2549.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2008). *Progressive discipline: A new approach to help make schools safer*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/discipline.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). *Greater equity means greater student success*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/ equity.html.

Orpinas, P., & Horne, A.M. (2006). Selection and implementation of universal bullying prevention programs. In P. Orpinas & A. Horne (Eds.), *Bullying prevention: Creating a positive school climate and developing social competence* (pp.165-177). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy research in educational settings: Contested terrain*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Parliament of Canada (2005). *Civil Marriage Act*. Retrieved from http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/LegislativeSummaries/bills_ls.asp?ls=c38&Parl=38&Ses=1.

Parliament of Canada (2007). *Charter equality rights: Interpretation of section 15 in Supreme Court of Canada Decisions*. Retrieved from http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/LOP/ResearchPublications/bp402-e.htm.

Payne, E. C., & Smith, M. J. (2012). Safety, celebration, and risk: Educator responses to LGBTQ professional development. *Teaching Education, 23*, 265–285. DOI:

10.1080/10476210.2012.699520.

Peel, E. (2008). De-heterosexualising health: Exploring lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans health issues and policy in Britain. *Sex Roles, 59*, 609-610. DOI 10.1007/s11199-008-9434-2.

Perkel, C. (2012, May 25). Students could call Gay-Straight Alliance a "Gay-Straight Alliance" under new Ontario legislation. *National Post*. Retrieved from http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/05/25/students-can-now-call-their-gay-straight-alliance-a-gay-straight-alliance-says-new-ontario-legislation/

Peters, A. J. (2003). Isolation or inclusion: Creating safe spaces for lesbian and gay youth. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 84,* 331–337.

Poteat, V. P. (2008). Contextual and moderating effects of the peer group climate on use of homophobic epithets. *School Psychology Review, 37,* 188-201.

Poteat, P. V., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. W. (2009). Willingness to remain friends and attend school with lesbian and gay peers: Relational expressions of prejudice among heterosexual youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *38*, 952-962. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-009-9416-x.

Poteat, V. P., Sinclair, K. O., DiGiovanni, C. D., Koenig, B. W., & Russell, S. T. (2013). Gay-Straight Alliances are associated with student health: A multi-school comparison of LGBTQ and heterosexual youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 23*, 319–330. DOI: 10.1111/j. 1532-7795.2012.00832.x.

Prasad, P. (2005). *Crafting qualitative research*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.

Rayside, D. (2008). *Queer inclusions, continental divisions: Public recognition of sexual diversity in Canada and the United States*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Rayside, D. (2014). The inadequate recognition of sexual diversity by Canadian schools: LGBT advocacy and its impact. *Journal of Canadian Studies, 48*, 190-277.

Region of Waterloo. (2006). *Census Bulletin 1*. Waterloo, ON, Canada: Planning, Housing and Community Services, Planning Information and Research. Retrieved from http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/discoveringTheRegion/resources/Bulletin_ 11.pdf

Remafredi, G., French, S., Story, M., Resnick, M.D., & Blum, R. (1998). The relationship between suicide risk and sexual orientation: Results of a population-based study. *American Journal of Public Health*, *88*, 57–60.

Robinson, J. P., & Espelage, D. L. (2012). Bullying explains only part of LGBTQ-heterosexual risk disparities: Implications for policy and practice. *Educational Researcher*, *41*, 309–319.

Robinson, J. P., & Espelage, D. L. (2013). Peer victimization and sexual risk differences between lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning, and non-transgender heterosexual youths in grades 7–12. *American Journal of Public Health, 103*, 1810-1819.

Robinson, K. H., & Ferfolja, T. (2008). Playing it up, playing it down, playing it safe: Queering teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*, 846–858.

Russell, S. T. (2011). Challenging homophobia in schools: Policies and programs for safe school climates. *Educar em Revista, 39*, 123–138. Retrieved from http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script5sci_arttext&pid5 S0104-40602011000100009&lng5en&tlng5en.10.1590/S0104-40602011000100009.

Russell, S. T., Driscoll, A. K., & Truong, N. L. (2002). Adolescent same-sex romantic attractions and relationships: Implications for substance use and abuse. *American Journal of Public Health, 92,* 198–202. DOI: 10.2105/ajph.92.2.198.

Russell, S. T., & Joyner, K. (2001). Adolescent sexual orientation and suicide risk: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health, 91*, 1276-1281. DOI: 10.2105/ajph.91.8.1276.

Russell, S. T., Kostroski, O., McGuire, J. K., Laub, C., & Manke, E. (2006). *LGBT issues in the curriculum promote school safety* (California Safe Schools Coalition Research Brief No. 6). San Francisco, CA: California Safe Schools Coalition.

Russell, S. T., Muraco, A., Subramaniam, A. & Laub, C. (2009). Youth empowerment and high school Gay- Straight Alliances. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 891–903. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-008-9382-8.

Russell, S. T., Seif, H., & Truong, N. L. (2001). School outcomes of sexual minority youth in the United States: Evidence from a national study. *Journal of Adolescence, 24,* 111–127.

Russell, S. T., Sinclair, K. O., Poteat, V. P., & Koenig, B. W. (2012). Adolescent health and harassment based on discriminatory bias. *American Journal of Public Health, 102,* 493– 495. http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/ ajph.2011.300430.

Russell, S. T., Toomey, R. B., Ryan, C., & Diaz, R. M. (2014). Being out at school: The implications for school victimization and young adult adjustment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 4*, 635–643. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000037.

Russo, R. (2006). The extent of public education non-discrimination policy protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students: A national study. *Urban Education, 41*, 115-150. DOI: 10.1177/0042085905284957.

Ryan, C. L., Patraw, J. M., & Bednar, M. (2013). Discussing princess boys and pregnant men: Teaching about gender diversity and transgender experiences within an elementary school curriculum. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 10*, 83–105. DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2012.718540.

Saewyc, E. M., Skay, C. L., Hynds, P., Pettingell, S. L., Bearinger, L. H., Resnick, M. D., & Reis, E. (2008). Suicidal ideation and attempts in North American school-based surveys: Are bisexual youth at increasing risk? *Journal of LGBT Health Research, 3*, 25-36.

Saewyc, E. M., Skay, C. L., Pettingell, S. L., Reis, E. A., Bearinger, L. H., Resnick, M. D., … & Combs, L. (2006). The hazards of stigma: The sexual and physical abuse of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents in the US and Canada. *Child Welfare, 85*, 195-213.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2001). Suicide attempts among sexual minority youths: Population and measurement issues. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 69*, 983-991.

Savin-Williams, R. C., & Ream, G. L. (2003). Suicide attempts among sexual minority male youth. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 32*, 509-522.

Scanlon, K., Travers, R., Coleman, T., Bauer, G., & Boyce, M. (2010). Ontario's trans communities and suicide: Transphobia is bad for our health. *Trans Pulse E-Bulletin, 1*, November 12. Retrieved from http://transpulse.ca/documents/ E2English.pdf.

Schindel, J. E. (2008). Gender 101 – Beyond the binary: Gay-Straight Alliances and gender activism. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 5*, 56–70.

Schneider, M. S., & Dimito, A. (2008). Educators' beliefs about raising lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in the schools: The experience in Ontario, Canada. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *5*, 49–71. DOI: 10.1080/19361650802223003.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*, 63–75.

Sherriff, N. S., Hamilton, W. E., Wigmore, S., & Giambrone, B. L. (2011). "What do you say to them?": Investigating and supporting the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning young people. *Journal of Community Psychology, 39*, 939-955. DOI: 10.1002/ccp.20479.

Short, D. (2008). Queers, bullying, and school: Am I safe here? *Journal of Gay and*

Lesbian Social Services, 19, 31–45. DOI: 10.1080/10538720802161508.

Short, D. (2013). *"Don't be so gay!" Queers, bullying, and making schools safe*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.

Snively, C. A. (2003). Building community-based alliances between GLBTQQA youth and adults in rural settings. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 16*, 99–112.

Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research, 72*, 387-431.

St. John, A., Travers, R., Munro, L., Liboro, R., Schneider, M., & Greig, C. (2014). The success of Gay-Straight Alliances in Waterloo Region, Ontario: A confluence of political and social factors. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11*, 150–170. DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2014.878564.

Sultana, F. (2007). Reflexivity, positionality, and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, 6*, 374-385.

Swearer, S. M., Turner, R. K., Givens, J. E., & Pollack, W. S. (2008). "You're so gay!": Do different forms of bullying matter for adolescent males? *School Psychology Review, 37,* 160-173.

Szalacha, L. A. (2003). Safer sexual diversity climates: Lessons learned from a

Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for gay and lesbian students. *American Journal of Education, 110*, 58–88. DOI: 10.1086/aje.2003.110.

Taylor, C. (2007). A human rights approach to stopping homophobic bullying in schools. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, *19*, 157–172. DOI: 10.1080/10538720802161672.

Taylor, C., & Peter, T. (2011). *Every class in every school: Final report on the first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools*. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

Taylor, S., Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., & Henry, M. (1997). *Educational policy and the politics of change*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility vs. cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 9*, 117-121.

Tetreault, M. K. (2012). Positionality and knowledge construction. In J. A. Banks (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*. Retrieved from: http://knowledge.sagepub.com/view/diversityineducation/n542.xml.

Toomey, R. B., McGuire, J. K., & Russell, S. T. (2012). Heteronormativity, school climates, and perceived safety for gender nonconforming peers. *Journal of Adolescence*, *35*, 187–196. DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.03.001.

Toomey, R. B., & Russell, S. T. (2011). Gay-Straight Alliances, social justice

involvement, and school victimization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer youth: Implications for school well-being and plans to vote. *Youth & Society, 45*, 500–522. DOI: 10.1177/0044118X11422546.

Toomey, R., Ryan, C., Diaz, R., & Russell, S. (2011). High school Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and young adult well-being: An examination of GSA presence, participation, and perceived effectiveness. *Applied Developmental Science, 15*, 175–185.

Tossel, I. (2010, October 26). Trust the web: It gets better. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from http://www. theglobeandmail.com/technology/digital-culture/trust-the-web-it-gets-better/article4330248/

Trickett, E. J., Kelly, J. G., & Todd, D. M. (1972). The social environment of the high school: Guidelines for individual change and organizational redevelopment. In S. E. Golann & C. Eisdorfer (Eds.). *Handbook of community mental health* (pp. 331-406). New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2012). *Good policy and practice in HIV and health education: Education sector responses to homophobic bullying*. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/health-education/homophobic-bullying/

Van Wormer, K. & McKinney, R. (2003). What schools can do to help gay/lesbian/bisexual youth: A harm reduction approach. *Adolescence, 38*, 410–418.

Vriend v. Alberta 1 S.C.R., *Supreme Court of Canada 493*. Retrieved from http://scc.lexum.org/en/1998/1998scr1–493/1998scr1–493.pdf.

Walls, N. E., Kane, S. B., & Wisneski, H. (2010). Gay-Straight Alliances and school experiences of sexual minority youth. *Youth and Society, 41*, 307–332. DOI: 10.1177/004418X09334957.

Walton, G. (2004). Bullying and homophobia in Canadian schools: The politics of policies, programs and educational leadership. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 1*, 23–36. DOI: 10.1300/ 1367v01n04_03.

Walton, G. (2005). Bullying widespread: A critical analysis of research and public discourse on bullying. *Journal of School Violence, 4*, 91-118.

Warner, T. (2002). *Never going back: A history of queer activism in Canada*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Washington, J., & Evans, N. J. (1991). Becoming an ally. In N. J. Evans, & V. A. Wall (Eds.). *Beyond tolerance: Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on campus* (pp. 195–204). Alexandria, VA: American Association for Counseling and Development.

Waterloo Catholic District School Board. (2004). *Suspected "Child in Need of Protection" Reporting*. Retrieved from http://www.wcdsb.ca/AP_Memos/PDF/APS020.pdf□

Waterloo Catholic District School Board. (2005). *Sexual Health Referral Protocol*. Retrieved from http://www.wcdsb.ca/ap_memos/PDF/APC032.pdf□

Waterloo Catholic District School Board. (2008). *Suicide/Depression and Self-Harm*. Retrieved from http://www.wcdsb.ca/ap_memos/PDF/APH019.pdf

Waterloo Catholic District School Board. (2010a). *Bullying Prevention and Intervention*. Retrieved from http://www.wcdsb.ca/ap_memos/PDF/APC034.pdf

Waterloo Catholic District School Board. (2010b). *Equity and Inclusive Education Policy*. Retrieved from http://www.wcdsb.ca/ap_memos/PDF/APC037.pdf

Waterloo Catholic District School Board. (2010c). *Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour*. Retrieved from http://www.wcdsb.ca/ap_memos/PDF/APC035.pdf

Waterloo Catholic District School Board. (2012). *Supporting Students of a Sexual Minority: Criteria for Activities and Organizations that Promote a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment*. Retrieved from http://www.wcdsb.ca/ap_memos/PDF/APC041.pdf

Waterloo Region District School Board. (2006). *Board Policy 1008: Equity and Inclusion*. Retrieved from http://staff.wrdsb.ca/policyprocedure/files/2012/07/BP1008-Equity-and-Inclusion.pdf.

Waterloo Region District School Board. (2012). *Director's Annual Report 2012*. Retrieved from http://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/WRDSB-AR-final-LR.pdf

Waterloo Region District School Board. (2013). *Director's Annual Report 2013*. Retrieved from http://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/WRDSB-AR-

2013_31.pdf

Waterloo Region District School Board. (2014). *Director's Annual Report 2014*. Retrieved from http://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/WRDSB-AR-2014_Web_REV.pdf

Watson, L. B., Varjas, K., Meyers, J., & Graybill, E. C. (2010). Gay-Straight Alliance advisors: Negotiating multiple ecological systems when advocating for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 7,* 100-128.

Watt, D. (2007). On becoming a qualitative researcher: The value of reflexivity. *Qualitative Report, 12*, 82-102.

Whitman, J. S., Horn, S., & Boyd, C. J. (2007). Activism in the schools: Providing LGBTQ affirmative training to school counselors. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy*, *11*, 143–154. DOI: 10.1300/J236v11n03_08.

Winton, S. (2012). From zero tolerance to student success in Ontario, Canada**.** *Educational Policy, 27*, 467–498. DOI: 10.1177/0895904812453994**.**

Worthen, M. G. (2014). The interactive impacts of high school Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) on college student attitudes toward LGBT individuals: An investigation of high school characteristics. *Journal of Homosexuality, 61*, 217–250. DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2013.839906.

Zehr, H., & Mika, H. (1997). *Fundamental Concepts of Restorative Justice*. Akron, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Central Committee.