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Centre for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Education

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(Special collection of blogs)



EDITORIAL

The Centre for LGBTQ+ Inclusion at Leeds Beckett University has established an international research network. We have invited members of the network to contribute to a blog series to showcase research and excellent practice in relation to LGBTQ+ inclusion in education.

This collection of blogs provides insights into school practice in both primary and secondary schools. It also presents some of the authors' research within this field. We are grateful to all the contributors. We have collated the blogs into this special edition of the Working Paper Series. If you would like to write a blog, please contact Professor Jonathan Glazzard. E-mail j.glazzard@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

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The names and affiliations of the contributors are shown on the individual papers.

Inclusivity and Diversity in the LGBTQ+ Community

Meredith G. F. Worthen, PhD,

Professor of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA

Though there is increasing awareness of the LGBTQ+ community, it is essential to provide careful attention to the diversity in this community. As I demonstrate in my book, [*Queers, Bis, and Straight Lies: An Intersectional Examination of LGBTQ Stigma*](#), LGBTQ people experience a wide range of negativities that are shaped by their intersecting identities of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class (among others) (Worthen, 2020). In working toward inclusivity, such diversities are essential to explore. For example, in a nationally representative United States (US) sample of 1,604 LGBTQ+ respondents that is inclusive of nine groups within the LGBTQ community, between 25% and 61% report experiences with sexuality-based discrimination (see Figure 1).

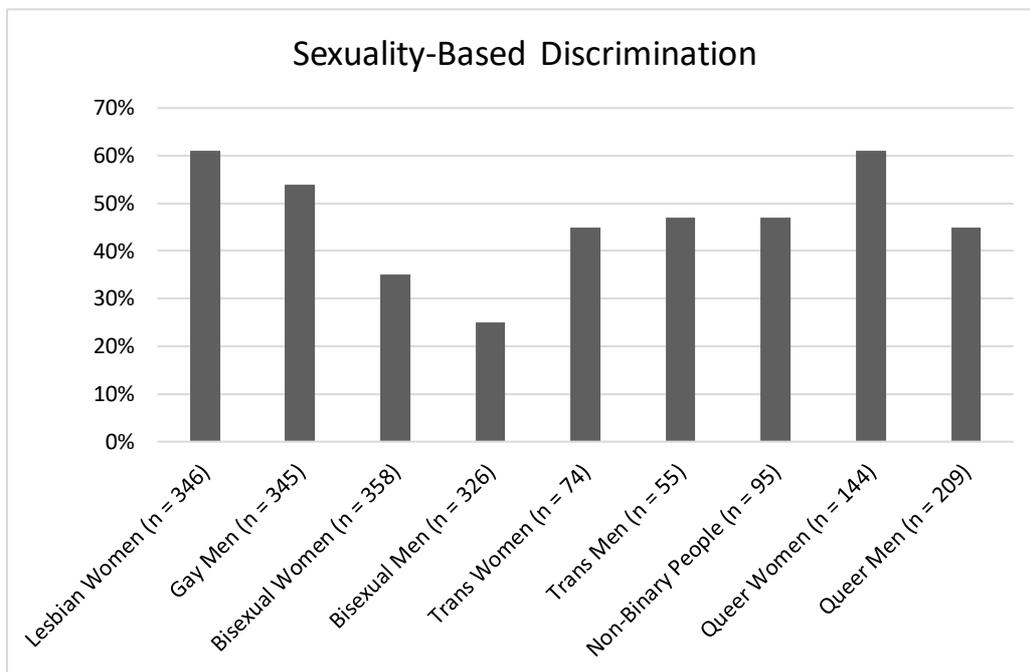


Figure 1. Sexuality-Based Discrimination Experiences of LGBTQ People adapted from Worthen (2020).

In particular, these data demonstrate that lesbian women are at a significantly heightened risk in comparison to most other groups while sexuality-based discrimination is notably less common among bisexual men. Lesbian women's experiences with at least two types of marginalization as women and as lesbians contribute to their unique experiences with discrimination that differ from others in the LGBTQ community. Markedly, these data

demonstrate the significance of exploring the intersections of both gender and sexuality in understanding the discrimination experiences of all LGBTQ people (see also Meyer, 2015).

Especially in the realm of education, discrimination experiences can take on various forms. LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff are at risk for such negativities which can range from hostile student-teacher interactions, to being looked over for a promotion, to losing one's job. As others have noted (Dessell et al., 2017), a "chilly" campus climate characterized by LGBTQ hostilities can sometimes be shifted through programmes such as bystander intervention and LGBTQ+ campus awareness programs. Thus, to be most effective, it is essential that we utilize best practices in these programmes that consider the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ people.

Overall, thinking about LGBTQ+ people as a "monolithic" group is not only problematic, it can lead to misguided and ill-informed policies and practices (Worthen, 2013). Providing an in depth focus on the unique experiences of the diverse groups within the LGBTQ+ community will help us to continue to work toward inclusivity in the fields of education and beyond.

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What does Covid-19 mean for LGBT+ students and teachers?

Dr Catherine Lee: Deputy Dean, Anglia Ruskin University

In the last ten days, I have heard that two young people in my area have committed suicide in their childhood bedrooms. Both identified as trans, and one was supposed to do their A-levels this year before heading off to university.

In common with all communities, Covid-19 is having a profound effect on LGBT+ people, forcing us into ways of living, behaving and interacting that would have been unimaginable just a few months ago. However, some of our challenges differ considerably from those of our heterosexual and cis-gendered peers.

Family and the home has never seemed so important. Night after night the news brings us depictions of the ways in which families are coming together to support elderly relatives and to home-school children. These narratives are exclusively heteronormative and make unhelpful assumptions that behind closed doors our lives are all the same.

Over the last few years schools have made enormous strides to challenge heteronormativity for students, staff and families. I am fortunate enough to work with LGBT+ teachers as part of a leadership programme called [Courageous Leaders](#) and I have been encouraged to hear about the way in which staff support LGBT+ young people, through the development of School Pride Clubs, through the depictions of LGBT+ people in the curriculum and via celebrations such as Pride Month and LGBT History Month. A few of the teachers I've spoken to recently are however worried that those young people are now at home with their parents (who they may or may not be out to, who may or may not be supportive of their identity) without access to any support.

Those LGBT+ young people who gained so much from their inclusive school communities are, as a result of Covid-19, now at home in their bedrooms, possibly back in the closet and cut off from the pastoral support their schools provided for them. The Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT), a charity supporting young people LGBT+ young people aged 16-25 advised young people to think hard before coming out while self-isolating with their families. Tim Sigsworth, AKT CEO, said "If you're a young person and you're thinking of coming out, press pause on that until you get support". LGBT+ people make up around 25 per cent of the UK's homeless population with family rejection the main reason for living on the streets.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also changed life for our LGBT+ teachers. As the majority, for now work from home, and deliver online learning, an inevitable blurring of the personal and professional identities has taken place as students see inside the homes of their teachers for

the first time. My research showed that LGBT+ teachers are very cautious when talking about their home lives in the school workplace (Lee, 2019a). Some LGBT+ teachers are talking with their line managers for the first time about who they live with and what their caring responsibilities are. It has forced some LGBT+ teachers to come out at work for the first time.

As house prices have forced early career teachers to be serial renters or to remain at home in their childhood bedrooms, they may be sharing their days in small spaces with family members or even living in flat-shares with relative strangers. The closing of pubs, clubs and restaurants has meant many LGBT+ teachers no longer have the social networks on which they often rely. Some LGBT+ teachers may be living alone. The Section 28 era meant that very few older LGBT+ teachers have children of their own and so may lack the family support provided by adult children during lockdown.

Although there is no doubt that Covid-19 presents particular challenges for LGBT+ teachers and students, this is not entirely negative. The LGBT+ community has a history of creating families of choice (Mitchell, 2008), friends who serve the function of families when LGBT+ people are estranged from their biological families. Teachers are no exception. During lockdown, my LGBT+ teacher friends and I (my family of choice for the last 25 years), have shopped for one another and quizzed via Zoom every week. There is no doubt that the silver lining in this strangest of times is the online social groups have emerged and begun to thrive. Diva, the lesbian Lifestyle Magazine, has a vibrant closed Facebook community providing a much needed social space for the lesbian community. The growth of online socialising means that LGBT+ students and teachers alike may have found new ways to connect with the LGBT+ community or may be participating in the community for the very first time.

We must not underestimate however, the extent to which the Covid-19 era is testing the emotional and mental health of all members of our society, and that includes LGBT+ teachers and their students. In 2019, I surveyed LGBT+ teachers across the UK and found that 64% of them had accessed help for anxiety or depression linked to their sexual or gender identity and role as a teacher (Lee, 2019b). Ruby Wax, the comedian and mental health advocate forecast in a recent interview that the UK would experience a 'mental health tsunami' post Covid-19 lockdown. When lockdown is lifted and schools return, we must invest properly in our mental health support services. The two young trans people who took their own lives are hidden statistics in the Covid-19 death rate data. Schools have a vital role to play in putting their communities back together by providing the safe and inclusive spaces that many desperately miss at this challenging time.

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Case Study: LGBT Inclusion in a Primary School

Kyrstie Stubbs, Principal, Boothroyd Primary Academy, Kirklees

Background

Boothroyd Primary Academy is a large Primary school serving an area of high deprivation. The community itself is very diverse although the majority of pupils follow a Muslim faith and the majority of the remaining pupils are of Eastern European descent.

It was during our work towards the Mental Health in Schools Award at Leeds Beckett University that we realised, as a school, that we had a real gap in our teaching about LGBT identities and diversity. An inspirational workshop with Claire Birkenshaw, lecturer at Leeds Beckett University, was the pivotal moment in our decision that we had a duty to include diversity in our curriculum. Both myself and my Chair of Governors attended the conference and we felt strongly that we should be teaching children about ALL of the nine protected characteristics within the Equality Act 2010 and not just those we may find 'easier'. We decided to adopt the LGBTQ+ framework that Leeds Beckett University had developed.

Why is it so important?

- 1) Inclusion by its very nature should mean that EVERYONE is included
- 2) Children have a right to feel accepted and to belong to their school community regardless of race, religion, family background etc – to be accepted they have to feel they are RECOGNISED and REPRESENTED
- 3) Currently some schools are ignoring a part of our community in what we are teaching and representing to children and are reinforcing a concept of 'normal' that does not exist

The process

We started with a commitment from our governing body to work towards an inclusive education relating to all aspects of the Equality Act and wanted to launch this to the whole school. It was really important to identify potential barriers prior to starting this and we spent a good deal of time working together with parents, staff and advisors to do this and to create a potential barrier audit and our steps to address them.

The first step was to engage staff and educate them so that they felt able to deal with questions and felt empowered to teach the pupils. For many staff, the workshop delivered by Claire was the first time they had been introduced to some of the issues faced by the LGBT

community and certainly the first time for many that they felt empathy and a recognition of their duty to do something about it through educating children. Staff of all faiths and races attended the training and all staff felt better equipped to move forward with our diversity focus. I am proud to say that all staff, regardless of their religion, were genuinely moved by some of the stories Claire shared and there was a real commitment from everyone to teach acceptance. I think the fact that we chose to train staff using 'real life' experiences rather than a workshop approach is one of the reasons we were so successful in gaining the buy-in of staff so quickly.

We had an amazing opportunity to showcase our art work at the local Town Hall and decided this was a great platform on which to launch our work. The whole school produced art work and poetry around the theme of diversity using photographs and children's books to inspire children and to stimulate discussion- the work produced was simple amazing! Children never fail to surprise adults in their complete acceptance of others, their understanding of differences and why this is special. The showcase was a great springboard for the school as there was media interest, messages on Twitter etc and it remained on show for over 4 weeks.

The diversity showcase was the start of our transformation of our learning environment as well. We felt that we needed to create an inclusive environment- one where it was obvious we were a totally inclusive school. Staff were invited to change their lanyards to rainbow ones and to add a diversity flag to their email signatures. We added a sign in page to our reception area stating that we were an inclusive school and expected visitors to uphold this culture and we added diversity themed displays around our whole school environment.

However, if you want diversity to be present in all aspects of the curriculum it needs a different approach and a 'themed week' or assembly message once in a while isn't enough for it to be truly embedded in teaching.

We have introduced policies and updated others to include transphobia, homophobia and biphobia for example and we have ensured that all recruitment information details our commitment to inclusion including inserting statements in our Home-School agreement. Decisions such as taking gender out of our uniform policy and introducing preferred pronouns onto staff badges are small steps but go a long way in terms of creating a culture of inclusivity.

We have had challenges and questions along the way but if you really believe that this is a fundamental right for children, as we do at Boothroyd, then questions are easy to answer and it is easier to stand firm. We have tackled issues from parents along the way and always

had an open door policy- issues have been addressed quickly and face to face but we have made it clear that relationships education and the inclusion of LGBT is part of our curriculum. Whilst we have been willing to listen to concerns, we have not changed this view nor legally should we. We have shared resources with parents, so they feel informed about what their children are learning and the majority have been supportive.

We have also made sure that we have an ongoing conversation with parents- a one off workshop is not enough to allay fears and misinterpretation especially when issues are raised in the press and social media. At Boothroyd we have had numerous workshops and continually listen to what the parents need us to do to make them feel comfortable with what we are teaching their children. For example, a recent discussion with parents identified a need to invite parents into some of our diversity lessons so that they understand how we use picture books etc to stimulate discussion. This had stemmed from recent social media scaremongering about the texts that they said schools were using.

Common questions and our approach

1. Why is there so much focus on diversity at the moment- more than other areas of the curriculum?

Firstly, it is simply because we have shied away from teaching anything to our children about some aspects of equality previously, so the gap is much wider. Think about years ago when most of the resources in our schools showed white families – as our communities have changed so have our educational resources and content and we had a lot of educating about different races for example to fill a gap that was identified- this is the same. Once diversity becomes an integral part of our curriculum, we won't need this 'push'. Secondly, we can't ignore our moral obligation as leaders- our eyes have been opened to the fact inequality exists and to the poor representation of some parts of our community in education and we cannot ignore that anymore- nor should we when we are leading the education of a next generation.

2. How have we interpreted the government advice that school should teach in an age appropriate fashion?

We have used common sense judgement and the simple advice from Stonewall- if it is age appropriate for teachers to refer to mummy and daddy, it is therefore age appropriate for teachers to refer to daddy and daddy and mummy and mummy. Children in Key Stage 2 use

the correct terminology and understand terms such as gay, homosexual, lesbian and homophobia for example just as we use the correct terminology for other subjects.

3. Why not leave teaching about LGBT until children are in high school?

There are children in primary school who belong to different family units and all children should feel represented- they shouldn't have to wait for high school to feel normal. We also know that there are children in primary school who identify as LGBT and we need to ensure that they feel safe, secure and part of their communities.

Final words

We recently had a visit from OFSTED who commented that equality and diversity were like ivy running through everything we did- we couldn't have asked for a better comment. True equality education should be seamless and should be present in everything we do without the need for standalone weeks or events.

Why should we teach children ?- because it is our role as educator to help our children grow into respectful citizens.

5 years ago...

Dr Declan Fahie, School of Education, University College Dublin (UCD), Ireland.

On May 22nd, 2015, Ireland voted overwhelmingly (62% of voters on a turnout of 61%) to amend the Irish constitution and allow marriage between same-sex couples. This was the first time that a nation state legalised gay marriage following a popular vote. As we approach the fifth anniversary of this concrete manifestation of the seismic shift in societal attitudes toward gay rights in Ireland, it would be easy to overlook another piece of legislation that was passed in the same year - one which has had a considerable impact on the lived experiences of LGBT+ teachers in Ireland.

The vast majority of Irish primary schools, and almost half of Irish second-level institutions, have a denominational ethos i.e. their formal organisational culture is (in)formed by a set of overarching principles which are underpinned explicitly by the norms and values of religious bodies. In practice, this means that such schools engage in formal religious instruction, employ religious iconography throughout and are instrumental in preparing their pupils for sacraments/religious celebrations such as Holy Communion and Confirmation. While there is a growing impetus towards multi-denominational education at both primary and second level in Ireland, church bodies, particular the Roman Catholic church, retain considerable influence over schools and schooling. Unsurprisingly, many LGBTI+ teachers who work in these schools experience a type of *psychic dissonance* given the attitude of the Roman Catholic church towards members of the gay community (Fahie, 2017).

Irish workers enjoy comparatively robust legislative protections under the seminal *Employment Equality Act 1998* which prohibited discrimination and harassment in the workplace across nine named grounds, including sexual orientation. However, the act contained an opt-out clause, Section 37(1), whereby a religious institution/place of work (most schools and many hospitals, for example) would not be taken to have discriminated against an employee or prospective employee if the action was undertaken in order to maintain or protect their religious character. Any denominational body was permitted to “*take action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee or prospective employee from undermining the religious ethos of the institution*”. The nebulous nature of such prohibitions (how precisely an individual undermines an ethos) was, it could be argued, a significant contributor to an insidious sense of fear and foreboding experienced by many LGBTI+ teachers, In essence they were frightened that their personal sexual identities would be revealed and their career trajectories undermined irrevocably (Fahie, 2016).

Previous research (see Fahie *et al.*, 2019, for example) indicated that LGBTI+ teachers experienced real fear, particularly those who were in precarious work situations and/or on temporary contracts. Teachers detailed how they were fearful that they would lose their jobs, be passed over for promotion, lose the respect of parents/guardians and undermine their authority within the classroom. In order to prevent this, they engaged in a variety of masking strategies. While many acknowledged the unlikelihood that such concerns would be realised, the derogation embedded within the original legislation made them feel vulnerable and exposed.

In 2015 the *Employment Equality (Miscellaneous) Act* was published, following considerable pressure from the primary teachers' union in particular, which obliged religious bodies to prove that any action taken to safeguard their ethos was proportionate and "*rationality and strictly related to the institutions ethos*". Critically, any action could not be related solely to, for example, their membership of the LGBTI+ community. In other words, the religious institution (school or hospital) could not terminate the employment or treat an employee/prospective employee differently/unfavourably just because they were gay. *Being* gay was not, in itself, an undermining state of being which could subvert the religious ethos of the school.

Since 2015, there has been increased visibility of LGBTI+ teachers nationally. "Out" teachers are regular contributors to media reports, academic studies and policy fora. There is increasing recognition of the broader contribution such teachers can make to a wider, cross-curricular EDI agenda. Some years ago, a gay primary school principal gave me an example of why such visibility matters. *Liam* (not his real name), a pupil in her school had been in trouble regularly. One day he spent some time in her office following an incident in the school yard. The following morning, his mother approached the principal and thanked her, saying "*You know, he said that he likes to talk to you because you're a lesbian. He said, 'Your life must have been hard when you were young, so you understand how it is for him when he tries to be good in school'*". Visibility matters because Liam matters.

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Our journey to the Gold LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Education Award, developed by Leeds Beckett University

Ben Webster, London Academy of Excellence

Why did we work towards the LGBTQ+ award at Leeds Beckett University?

We have had an enthusiastic and well-established student LGBTQ+ Network in our school for a number of years and we were looking for a framework by which both the school and the students could take LGBTQ+ inclusion to the next level. We were looking in particular for an effective self-evaluation and review process that could form an annual part of the school's self-improvement plans. We also wanted a way to formally acknowledge the achievements of the students and the staff in creating a strong, LGBTQ+ inclusive culture.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

The evidence based self-reporting system is a rigorous process. I was personally completing the NPQH alongside this award and it is fair to say that they felt an equal rigour! However, this was welcomed and pushed us to really consider the input that LGBTQ+ education had within the strategic direction of the school and the school policies. The sections on governance, provided an important means by which stakeholders at every level were introduced and brought into the culture the school was trying to create,

What did we change or develop?

One of the changes that had the most impact was having a link LGBTQ+ governor and including a thorough analysis of our inclusion programme within the termly governor reports. The second biggest change was providing the existing student network an approach to their work each school year that reflected on previous successes, identified areas of development and had clear impact measures that allowed them to see the changes they made. For example, this led to the network organising an off-timetable day for the whole school and arranging for a number of different visiting speakers, workshops and school trips on LGBTQ+ inclusion.

What impact did it have?

The overall impact will be lasting as the systems and processes will allow for continuous year on year improvement on the culture of inclusion. Specifically, in this academic year, 86% of students said they agreed or strongly agreed that “there is a culture of LGBT+ equality within my interaction with other students”, which is the highest figure in the termly survey since we first asked the question in 2018.

Why LGBTQ+ Youth Skip Physical Education and Sport and How Schools Can Help

Scott Greenspan, Ph.D.

Clinical Fellow, Harvard Medical School

Research tells us that many sexual minority and gender diverse (LGBTQ+) youth feel unsafe at school (GLSEN, 2018) which could be attributed to the bullying and victimization that this group of youth experience (GLSEN, 2018). Scholars, policymakers, and educators have been studying and employing interventions to support safer and healthier school-based experiences for LGBTQ+ students (e.g., [Gender and Sexualities Alliances](#), [Safe Space Kits](#), [Welcoming Schools Professional Development](#)). While these interventions have been vital in enhancing outcomes of youth and school communities, there remains a critical need for increased supports.

The World Health Organization (2010) posits that youth should obtain about 60 minutes of physical activity per day. However, LGBTQ+ youth struggle to access adequate physical activity due to feeling unsafe in such settings (GLSEN, 2018).

Research from the [National School Climate Survey conducted by GLSEN](#) tells us that approximately 40% of LGBTQ+ youth avoid locker rooms and physical education classes and 25% of LGBTQ+ youth avoid school athletic fields or facilities due to feeling unsafe (GLSEN, 2018). [While there have been several athletes that have come out in recent years](#), there is minimal representation of LGBTQ+ related topics in physical education class (GLSEN, 2018). Further, research indicates that just about 5% of gender diverse youth participate in a school sport that matches their gender identity (GLSEN, 2018). Promisingly, if a gender affirming school-based policy is in place, this figure increases to approximately 42% (GLSEN, 2018).

Throughout the past five years, I have engaged in collaborative research endeavors pertaining to LGBTQ+ youths' experiences in school-based physical activity. I took a deep dive into the research by conducting systematic reviews (see [Greenspan, Griffith, & Watson, 2019](#); [Greenspan, Griffith, & Murtagh, 2017](#)) and found that while there is minimal research on this topic, literature continues to suggest that LGBTQ+ youth engage in less physical activity and feel less safe in this context as compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. This could be due to experiencing bullying, victimization, and hearing anti-LGBTQ language.

LGBTQ+ Youths' Experiences in School-Based Physical Activity

I recently collaborated with a group of colleagues to employ a mixed method study to explore LGBTQ+ youths' and allies' perceptions of school-based physical activity and sport (see [Greenspan, Griffith, Hayes, & Murtagh, 2019](#)). In this U.S. sample of 71 total participants (n = 58 survey, n = 13 focus group), approximately 67% of survey participants reported that they do not or just seldomly engage in physical activity and approximately 40% avoid locker rooms and physical education classes. Over half of these youth reported that they have been assaulted or harassed while playing school sport due to how they express their gender, and 20% reported that if a homophobic or transphobic remark is made, and an athletic staff of physical education teacher is present, that staff member "never" responds. Results further illuminated that LGBTQ+ youth prefer playing individual sports to team sports (36% to 13%, respectively).

Focus group participants expressed experiencing low self-esteem, isolation, and rejection. Participants also indicated that they feel ambivalent about physical activity, as they want to engage, though feel unsafe to do so. Specifically, participants expressed a desire for co-ed sports and gender-neutral facilities. It is noteworthy that participants highlighted administrative and structural barriers to their successful participation including gender segregation practices and the presence of male-dominated hyper-aggressive sports that do not take into account the needs of LGBTQ+ youth.

Youth participants identified many suggestions to foster healthier and more affirming school athletic practices.

LGBTQ+ Youths' Suggestions for Improvement

- A private place to change in and out of uniform
- Use of a gender-neutral bathroom
- Use of their locker room of choice based on their gender identity
- The opportunity to wear a gender-affirming uniform
- The option to not participate in the days' activities if they so choose
- Targeted interventions to stop harassment/bullying behavior.

Participants also advocated for specific training for all school personnel to obtain increased foundational knowledge of allyship behaviour and appropriate pronoun usage.

Looking Forward

The perspectives of youth that participated in the aforementioned mixed-method study understanding has allowed for the conceptualization of an intervention entitled School Athletics for Everyone (SAFE; see [Greenspan, Whitcomb, & Griffith, 2019](#)) where school-based mental health professionals forge collaborative relationships with physical education teachers with the goal of increasing LGBTQ+ affirming physical education practices.

Components of this professional development intervention foundationally involve data-based decision making through [Professional Learning Communities](#) and [Job-Embedded Professional Development](#). Professional Learning Communities involve an interdisciplinary team of invested school stakeholders that meet consistently to keep their pulse on topics within the school (e.g., LGBTQ health) and may identify problem areas in the physical education context that could be improved. Through professional development opportunities, physical education teachers learn about stigma and risk, challenges of social norms pertaining to gender and sexual orientation, and tools and resources to improve upon their practices. Through robust data collection efforts, aspects of physical education teachers' practices that warrant improvement in affirming practice (e.g., increased gender-neutral activities, increased LGBTQ+ representation) are identified and they are provided peer coaching and consultation to support progress in attaining goals, and thus, enhancing affirming practices.

It is critical that researchers, policymakers, and educators continuing developing empirically supported interventions to support LGBTQ+ youth within the school-based sport and physical education context. Every youth has the right to play.

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