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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQQIAA ADVOCATES
IN EDUCATION**

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and ally (LGBTQQIAA) students are not commonly discussed in teacher education programs. Issues related to LGBTQQIAA learners need to be addressed in schools and in teacher education programs. Extant research shows that LGBTQQIAA students often face hostile school climates, with few resources and little support, which can lead to higher levels of absence and truancy, lower levels of academic achievement, and numerous negative health outcomes. This article uses autoethnographic methods to examine the experiences of an activist group working with preservice teachers, teacher educators, and other social justice advocates on a long-term service project for undergraduate teacher candidates aimed at increasing recognition of and giving voice to K–12 LGBTQQIAA students' experiences. Issues related to agency and resistance are addressed, and implications for teacher preparation programs are discussed.

We are teacher educators, critical pedagogues, and social justice activists who recognize the need to address and embrace issues of diversity and equity in teacher preparation programs. While inequalities related to race and disability are increasingly being considered in teacher certification classes, issues of gender identity and sexual diversity are often considered “taboo” in K–12 classrooms and in preservice teacher coursework (Hermann-Wilmarth & Bills, 2010; National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2012). Cognizant of these circumstances, the authors formed a working group with the goal of explicitly addressing these issues in the preparation of preservice K–12 teachers. This article provides a systematic description of our efforts to encourage thoughtful dialogue and critical activism in educational contexts to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and ally (LGBTQQIAA) students in K–12 schools.

In this study we draw on autoethnographic methodologies (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005), theories of social justice and democratic social change (Apple & Beane, 1995; Gorski, 2010), and Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “multi-vocalness” to describe our experi-

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ences and contextualize them within theoretical perspectives that support our work as an educational group. By multi-vocalness, we mean the multiple voices, visions, and identities that brought each of us to the group, current sociopolitical discourses on LGBTQQIAA issues, and our experiences of working as a team as documented through our stories and reflections on the development, implementation, and evaluation of our collaborative work. From this perspective, we investigated two broad, overarching research questions: What does it mean to be educators, researchers, and advocates for LGBTQQIAA issues in education? And what insights can be gained by examining our experiences of facilitating preservice teacher learning around the concept of dialogue and LGBTQQIAA activism in teacher preparation courses? To investigate these questions, we examined issues of resistance, tension, and agency as they related to our efforts to nurture the social justice-oriented perspectives of teachers. These considerations framed our engagement in an ongoing service project to initiate transformative conversations around LGBTQQIAA educational issues with undergraduate preservice teachers. The research was conducted at a research-intensive university in a metropolitan area in the southwestern region of the United States.

Our work is grounded in the literature on sexual identity, sexual orientation, gender issues, and diversity in educational contexts. We use the acronym LGBTQQIAA when referring to our own work; however, acronyms such as LGBT and LGBTQ are used when referencing the research of others to reflect the language they used in their work. For example, Goodrich and Luke (2010) explored the experiences of school counselors-in-training engaged in a service-learning assignment facilitating psycho-educational groups for LGBTQ students in Gay-Straight Alliances or Acceptance Coalitions. The authors found that school counselors-in-training increased their multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills working with LGBTQ K–12 students, however, counseling trainees appeared to experience the greatest growth in their awareness of LGBTQ students, and demonstrated the least growth in skill acquisition, including confrontation skills. These findings were replicated by a follow-up study (Luke & Goodrich, 2013). In another study, Eichler (2012) used autoethnography to explore how the marketplace was used as a pedagogical tool for LGBTQ persons to understand queer identity. He framed queer bars and online dating sites as consumption tools, which taught queer people how to live queerly, including LGBTQ relationships with others. He argued that these consumptive tools served as an education for LGBTQ people about life as a queer person, as this was the only education many had received since their family of origins were typically heterosexual and not connected to the LGBTQ lifestyle. Young and McKibban (2014) wrote a collaborative autoethnography exploring their experiences creating a safe zone program. They reflected on the challenges of program development as framed within three dialectical tensions: independence and mutual dependence, similarity and difference, as well as openness and closedness. The researchers found power in the personal narrative, which served as a tool for campus dialogue, empowerment, and social change.

As teacher educators and social justice-oriented scholars, we were interested in conducting an autoethnographic investigation of our experiences working with preservice teachers to address the needs of LGBTQQIAA students in schools. While researchers have explored issues related to queer identity and queer education space, scant literature exists focusing the infusion of queer curriculum into undergraduate teacher preparation programs from an autoethnographic perspective. In this article we explore our collaborative experiences as we worked to ensure that teacher education students had the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions needed to create supportive educational environments for LGBTQQIAA students in schools.

Background of the Project

History of LEG

In 2012 a group of interdisciplinary scholars, students, K–12 educators, and community members formed an ad hoc group to work with preservice teachers to address the needs of an underserved and marginalized population in K–12 schools: LGBTQQIAA persons and their families. We called ourselves the LGBTQQIAA in Education Group (LEG). Our goal was to make visible the support that LGBTQQIAA persons need in schools to stand tall and be proud members of the education community. Each of us came to the group for different reasons, but for the same overarching purpose: to acknowledge and represent the LGBTQQIAA students' voices in K–12 schools that are often overlooked or ignored in teacher preparation programs. While doing this work, we learned a great deal about our students, our institution, and ourselves. This autoethnographic investigation describes the experiences of four team members as we worked together to understand what it means to be educators, researchers, advocates, and persons involved in queer work with preservice teachers.

Our work took place in a college of education in a university classified as a high-research activity institution in the southwestern United States (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013). The first author identified as a gay White male who serves as a faculty member in a Counselor Education graduate program. The second author identified as a straight bicultural female faculty member in the Teacher Education graduate program. The third author identified as a faculty member and gay Latino International scholar from a critical multilingual and multicultural education program. The fourth author identified as a straight White male and doctoral student in a critical race theory doctoral program. All of the authors share identities as members or allies of the LGBTQQIAA community. The two authors who self-identified as gay men shared their experiences and struggles with peers and educators as they made their way through the education system. For example, one of them almost lost his job due to gossip in his community about his sexual orientation. Another author identified as an LGBTQQIAA ally with two gay brothers and a long-term commitment to social justice issues in education. One author identified as a former bully, who later in life learned more about diversity, social justice, advocacy, and the human condition and wished to recompense for past deeds and create hope for a new generation of students. These identities impacted how we framed our work and analyzed our lived experiences. The experiences we had entering into this project varied, as did the experiences we had while engaging in and reflecting on our work. Some of the differences at the start of the project are reflected in journal entries written by two of the project's members:

The reason why I joined the group is because I fundamentally believe that schools are not currently set up and equipped to address the unique and diverse needs of LGBTQQIAA students. . . . My own experiences as a queer youth included verbal, psychological, and physical harassment and discrimination, which impacted my self-image, my academic achievements (at different points in my academic career), as well as my physical and emotional investment as part of my school system. I internalized many of the negative attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions thrown at me, and in many ways damaged my body, my mind, and my spirit while progressing as a student. (R1 Subjectivity Journal)

The rationale for engaging in the project, and experiences throughout the project of the first researcher contrasted with the rationale and understandings of the fourth researcher, as reflected in his first research journal entry:

[G]uilt has played a role in the fact that before and after meeting Tom [gay person], I [realized that I] have been a bully as it comes to sexual orientation. I have been a very mean and physical perpetrator of violence against my brothers and sisters. This is all I will say about physicality, yet the guilt I carry I cannot deny played a role in the formation of this group. (R4 Subjectivity Journal)

As noted in his subjectivity journal, the fourth author's participation in the group was "selfish in the attempt to reclaim that which has been lost in me and to hopefully provide the same space for those who have been marginalized." In later conversations with the group, this member reaffirmed the convergence of his educational goals and beliefs with those of the project. Our group reflected on, contextualized, and owned these identities as we engaged in the research process. Through reflection on our identities and subjectivities—individually and collectively—we hope to offer insights for teacher educators interested in similar endeavors supporting preservice teachers understanding and preparation to work with and support LGBTQQIAA students in schools.

Methods of Inquiry

Context of the Research Project

During the Spring 2012 semester a team of 10 stakeholders (including the authors of this article) working in the public education system and in various departments in a college of education came together for an initial meeting to discuss the possibility of creating workshops related to LGBTQQIAA students and their families for undergraduate preservice teachers at the university. The frameworks of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2007) and multicultural education (Nieto, 1999) shaped the study and provided a lens for us to consider ways to enact social change. Critical pedagogy takes the view that issues of power and conflict are socially and historically constructed, and that in every social context there are some groups who are privileged over others. By acknowledging issues of power and conflict, and integrating them into our dialogue, we sought to develop a deeper understanding of how we might engage in collaborative, transformative action. The primary focus of the project was to help preservice teachers envision themselves as change agents (Ritchie, 2012) prepared to critique societal structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality, particularly with regard to LGBTQQIAA persons.

Over the course of several meetings we engaged in critical dialogue and collaborative inquiry as we worked to identify objectives for our preservice teacher workshops. Overall, our goal was to utilize dialogical, problem-posing, critical teaching strategies to model the creation of an inclusive learning environment where antiheterosexist/cisgenderist principles could be integrated into classroom instruction and curricula. Specifically, our goals included (a) collaborating with preservice teachers and their instructors to co-create instructional materials and classroom resources that promote LGBTQQIAA awareness, (b) communicating the complexities of enacting a social justice framework for integrating LGBTQQIAA issues into classroom practice, and (c) providing preservice teachers with

resources and strategies to prevent, detect, and deal with LGBTQQIAA bullying and cyberbullying at school.

Following our initial meetings, LEG coordinated with other faculty members in the teacher education program to set up classroom sessions in the preservice teacher practicum courses. At first, we conducted workshops with approximately 50 students enrolled in teaching practica in the elementary education program. As our project progressed during the semester, we held workshops with two additional sections of elementary and two sections of secondary education students in their practicum. We were invited back to the elementary practicum course for a follow up group discussion. In all, approximately 200 elementary and secondary preservice teachers participated in the workshops. The length of the sessions varied depending on the course instructor's availability and their ability to reserve a room large enough to accommodate approximately 65 students. The shortest sessions lasted about an hour, and the longest lasted 2.5 hours (a full course period). Each workshop included information on LGBTQQIAA identity and LGBTQQIAA issues in education, as well as content knowledge about the prevalence and types of bullying/school violence directed at LGBTQQIAA students. Small- and whole-group discussions and conversations about how the students, as future teachers, might respond to episodes of LGBTQQIAA bullying were facilitated through role-play scenarios, which allowed the participants to consider circumstances that they were likely to encounter in their classrooms. In the longer sessions, the roleplay and group conversations were complemented with educational videos, in-depth small-group conversations, and other activities aimed at raising awareness of LGBTQQIAA issues in schools. The activities were designed to provide a safe space for the preservice teachers to examine and confront their own potential biases in nonthreatening ways.

The preservice teachers filled out a short survey prior to and following the workshops. The surveys helped us to pinpoint what information about LGBTQQIAA issues the preservice teachers felt they had not received as part of their coursework, and what information they needed in order to be prepared to support LGBTQQIAA students and their families. This information also helped us identify questions or issues that might not have been addressed in the sessions due to time constraints, to better accommodate the preservice teachers' needs in future workshops. Eventually, we came to view the workshops as a research project with the goal of documenting our experiences for others who might be interested in undertaking similar work.

Autoethnography

In conversations about our work with the preservice teachers, we were intrigued by the diversity of our experiences as LGBTQQIAA advocates and allies. We began documenting and analyzing these experiences using autoethnographic approaches (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011) such as keeping subjectivity journals (Drapeau, 2002) and engaging in critical discussions. Our journaling and critical conversations were shaped by the concept of *multivocality*, the process of "providing representational space in the autoethnography for the plural and sometimes contradictory narrative voices located within the researcher[s]" (Mizzi, 2010, p. 2). Each of our life stories, feelings, and experiences—our *subjectivities*—were part of a value-centered, rather than a value-free, research process (Ellis et al., 2011) that included tensions, apprehensions, and possibilities.

Unlike traditional forms of ethnography, which often do not take into account or examine the experiences of the researcher(s) conducting a study (Mizzi, 2010), an auto-

ethnographic approach allowed us to consider not only the experiences of the preservice teachers who participated in the workshops, but also to analyze our own experiences as workshop facilitators and to reflect on the broader “relational ethics”—the interpersonal relationships—we had with the other members of our activist/advocacy group (Ellis et al., 2011), and the interactions we had with educators and administrators involved in our work. We engaged in systematic, self-conscious introspection from two perspectives: as full members and active participants of an advocacy group (members of a community), and as individual ethnographers (autonomous researchers) who regarded our own feelings and experiences as “important data for understanding the social world observed, yielding both self and social knowledge” (Maréchal, 2009, p. 43). As such, we were simultaneously insiders of the studied community (LEG) and outsiders (members of the academic community) engaging in self observation and reflexive investigation (Maréchal, 2009). Adams (2012) asserts that an autoethnographic approach differs from an autobiography in that the autoethnographer goes beyond telling her/his own story; an autoethnographer is a researcher who investigates his/her own experiences using theoretical and methodological research tools. She/he must first distance her/himself from her/his own experiences to discern and analyze patterns of these experiences and then reflect analytically on her/his meaningful and valuable personal experiences and describe the characteristics, responses, feelings, and topics of discussion of those experiences and make of those experiential or cultural patterns familiar and “meaningful for others” (p. 158), for both insiders and outsiders.

According to Adams and Holman Jones (2008), autoethnography “hinges on the push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience in the larger social, cultural, and political concerns” (p. 374). Bochner (2000) adds that it seeks to “extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived” (p. 270). An autoethnography is an ongoing dialogue wherein the experiences of a culture-sharing group are described, analyzed, and interpreted to provide a critical autoethnographic “thick description,” a sort of *cultural portrait* of the participants’ experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Merriam, 1998) and of our own attitudes, beliefs, and experiences as colleagues from differing backgrounds.

Using the autoethnographic process we documented and analyzed our individual and collective subjectivities, identities, and actions and reflected on how they influenced our experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). We examined our work to increase queer identity awareness in teacher education (Hermann-Wilmarth & Bills, 2010), and documented how dominant societal discourses from the past and in the present influenced our experiences—collectively and individually (Mizzi, 2010). Using reflexivity and introspection, we came to better understand the complexities of our individual and collective actions, practices, and lived experiences during the development and implementation of the workshops (Bakhtin, 1981). Using Freire’s (2007) notion of critical reflexivity we explored who we are and how we might continue to encourage preservice teachers to think about issues of equity and social justice, particularly with regard to the marginalization and bullying of LGBTQQIAA students. In the process, we resisted the use of linear, one-dimensional research approaches characterized by canonical, colonial paradigms that dismiss or ignore personal experiences and issues of subjectivity (Mizzi, 2010). Our work necessitated moving beyond the limits of a single field, understanding, or frame of knowing (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Watson, 2005). Rather, our personal and collective experiences were embedded in a shared social, cultural, political, and dialogic context (Ellis et al., 2011).

Data Sources

Data sources included our autobiography narratives, as well as field notes and observations made during the workshops (recorded by the workshop presenters and the seminar instructors), minutes from our LEG meetings, e-mail conversations, personal communications, workshop materials and artifacts, survey information (pre- and post-workshop questionnaires), preservice teacher written reflections, and personal subjectivity journals. The construct of invisibility—what was ignored, what was not there, was also part of our experience. Multiple data sources allowed us to formulate a “plural consciousness” (Bakhtin, 1981) that served to deepen our understanding of the social context of our LGBTQQIAA work. This was particularly useful as we struggled to make sense of the unexpected events and conflicting pressures that emerged as we worked to form a cohesive, collective identity as an advocacy group.

Data Analysis

Critical reflectivity and theories of critical pedagogy (Durden & Truscott, 2013; Freire, 2007) informed the process of data collection and interpretation. Social movement theory (McEnterfer, 2011) was the lens through which we viewed our efforts to “transform the deeply held beliefs and practices of an institution” (Embry & Grossman, 2007, p. 490), albeit on a smaller scale than traditional social movement theory (SMT), which typically focuses on one undergraduate program at one university. Data analysis drew on SMT models (Embry & Grossman, 2007) to explore “the ways in which political activists and social movement leaders frame events and create meaning” to “inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). In particular, we examined how sociopolitical processes, within and outside of our group, tended to facilitate or inhibit our mission, and how a lack of collective coordination unintentionally spawned destabilizing conditions during the workshops and within the larger group. Each of us conducted separate individual analyses of the interactions, processes, and relations in our work. We inductively coded what Ellis and colleagues (2011) have described as “patterns of cultural experience—repeated feelings, stories, and happenings” (p. 4). Data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously (Charmaz, 1983). A multilayered, interpretive, coconstructed narrative, one that we hope will be instructive for other social justice-oriented educators, was the result.

To assist us in this process, we collectively developed and individually responded to several prompts for our journaling, such as why we joined the group, why the issue of LGBTQQIAA equity was important to us, how we saw ourselves individually and as a group working together, and our perceptions and interpretations of our experiences in LEG. The subjectivity journals (Drapeau, 2002) were kept by each researcher and then shared with the team after each workshop was completed. Four members of the LEG team participated in this process. The journal entries were initially open coded, in which individual thoughts and ideas were assigned a thematic code (Fassinger, 2005). Following this procedure, we met and reviewed the open codes and discussed how our ideas, thoughts, and codes related to one another (e.g., axial codes: Fassinger, 2005) and to clarify our understandings of the information collected. We also examined the surveys completed prior to and following the workshops to determine the preservice teachers’ perceptions of their level of knowledge and experiences working with LGBTQQIAA students. Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of

heteroglossia—how cultural, societal, and individual voices constitute multivocality—helped us understand the institutional structures and political forces that shaped how our work was unfolding. After several face-to-face and electronic discussion sessions, we condensed the phenomena we had experienced and documented into the three broad, thematic categories: agency, resistance, and tension. The nexus of these themes (agency, tension, and resistance combined) represented an intricate web of power and politics that had considerable bearing on our work as social justice advocates and critical educators. We unpack and contextualize these themes in the next section of the article.

Findings and Discussion

As we interrogated, problematized, and dialogued about work in LEG, we came to understand that our experiences embodied many of the constructs described in critical pedagogy and social justice research. For example, we noted promising results as demonstrated by the preservice teachers' active participation in the workshops. Most of them were willing to "try on" different roles and assume various agentive positions as a means of reflecting on how undemocratic and inequitable practices and structures in schools can disadvantage students who are, or who are perceived to be, LGBTQQIAA. At the same time however, we noted that a few preservice teachers, as well as one of our LEG colleagues, displayed resistant or distracted behavior during the workshops. In exploring the dynamics of our group, we uncovered different thought processes, actions, and understandings among members that at times created challenges to implementing the workshops. Examples of these differences are discussed using vignettes and excerpts from the authors' narratives to describe how agency was enacted by students and by LEG members, and to pinpoint how and where resistance and tensions emerged.

Agency, Resistance, and Tension

den Heyer (2012) has described agency in the context of education as "how people are influenced and are influential within social life" (p. 293). As such, *agency* has been utilized within the education literature to describe individual or collective action, typically around advocacy for education reform, especially in reframing an individual or a collective place within the educational structure. From a critical pedagogical perspective, agency encompasses the process of engendering change in ways of thinking and acting through actions and exposure to circumstances that demand change (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Agency

LEG's agency was reflected in our motivations, actions, and discussion of queer issues in education with the undergraduate students in the teacher education program. In our case we realized that the only way to improve the circumstances of LGBTQQIAA students was through collective action and awareness on many levels; thus agency was distributed and collectively achieved through the use of socially meditated means (Werstch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993). The LEG workshops required us to navigate an array of logistical issues among multiple parties, from the practicum seminar course instructors who provided the physical and social space, to the faculty members who gave their time and support, to the preservice teachers who were willing to engage in the reflective process of thinking deeply about the needs of LGBTQQIAA students. While we believe that changes in preservice

teacher preparation programs are possible, larger structural and systemic changes are still needed.

In reviewing our involvement in LEG, one member noted “we [in LEG] seem committed to deeper reasons than ‘required’ faculty service. We are there because we know we need to be.” Each of us, through different experiences, recognized the need to support LGBTQQIAA students and to change institutionally oppressive structures in schools. All of us were aware of the research and statistics about LGBTQQIAA youth, such as the studies conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) showing lower academic and social outcomes for LGBTQQIAA students as compared to their heterosexual and gender normative counterparts. Research indicates that queer youth engage in more high-risk behavior and have lower self-esteem than their heterosexual peers; they are also much more likely to experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination at school (Bidell, 2014; Goodrich & Luke, 2009; 2014).

The desire to promote change in schools was grounded in our personal journeys and our experiences within the dominant, sociopolitical structures of schools and schooling that conflicted with our philosophies about education, students, and acceptance. As one researcher described in his subjectivity journal, his identity development process eventually transformed into agency:

This process of renouncing to live away from the scripts that my family, friends, students, relatives, and society had envisioned for me was very hard. I realized that I could either follow that script or start my own. I took that courage to defy imposed scripts and face the unscripted pathway of being myself, of being a gay Guatemalan man, a gay teacher, a gay friend, a gay son, and a gay brother. (R3, Subjectivity Journal)

We also understood that agency rests upon collective action grounded in individual convictions, not in policy mandates. People with superficial convictions about supporting LGBTQQIAA students may comply with directives focused on diversity, but they will not be committed to long-lasting, democratic change in schools and in society (Gorski, Zenkov, Osei-Kofi, & Sapp, 2013). We encourage the teacher education community to develop closer relations with LGBTQQIAA people and students in order to nurture preservice teachers’ commitment to equity and social justice. A deeper understanding of and respect for diversity, which includes recognition of the needs of LGBTQQIAA students, can catalyze educators to work toward large-scale, systemic change. Darling-Hammond (2006) recommends that prospective teachers engage in dialogue on ways to develop a vital, caring community in their classrooms and to develop a “liberating pedagogy” (p. 238) within the contemporary education system.

Our personal experiences with issues of marginalization of LGBTQQIAA people at school and in society activated our commitment to promoting safer, more equitable educational environments. As the various LEG members began working together, however, differences in our perspectives came to the fore, making it clear that we would be unable to move forward as a team unless we collaboratively negotiated our disparate perspectives and points of view. The problematic circumstances, however, inspired LEG members to work to develop agency through our collective and negotiated vision, rather than through individual agendas, goals, and procedures. In our efforts to resolve our differences we identified several countervailing forces that complicated or hampered our work together, which are described below.

Tension

One concern among the group was a LEG member's irregular attendance of the planning meetings, which affected the flow of the workshops. Although this person did not have an assigned role for the workshop presentations, the member actively participated by agreeing or elaborating on the points raised by other LEG members. At the end of one presentation, the member shared a story as a teacher from years before. The story, however, included some unintentionally transphobic remarks, including questioning the gender identity of a student in the story. Although some of the points about gay and lesbian students were powerful, this LEG member's limited knowledge of transgender issues was evident. Another group member intervened and further elaborated on the presenter's story, offering a gentle but challenging perspective to counter the transphobic remarks. This exchange made visible the importance of allowing only members who had attended LEG planning meetings to actively participate in the workshops. It also underscored the need for all LEG members to be knowledgeable about the wide-reaching identities of LGBTQQIAA persons. The purpose of LEG was to inform preservice teachers about issues of gender identity and sexual orientation, but it was evident that some team members had a more comprehensive understanding of LGBTQQIA issues than others. Thus, the group needed to tap the knowledge base of several team members: our agency resided in the power of a collective. This incident was an instructive example of how tensions could develop within the group. It also brought into sharp relief the fact that when some group members resisted attending all group planning meetings, the work of the entire team was affected.

Resistance

The term *resistance* has multiple definitions. For purposes of our work in LEG, we conceived of resistance as forces that limited or constrained our collective work and our agency as a group to push back against heteronormative and transphobic practices that marginalize LGBTQQIAA students and their families. This included tensions between team members due to differing levels of involvement and engagement, which we considered manifested resistance to the norms of our group. We highlighted the previous scenario to illustrate the fact that tensions naturally arise within groups doing social justice work, and to emphasize the importance of understanding the tenets of social movement theory and communicative dialogue as a tool for mediating those tensions. According to social movement theory, researchers working together to "transform the deeply held beliefs and practices of an institution" (Embry & Grossman, 2007, p. 490) have used three models to frame their work: the *Political Process Model*, the *Resource Mobilization Model*, and the *Frame Analysis Model* (Embry & Grossman, 2007; McEnterfer, 2011). The Political Process model focuses on the political dynamics of a particular environment and how those politics can be more or less conducive to social change (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). In our case, there were conflicting views about the goals of the workshops and about the importance of attending the planning meetings. Furthermore, LEG members had varying levels of expertise on LGBTQQIAA issues, which affected how the workshops unfolded. A lack of collective agreement on these issues made our work more complicated, and, we believe, less effective. In fact, it may have increased the likelihood that we were confusing rather than informing the preservice teachers.

The Resource Mobilization Model in SMT, which emphasizes the "significance of organizational bases, resource accumulation, and collective coordination" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 15) was relevant in this example. Our team needed to draw on the collective exper-

tise of the group. To do that, we needed to collaborate and coordinate our roles to ensure that we provided an inclusive, well-rounded workshop that helped prepare the preservice teachers to support LGBTQQIAA students and their families. Lack of participation in the planning meetings led to fragmented knowledge and disruptions during the workshops, which in turn led to tension and frustration. The result was a level of destabilization that may have diminished our credibility with the students, who were expecting a comprehensive, cohesive learning experience. Looking back, it would have been helpful if we had made explicit the need for continuity during the workshops, as well as which LEG members' expertise would be tapped for each topic covered.

In our efforts to engage with the issues that LGBTQQIAA students and their families face, we encountered resistance that stretched beyond the relationships within our group. We considered the process of discussing LGBTQQIAA issues in education as an act of resistance to the larger apparatus of teacher education, which has not traditionally provided a voice to LGBTQQIAA persons (Jennings, 2006; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). Studies on teacher preparation (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008; Sherwin & Jennings, 2006) and training of other school personnel (Hackford-Peer, 2010; Jennings, 2014; Luke, Goodrich, & Scarborough, 2011) have consistently found a lack of attention to LGBTQQIAA issues. Throughout the process of our work we encountered institutional resistance—pushbacks—from the entire structure of public education, including school district personnel, individual schools, and individual classrooms. For instance, three members of the LEG team were also members of a school health advisory committee for a local public school district. In that capacity, they faced strong opposition when attempting to develop and adopt comprehensive, developmentally appropriate sexuality curricula for the district. When, and whether or not sexual orientation and gender identity should be discussed in schools was an ongoing controversy. LEG team members had to contend with district personnel who eschewed discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity, preferring instead to rely on individual teachers, schools, and students to ensure that learners were provided with the resources and support necessary for them to be successful in schools (such as out transgender elementary school students or LGBTQQIAA students in middle or high schools). It is worth noting here that these events were unfolding within a state with one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the nation, an indication that health and sex education would be beneficial to teens and young adolescents.

Institutional resistance came from college faculty and administration as well as from other organizations on campus. For example, one faculty member who was the instructor of record for several preservice teacher courses (but was not a member of LEG) suggested that in the future she would cover the topic of LGBT in class, so there was no need for the LEG workshops. Although this instructor was ostensibly concerned about LGBTQQIAA students in education, in practice her actions represented a dismissal of our efforts and a co-opting of our project. The instructor explained that she planned to include information on LGBTQQIAA issues in a catch-all “diversity day,” where the concerns of multiple historically and culturally marginalized groups would be lumped together (and in our view, diluted). We recognized in these actions a reification of Freire's (2007) contention that members of the mainstream dominant group can sometimes subvert the work of the minority by pretending to adopt their causes, but then changing the discourse to maintain the status quo, thereby undermining the causes and needs of less powerful members of society. The LGBTQ resource center at the university was also dismissive of our efforts. Despite our attempts to collaborate with them, and although their work did not directly focus on the discipline of education or on preservice teacher preparation, there appeared

to be apprehension that the LEG team might be encroaching on what they considered to be their territory. Someone from the LGBTQ resource center did attend one LEG meeting and one workshop, but we later learned that this person subverted our efforts by hosting a competing “antibullying” workshop, recruiting select members of the LEG team to participate in that presentation.

At the institutional level, the coordination of several members of community-based groups, K–12 educators, university professors, and students proved difficult due to competing teaching, service, and event schedules. The time spent in LEG meetings and online discussions was not, and is still not viewed as “official” work by school and university administration. After three years of active work, LEG is still perceived by administration in the college as an ad-hoc committee; there has been no support for our attempts to institutionalize our work through formation of a standing college committee. We believe that students, faculty, and staff in the college of education would benefit if LEG were to be recognized as an advisory council and acknowledged as a resource for research efforts related to LGBTQQIAA issues. Gradually, it became apparent that our political efforts were as important as our pedagogical goals.

At the level of the preservice teachers themselves, passive and active forms of resistance to the workshops were evident. In some cases participants were reluctant to engage in the discussions and role-playing activities. Others displayed disinterested behavior by playing mobile games on their phones or checking Facebook on their computers, texting, reading a novel, or dozing off. On a more explicit level, some students questioned whether the topic of LGBTQQIAA students should be discussed at all at K–12 schools. Some expressed fear of pushback from students, parents, and/or administrators. Others pointed out that with the emphasis on high stakes testing and teacher evaluations, there was no time or room in the curriculum to address LGBTQQIAA issues in the classroom because it is not a subject that is tested. Still others personally objected to discussing LGBTQQIAA issues on the basis of their religious beliefs or the view that all issues related to sexuality, including gender identity and sexual orientation, do not belong in schools. In particular, two students pointed out that teachers have been fired for discussing LGBTQQIAA issues, and that they could not afford to have complaints from parents as new teachers. These were legitimate concerns that we considered important to address during the workshops.

Tension and Resistance as Destabilizing Forces Within the Group

Tensions and resistance were evident also within LEG. There were times when particular LEG members imposed their own individual agendas, pushing aside the needs of the larger group and undermining the collective voice and agency of the LEG team. For instance, there were too many topics to cover in the limited time available for the workshops, which made decisions about how much time to allot to each individual and to each issue difficult. Despite lengthy deliberations involving the entire LEG team, whenever the group voted to include a presenter or topic in an upcoming workshop, inevitably some individuals of the team felt slighted. Interestingly, a roomful of critical pedagogues can be problematic insofar as questions of difference usually involve issues of power and control. Different assumptions about the goals of LEG and about the role of power in our dialogue began to emerge (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012). Because each of us was acutely sensitive to issues of power and control, no one wanted to position themselves (or others) as having more or less power than anyone else in the group. This made it difficult at times to unify our ideas

and translate them into practice, despite the fact that all of our epistemological beliefs and ideas about liberatory pedagogy were connected tightly with critical theory and deliberative democracy. Ironically, in a good faith effort to contest hegemonic societal structures, our attention became focused on the notion of power to the extent that this group of critical educators was having trouble bringing our own vision of critical pedagogy to life. At this point, the principles of social movement theory (Embry & Grossman, 2007; McEnterfer, 2011) provided a broader frame of reference for us: we needed to consciously direct our attention toward identifying the group dynamics that were constraining our ability to focus, coordinate, and deploy our knowledge, energy, and resources—in other words, our collective agency.

The LEG group was comprised of between 10 to 12 members from three colleges (students and faculty), as well as people working in the school district and in the community, which made it difficult to coordinate a convenient time when everyone could meet. In addition, competing views of the purpose(s) of the LEG meetings strained relationships among group members. Some members viewed meetings as a time to plan and coordinate our efforts as a group, particularly with regard to the preservice teacher workshops, while others considered the meetings a space for conversations, building community, sharing experiences, or venting frustrations. With a limited amount of time to do our work as a group, and time constraints for conducting the workshops, these competing perspectives were a source of consternation. Although an agenda for each meeting was provided, it was difficult to adhere to it because so many relevant (and sometimes nonrelevant) issues were raised regarding the agenda items. The authors' subjectivity journals indicated that each of us was making a conscious effort to ensure that all LEG members felt heard and respected. The journals also contained evidence that each of us wished to avoid confrontation or disagreement in the meetings that might distract us from our work. The result was that even as we strived to ensure democratic dialogue and collective agency, we struggled with pinpointing which particular issues and ideas needed to be prioritized during meetings, and with how to balance the competing interests of all stakeholders in the group. We recognized that there is no linear, easy, or smooth way to work collectively, especially on an effort that was still under development. Still, we brainstormed and reflected on how having conversations and defining our work more explicitly might have smoothed the pathway toward reaching a shared vision on LEG's goals, purposes, and procedures. It is possible that dedicating early meetings to group building among LEG members may have helped us to establish a stronger sense of community, which may have fostered more consensus during the later planning sessions.

The most significant rupture in the cohesiveness of our group occurred during an incident that took place during one of the workshops. In the course of a large group discussion, an uncomfortable exchange unfolded between a LEG presenter and one of the preservice teachers. The exchange took place during a roleplay activity that addressed the possibility of a teacher encountering students using the phrase "that's so gay" in school hallways. In the discussion, the LEG members emphasized the importance of intervening in such situations as well as some strategies to support LGBTQQIAA and other students who might have overheard the discussion. Tensions arose when a preservice teacher questioned the need to intervene in such a situation, arguing that the phrase is common, "normal," inoffensive, and unrelated to actual LGBTQQIAA persons. One LEG presenter vehemently disagreed, stating loudly that such behaviors are homophobic, constitute harassment, and that she was personally offended by that statement. A strident disagreement erupted, interrupting the flow of the entire workshop. It was clear that both the presenter and

the preservice teacher were offended by the other's views and that each of them had taken the exchange personally.

The situation was very uncomfortable for the students attending the workshop and for the other LEG members present. Although other LEG presenters wished to support their colleague, several of us were concerned with the tone and manner in which the preservice teacher was addressed, and with the unpleasant conflict that ensued. A small break was given in the workshop following the exchange, during which some members attempted to individually speak with the preservice teacher and with the presenter. The student ended up leaving the room in tears. No clear resolution was achieved, although the workshop continued after the break.

The discomfort that developed during this workshop carried over to the following LEG meeting. On one hand, the presenter's point was legitimate: frequently used phrases such as "that's so gay" can negatively shape beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes toward LGBT people (McAdam et al., 2001). During the workshop we were encouraging the preservice teachers to be attentive to antihomophobic behavior at school; the presenter correctly pointed out that using the phrase "that's so gay" is not innocuous and is an issue that needs to be addressed. On the other hand, it was clear that the preservice teacher felt singled out and embarrassed, especially by the tone and intensity of the presenter's response to her. The student was asking us a question: Why was this phrase offensive, anyway? At that point, as experienced educators and workshop presenters, we had the opportunity to share insights about the concept of *microaggressions*, wherein sometimes the perpetrator is sometimes oblivious to how their words or actions are offensive or hurtful to others (Nadal, 2013). Although the student and the presenter were both well-intentioned, it was clear that the preservice teacher was unsure of how to respond to remarks such as "that's so gay." It was evident that the phrase "that's so gay" could be understood differently by people with varying levels of awareness about oppressive societal and political issues on LGBTQQIAA people. As presenters, it was our responsibility to create a safe space for delicate conversations such as this one to happen in a way that was supportive and proactive rather than defensive and reactive. Clearly, the preservice teacher lacked the tools to recognize the homophobia manifested in the phrase or to address the situation appropriately. She took a risk by asking for our help to learn how (and why) to engage students who use the phrase "that's so gay," but the response she received did not validate her question; rather, it made her feel embarrassed and intimidated.

It's possible that after that exchange the other participating preservice teachers were reluctant to participate in workshop discussions for fear that they too might be chided by one of the presenters due to a misspoken phrase. In fact, it's possible that the way the incident played out during the workshop actually worked at cross-purposes to our goal by evoking defensive reactions and igniting resistance from the preservice teachers, as opposed to sparking their interest and boosting their empathy for the fictional students in the roleplaying activity. McEnterfer (2011) used SMT to describe this phenomenon in her analysis of how assertiveness with regard to LGBTQQIAA activism can be interpreted as antagonistic behavior that threatens rather than furthers the goals of the group. We believe that including multiple voices and perspectives allowed each of us to share our experience and expertise with the group and with the preservice teachers, but the need for respectful, deliberative dialogue in a nonthreatening environment was equally important if we were to continue our work together. As Wink (2000) has pointed out, "Critical pedagogy enables us to understand that we are also professionals and intellectuals who have the power to take part actively in self and social transformation. Critical pedagogy

makes us keep on keeping on” (p. 136). At the same time Pelligrino, Weiss, and Regan (2015) assert that “although collaboration between educators is becoming more common . . . the skills to become an effective collaborator are not at all intuitive” (p. 187). In the workshop situation the perspectives of both the presenter and the student needed to be acknowledged and discussed, but as presenters it was incumbent upon us to model nonthreatening, respectful dialogue and empathetic problem-solving strategies to the pre-service teachers who might at some point find themselves in similar situations with their own students. In this particular case, we feel that our group unintentionally fell short of this objective.

Conclusion and Implications

This article traces the experiences of four educators and advocates working together to address LGBTQQIAA issues in a teacher education curriculum. The research questions guiding this investigation were: What does it mean to be educators, researchers, and advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and ally (LGBTQQIAA) issues in education? And what insights can be gained by examining our experiences of facilitating preservice teacher learning around the concept of dialogue and LGBTQQIAA activism in teacher preparation courses? The findings indicate that it has indeed been challenging to accomplish our work, both within our group and within the college, as well as in conjunction with other parties outside of the college. Unforeseen tensions emerged during the project that interrupted or constrained our work. Nonetheless, risk and uncertainty are part and parcel to the process of enacting transformative social change, and the tensions we encountered offered innumerable lessons that prompted us to consider new ways of thinking about how we listen to one another, engage in the process of reflection, and negotiate with our colleagues. Our findings are largely congruous with the work of Young and McKibban (2014) in that we faced considerable challenges while working to establish an educational program with multiple stakeholders. Similar to Young and McKibban, we can frame these challenges across three dialectical tensions: independence and mutual dependence, similarity and difference, as well as openness and closedness. We each wanted to act as independent parties with independent voices to share what we thought was important with the preservice teachers; at the same time, we needed to work together to achieve the holistic goals of the group and to have continuity of voice during our presentations. Each of us brought similar thoughts, feelings, and goals to the project, but there were also differences in our personal experiences and our connections to the LGBTQ community. There were stylistic differences, too, regarding how each of us communicated with peers and with students, and how explicit we were willing to be in expressing our expectations of the other group members. Each of us was unique in how we interpreted feedback from our peers, how we believed discussions about sexuality and diversity should be integrated into preservice teacher education, and the extent to which we were willing to engage in self-reflection and critical dialogue to work through our differences. These dialectical tensions affected how the workshops unfolded and ultimately shaped the outcomes of our project. According to the feedback we received from the preservice teachers, the project as a whole was successful: the students found the workshops to be useful and informative. And, like Young and McKibban (2014), we found power in our own as well as our students’ personal narratives, something that fueled our efforts to continue our efforts to enact social change.

Limitations

As critical educators, we do not believe that all research can be, or should be, conducted from a neutral, objective, impersonal stance (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The current autoethnographic study aimed to examine and make sense of the *lived experiences* (van Manen, 1999) of teacher educators who developed a program to integrate LGBTQQIAA awareness into undergraduate teacher preparation courses. This project described the experiences and perspectives of four teacher educators and advocates at one university. Persons at other institutions or in other geographical areas may face different challenges depending on the context of those settings. Thus, the findings of this research are not intended to be generalized to all groups, regions, or educational contexts. Instead, we hope this study provides a rich description and a contextualized view of some of the challenges we faced in our efforts to work as a group to encourage preservice teachers to consider the needs and concerns of LGBTQQIAA students in K–12 schools.

Reflections and Implications

This study adds to the literature on addressing LGBTQQIAA issues in the context of preservice teacher education. To do this effectively required time, patience, a willingness to take pedagogical and professional risks, and extensive planning. Clarity about the roles and expectations for all group members, coupled with a willingness to engage in respectful, deliberative dialogue to reach consensus about the overarching goals of the group were also needed. Teacher educators must envision and take concrete action to actualize inclusive, democratic schools by integrating conversations and curricula about LGBTQQIAA issues into their everyday instruction. Undoubtedly, initiatives aimed at supporting LGBTQQIAA students are fraught with social, political, and logistical pitfalls; they can falter or even fail if colleagues are not clear about focus of the work or have mismatched expectations about how to implement it. However, as Schmidt, Muijtjens, Van der Vleuten, and Norman (2012) have pointed out, “Real change requires taking risks beyond the formal curriculum; it requires transforming the structures that confine our own thinking, practice, and programs” (p. 1194).

The current study has implications for teacher educators. As noted earlier, LGBTQQIAA issues are not commonly discussed in teacher education curricula or integrated into their field experiences (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). Yet LGBTQQIAA students face considerable challenges in schools that often result in higher dropout rates, lower academic achievement, and unhealthy social outcomes (Bidell, 2014; Kosciw et al., 2012; Jennings, 2006; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). Recently, researchers (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014) reported that structural stigma, such as living in a community with high levels of antigay prejudice increases the risk of premature death for sexual minorities. The formation of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) between universities and K–12 schools, such as the project described in this study, can help ensure that the needs of LGBTQQIAA students are recognized and supported at school. McEnterfer (2011) suggested that LGBTQQIAA advocates talk with one another and share experiences, advice, and support. We agree: if collaborative, critical practices and democratic dialogue are modeled in teacher preparation programs, classroom teachers are more likely to engage with issues of social justice and critical practice when they are in their own classrooms (Ritchie, 2012). It is worth reiterating that tensions and resistance are unavoidable phenomena in advocacy work.

Thus, respectful dialogue and efforts to keep the focus on a collective vision are key to ensuring that the work of activist groups can move forward.

As we engaged in the research process, we discovered that personal narratives can be powerful tools for reflection, growth, and transformation—individually as collectively. Young and McKibban (2014) and others (Schmidt et al., 2012) have documented the power of personal narrative to enact social change and to promote personal empowerment. Hernández, Sancho, Dreus, and Montané (2010) have described the process of engaging in autoethnography this way: “to explore and understand how scholars establish a dialogue, resist, adapt themselves or adopt changes, in the process of establishing their professional identities” (p. 3). They continue, “[autoethnography] mean[s] paying attention to moments of personal and professional transits such as learning processes, crises, migrations, beginnings, and ruptures, new contexts, and relations, and so forth” (p. 5). Indeed, conducting this autoethnographic inquiry transformed us socially, professionally, and culturally. By sharing our story—including the challenges, missteps, and disappointments we encountered—we hope to motivate others to organize and advocate for social change and to begin the process of modeling for preservice teachers how to use personal and collective agency to nurture LGBTQQIAA students at school. We recognize that although recent political recognition of LGBTQQIAA marriage equality represents a step towards social justice and equality, oppressive political structures at all levels in education are still in place, and they need to be resisted by teachers committed to supporting LGBTQQIAA students. We must make schools a safe, nurturing place for all students, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized learners. The goal of LEG is to provide preservice teachers a leg to stand on; that is, to provide the pedagogical tools, instructional resources, critical questioning strategies, and teaching experiences that will catalyze teachers to actively support LGBTQQIAA students in schools.

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