LGBTQ Curriculum Inclusion: the role of the school library

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Abstract
Research has found that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum improves the school experiences and achievement of all students, LGBTQ and straight. The school library has a unique opportunity to support a safe learning environment and provide a more accurate representation of the diversity of the world through LGBTQ inclusion. This paper provides school librarians working in a variety of cultural and political settings strategies to support LGBTQ inclusion through identifying barriers, reviewing library policies, assessing the information needs of LGBTQ students, providing access to information, and promoting LGBTQ inclusion in the library and in the classroom.

Keywords: LGBT, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

Introduction
The school library offers a window to the world, and school librarians have a responsibility to accurately reflect the diverse world in which students live. Although their voices are often silenced, this diversity includes the experiences and contributions of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) people across cultures and history. School libraries, the heart of the school community, have the opportunity to create a more inclusive learning environment. School librarians play a central role in the school community by selecting materials for the collection, providing access to information, promoting intellectual freedom, participating in curriculum development, working with administrators, providing instruction to students, and collaborating with teachers. However, little has been written about the potential role of the school library in supporting LGBTQ inclusion beyond gay and lesbian book lists.

This paper provides school librarians, who may be working in a variety of cultural and political settings, the strategies needed to support LGBTQ inclusion through adopting a human rights based framework, identifying barriers, reviewing library policies, assessing the information needs of LGBTQ students, providing access to information, and promoting LGBTQ inclusion in the library and in the classroom.

Terminology

For the sake of recognition and simplicity, this paper will use the acronym LGBTQ as an umbrella term to refer to people who identify as LGBT and those who may not identify themselves as LGBT but experience same-sex attraction. For the purposes of this paper, LGBTQ also includes other marginalized gender and sexual minorities, such as asexual, pansexual, intersex, or non-binary genders. Similarly, the term homophobic bullying is intended to include transphobic bullying. When referring to specific populations in surveys or studies, the paper will use the terminology used by the survey authors.

Background

LGBTQ population estimates vary widely. Some studies report as little as 1.5 percent to 4 percent of the population is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, while other estimates are as high as 20 percent (BBC, 2010; Eveleth, 2013; Gates, 2011). While different factors may influence survey results, the distinction between identity and behavior often influences the range in LGBTQ population estimates.

The Williams Institute found that 4 percent of U.S. adults identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, but just over 8 percent reported having engaged in same-sex sexual behavior and 11 percent reported same-sex sexual attraction (Gates, 2011). Similarly, another U.S. survey found that 7 percent of adolescents identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, but close to 10 percent identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and/or reported some same-sex sexual contact. A U.S. study of such surveys found that bias and anti-gay sentiment lead to inaccurately low estimates of LGBT populations and concluded that up to 20 percent of the general population is attracted to their own gender (Coffman, Coffman, & Marzilli Ericson, 2013; Eveleth, 2013).

LGBT identities also vary across cultures. The concept of sexuality as a part of personal identity is often considered a Western concept. Same-sex attraction and behavior exist throughout the world, although these behaviors are often considered separate from sexuality or identity, particularly in the Global South. Similarly, non-binary genders and other gender nonconforming identities exist throughout the world, but may not identify as transgender or LGBT (Dankmeijer, 2008; Roughgarden, 2004; Rupp, 2009).

Although their voices or even existence may be hidden, LGBTQ people do exist in the world (Meyers, 2010). Educators must acknowledge that in every class of 20 students, one or two may currently or in the future identify as LGBTQ, and even more will have LGBTQ friends or loved ones.

LGBTQ students

National and international surveys have found that LGBTQ students experience bullying and harassment at much higher rates than their peers. LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ (straight) students report hearing homophobic language and remarks at school (Attawell, 2012; Formby, 2013; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Studies in Canada, the U.S., and the Netherlands found that LGBTQ students are more likely to feel unsafe as school (Attawell, 2012; Kosciw, et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Similar findings have been found across Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific (Attawell, 2012). LGBTQ youth of racial or ethnic minorities experience homophobic and other forms of harassment at higher rates than their peers (Kosciw, et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011).

Homophobic bullying has been linked to a compulsion to police gender roles (Biegel, 2010; Meyer, 2010). In many cases, more students report being victims of homophobic bullying than the students who identify as LGBTQ. Students who are perceived as LGBTQ or who do not strictly conform to rigid gender roles, may become targets for homophobic bullying (Attawell, 2012; Meyer, 2010).

Within this climate, the quality of LGBTQ students' lives and education suffers. LGBTQ students are more likely than their peers to skip school, drop out early, or have lower grades and poorer academic achievement (Attawell, 2012; Formby, 2013; Kosciw, et al., 2014). UNESCO described homophobic bullying as "a threat to the universal right to education" and "a barrier to achieving Education for All" (Attawell, 2012).

While educators should be aware of the obstacles facing LGBTQ youth, they must also avoid assuming that all LGBTQ students are "at risk." Many LGBTQ students are successful at schools and grow up to be happy adults, despite suffering the internalized harm of growing up in a homophobic environment. A growing field of research shows that LGBTQ youth and adults demonstrate high levels of resilience (Lipkin, 2004; Mayer, 2014).

LGBTQ education

As educators, school librarians have an ethical and professional responsibility to create a safe learning environment and to teach all students. Homophobic harassment and hostile school climates toward LGBTQ youth pose a threat to those students' right to education (Attawell, 2012). School libraries further aim to offer students a window to the world. Gender and sexual diversity exists in the world, and school libraries cannot in good conscience ignore one segment of the population.

Fortunately, studies have found that in schools with a LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, individual students (LGBTQ and straight) report feeling safer at school, school climates are safer (reports of bullying and harassment decrease), and student achievement improves (Burdge, Sinclair, Laub, & Russell, 2012; Burdge, Snapp, Laub, Russell, & Moody, 2013; Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006). The school library, as the center of the school community, is in a unique position to foster LGBTQ-inclusive education and curriculum.

LGBTQ inclusion in the school library

The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines state:

> The school library staff have the responsibility to observe high ethical standards in their dealing with all members of the school community. All users should be dealt with on an equal basis regardless of their abilities and background. [...] [School library staff] must try to adopt the user's perspective rather than let themselves be biased by their own attitudes and prejudices in providing library service. (Sætre & Willars, 2002)

The school library is obligated to create a safe and equitable learning environment for all students. These ethical and professional responsibilities require more than "neutrality" regarding service for LGBTQ students, as neutrality is itself a position which favors the status quo (Schrader & Wells, 2011; Carmichael, 1998). However, school libraries still must function

within the legal framework and cultural context of the country or region in which they work. Organizations such as UNESCO and the Global Alliance for LGBT Education (GALE), a formal partner with UNESCO, have developed strategies for LGBTQ-supportive education in different settings.

Identifying and overcoming barriers

UNESCO and GALE both acknowledge that integrating LGBTQ education and combating homophobic bullying can be difficult. Appropriate strategies depend on the country context, including laws and culture. UNESCO and GALE identified three "stages" used to describe the status of LGBTQ issues in countries around the world: denying, ambiguous, and supportive. In denying states, attention to LGBTQ topics is forbidden or strictly taboo. In ambiguous states, providing information about LGBTQ topics is not prohibited, and local organizations provide educational materials. However, an ambiguous state has not taken leadership on providing LGBTQ information, and the education sector views LGBTQ topics as private or the interest of marginal advocacy groups. In supportive states, the state has decided that combating homophobia is a relevant policy issue and has devoted time and energy to develop programs to integrate LGBTQ topics into the mainstream education sector (Attawell, 2012; Dankmeijer, 2012).

In denying states, where addressing LGBTQ topics directly is not possible, UNESCO and GALE recommend adopting a human rights education framework. In a human rights based approach, the school librarian can take steps to promote respect toward all people and the right of all students to an education free from bullying. School librarians may begin by removing library materials that contain harmful portrayals of LGBTQ people and negative stereotypes about gender roles. The school library can also support a safe learning environment by clearly expecting respectful behavior of all students, collecting or displaying materials which promote human rights and respect toward all people, and promoting local cultural or religious values of kindness toward others (Attawell, 2012; Dankmeijer, 2012).

In ambiguous and supportive states, more opportunities exist, although barriers may still be present even in supportive states. Working in the United States (an ambiguous state), Straut and Sapon-Shevin (2002) identified five barriers which preclude LGBTQ inclusion in education. These barriers include: the assumption of heterosexuality, the invisibility of such assumptions, curricular gaps, the perception that LGBTQ topics are too "dangerous" to cover in schools, and the fear that LGBTQ topics are too noticeable to confront (Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002). Research from Belgium, Canada, Finland, and Sweden, identified similar barriers, including silence on the part of teachers and school leaders, homophobia and heteronormative bias (that is, a worldview in which heterosexuality is the normal or preferred sexual orientation), and rigid gender roles (Chamberlain, 2010).

Heteronormative bias can be invisible even in LGBTQ-supportive environments. Lauren Kenney (2010) described her experience as a lesbian preservice teacher in a graduate-level education course in which the instructor asked students whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements ("You believe you will teach a gay or lesbian student" and "You believe you will have a gay or lesbian colleague"). Kenney reflected,

> I had never before understood compulsory heterosexuality so clearly as that day when I witnessed and participated in its enactment. [...] While I (and any other

invisible LGBTQ students in that room) sat, passive, reduced to a hypothetical problem that straight people would have to struggle with in their careers. (Kenney, 2010)

Even well-meaning LGBTQ allies (or LGBTQ people themselves) can be unaware of their own bias or assumptions. Often the first step toward LGBTQ inclusion is to begin to challenge assumptions. School libraries can also help overcome LGBTQ invisibility by developing a more inclusive collection. Whether or not they are "out" or visible, LGBTQ students and those students with LGBTQ family and friends are using the school library.

School libraries are often community-centered and collaborative by nature, so they can serve as the ideal place for laying the foundation for LGBTQ inclusion. A school library can begin by developing a support base among teachers and administrators, students and parents, school clubs (such as Gay-Straight Alliance or Civil Rights Club), and the wider community. Similarly, the library can build connections with local and national LGBTQ organizations. Library staff should also continue to learn about LGBTQ issues and history, become familiar with local and national laws, and assess the current climate of the school community (Biegel, 2010; Meyer, 2010; Teaching Tolerance, 2013a/2013b).

Policies and book challenges
In denying states, an LGBTQ-inclusive collection is likely not possible, whereas in supportive states, LGBTQ topics may be included in local or national curriculum. In ambiguous states, LGBTQ-inclusive collections are not prohibited, but librarians may fear book challenges or complaints. In all cases, the school library must review or create a comprehensive set of library policies which include statements in support of equitable service for all users, a collection development policy, and a procedure for the handling of challenged materials.

School libraries should aim to implement policies which reflect the spirit of national and international library guidelines and a human rights based framework. In accordance with national and international library standards, collection development policies should include statements in support of intellectual freedom, an unbiased approach to selection, and inclusion of diverse viewpoints. Where possible, such policies should also explicitly support the inclusion of under-represented groups, including LGBTQ people (Schrader & Wells, 2011). While having policies in place may not prevent potential challenges, they will help demonstrate that LGBTQ-inclusive materials are selected by the same criteria as all other library materials. Ann Symons, a former president of the American Library Association (ALA) and current president of the ALA GLBT Round Table, recommended school librarians build the collection they think they need and dealing with any controversy later (Whelan, 2006).

Information needs of LGBTQ students
LGBTQ students face a variety of obstacles to find the information they need. According to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), only 44 percent of LGBT students in the U.S. reported that they were able to find LGBT-related materials in their school library, and less than half of LGBT students with Internet access at school were able to find LGBT-related information online via school computers (Kosciw, et al., 2014). This statistic has changed little in 10 years (Kosciw, 2004). Less than 40 percent of Australian LGBTQ students reported a presence of LGBTQ-themed materials in their school library

(Hillier, et al., 2010). In the UK, 35 percent of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students report that their school library does not have materials related to gay people and issues, so in this case, a small majority of those students are able to find such resources (Guasp, 2012).

Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, and Harris (2013) surveyed 125 school libraries for LGBTQ-themed materials, including fiction, nonfiction, and biographies. The study found that the average number of LGBTQ-themed titles in school libraries was 0.4 percent, and concluded that school libraries are under-serving LGBTQ students. The study also found that overall, school libraries collected more LGBTQ-themed fiction than nonfiction and biographies combined (Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, & Harris, 2013).

Linville (2004) surveyed LGBTQ teenagers asking what resources they most wanted from the library. The most common response, which outnumbered all other responses combined, was real stories about real people. Other responses, in order of greatest frequency, included: coming out stories, how-to information on activism (such as how to start a Gay-Straight Alliance club), stories about fictional characters, lists of community resources, information about being LGBTQ, information about safe sex and sexual health, information about transgender issues, and information about bisexual issues (Linville, 2004).

In a study of the information seeking behavior of adolescent gay men, Hamer (2003) found several commonalities among the experiences of study participants. Nearly all those surveyed reported some period of time of no information seeking or concealment of their information seeking activities, out of fear of the repercussions of identifying as gay. Most participants also reported a negative perception of the information resources available to them, particularly in school libraries (Hamer, 2003).

Access to information and the school library

In the *Guidelines for an LGBTQ-Inclusive Education*, the International Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organization (IGLYO) identified access to information and support as a key component for inclusion. The guidelines call on school libraries to make LGBTQ materials easily available for students. LGBTQ-friendly materials can be either generic materials that are LGBTQ-inclusive or resources that are LGBTQ-specific (Selun & Anderson, 2009). LGBTQ-inclusive materials, whether generic or specific, benefit all students by providing a more complete view of the diversity that exists in the world.

General materials that are LGBTQ-inclusive could include biographies which acknowledge the LGBTQ lives of historical figures (such as Alexander the Great, Emperors of the Han Dynasty, or Jeanne d'Arc). Although such figures may not have labeled themselves with terms used today, such materials help recognize that gender and sexual diversity has existed throughout history and across cultures. Other inclusive materials, particularly those related to health and sexuality, should treat sexual or gender identity as part of the human experience and not treat LGBTQ people or identities as abnormal.

For LGBTQ students, just seeing that LGBTQ materials are available in the library will help those students feel more included and safe at school (Martin & Murdock, 2007). LGBTQ-specific materials could include fiction with LGBTQ protagonists, biographies of important LGBTQ figures, resources on LGBTQ history and rights movements, "guidebooks" or books about being LGBTQ, or lists of community resources and organizations.

Providing relevant and inclusive resources is critical, but school librarians should also be conscientious of Hamer's (2003) findings which suggest that some LGBTQ students may suspend or conceal their information-seeking activities (Hamer, 2003). Libraries can implement practices which allow students to find LGBTQ materials discreetly, such as clear signage, using "honor system" labels, or removing security tags (Martin & Murdock, 2007). Librarians may also work with school administrators or technology personnel to override web-filtering software or "unblock" websites which contain useful information on LGBTQ topics.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the ways in which individuals navigate intersecting marginalized identities, such as gender, sexuality, race or ethnicity, and class. LGBTQ representation in media, already limited, often fails to accurately represent the diverse, intersecting identities of LGBTQ people. In 2014, U.S. and Canadian entertainment media outlets reported that LGBTQ representation in media is disproportionately white, male, and wealthy and not reflective of the actual identities and experiences of LGBTQ people (Media Smarts, n.d.; McHenry, 2014; Lange, 2014). Malinda Lo, a Chinese-American author of LGBTQ young adult literature, tracks trends in LGBTQ young adult literature by mainstream U.S. publishers. She has found that less than 1 percent of young adult novels feature LGBTQ main characters. Of those, books about gay male characters have historically outweighed books about lesbian, bisexual, or transgender characters (Lo, 2011). In 2014, she found that of 47 LGBTQ young adult novels published that year, 15 featured main characters with intersecting identities, including LGBTQ characters of racial or ethnic minorities or with disabilities (Lo, 2014). While school librarians may not have control over what books are published, they can be conscientious when selecting materials to be as inclusive of intersecting identities as possible.

Inclusion and integration

For those libraries which are able to develop an LGBTQ-inclusive collection, the next step is integrating those resources into the daily activities of the library (Martin & Murdock, 2007). The school library is often asked to pull resources for classes working on projects or research assignments. In these cases, the librarian can include those materials which are related to the topic and LGBTQ-inclusive. For example, if students are researching the lives of important national figures, the resources provided may include LGBTQ-inclusive biographies.

The school library can recognize gender and sexual diversity as part of the human experience as reflected through literature by integrating LGBTQ-inclusive titles into reading promotion activities, such as book talks, reader's advisory, and book displays. A book display featuring fantasy novels could include a couple of books of that genre which feature LGBTQ characters. Similarly, when conducting a book talk or reader's advisory with a stack of 10 books, one or two could feature LGBTQ characters or themes. Since LGBTQ books are selected by the same criteria as other books, they should have the same literary merit as any other library book. Librarians do not need to make assumptions about a student's sexual or gender identity, but rather conscientiously select books which suit the audience: if a student

asks for a good science fiction book, there may be at least one book in the library that meets that criteria and includes an LGBTQ character (Martin & Murdock, 2007).

LGBTQ inclusion in primary school

Even those who otherwise support LGBTQ inclusion balk at the idea of LGBTQ inclusion in primary school (Hall, 2010). However, there are children who have LGBTQ parents or family members, and there are those students who will grow up to identify as LGBTQ themselves. Further, homophobic bullying and bullying based on gender stereotypes begins in primary school, so gender and sexual diversity cannot be ignored at this level (Baker, 2002; Meyer, 2010).

At the primary school level, LGBTQ topics focus not on sexual activities, but on relationships and respecting the differences of others (Hall, 2010). The primary school library collection should include picture books which challenge gender stereotypes and, where possible, books which feature same-sex parents. Children may have questions, and in that case, a teaching moment that arises is that people have differences and all people deserve the same kindness and respect.

Most LGBTQ people "come out," or acknowledge their sexual or gender identity in adolescence or adulthood. However many LGBTQ adults recall feeling "different" or separate from their gender group as a child. For those children who feel different or who may grow up to identify as LGBTQ, silence sends a very clear message. If children are only exposed to heteronormative stories and characters, they will learn that anything different is abnormal and bad, and that they themselves are abnormal and bad (Baker, 2002; Flores, 2012).

Inclusive teaching strategies

In addition to an inclusive collection and library activities, school librarians can adopt inclusive teaching strategies, such as using inclusive language, challenging bias, and fostering inquiry. Inclusive language means avoiding negative statements about gender roles ("Don't be such a girl"), adopting gender neutral terms (parents instead of mother and father), avoiding connotative bias (sexual "preference" or "alternative lifestyle"), and avoiding assuming students are straight (Weinberg, 2009).

Educators can challenge bias by not permitting homophobic remarks or gender stereotyping in their classrooms. However, strictly policing language can be counterproductive. When students use the word "gay" as a pejorative term, educators often fall into the trap of prohibiting the word gay altogether, thus sending the message that anything "gay" is offensive. Instead, educators can have students reflect on their own use of language, for example, "What makes you think 'gay' is an insult?" or "How do you think a gay person would feel when you say something like that?" (Aaron-Brush, 2015; Gonzalez, 2010).

Hall and Blackburn (2009) found that literature teachers introducing LGBTQ content approached such lessons by positioning their students as straight and homophobic. Hall and Blackburn argue that this approach is counterproductive, because homophobia and heterosexist bias (the attitude that heterosexual relationships are normal or superior) is assumed and normalized. They suggest that teachers should assume students are LGBTQ or straight allies, thus normalizing acceptance (Hall & Blackburn, 2009). However, others

have found that those students with homophobic or heterosexist attitudes can feel silenced as teachers become more LGBTQ inclusive. The goal must be to maintain an accepting and respectful learning environment while keeping the lines for dialog open, allowing all students the opportunity to grow (Biegel, 2010; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2010; Gonzalez, 2010).

Inquiry and self-study can provide positive avenues for learning and growth. Students may engage in small-group discussions or reflect on their own lives and identities through autobiographical writing (Gonzalez, 2010; Letts, 2002; Meyer, 2010). Teachers must avoid the "foods and festivals" pitfall, by including LGBTQ content throughout their curriculum and not only once or during a special event (Kenney, 2010; King & Brindley, 2002).

LGBTQ inclusion in the classroom

The school library is a learning center for the whole school community and as such, has the opportunity to foster LGBTQ inclusion across the curriculum. In most supportive states, LGBTQ inclusion is protected or encouraged, and in a few, including Brazil, the Netherlands, Norway, and the U.S. state of California, LGBTQ-inclusive education initiatives are in place (Chamberlain, 2010; "Dutch LGBT policy," n.d.; "Fair, accurate," n.d.; Norway, Ministry of Children and Equality, 2008). In ambiguous states, LGBTQ inclusion is not prohibited, but teachers may have hesitations or may not have the resources necessary (Chamberlain, 2010). School libraries can collaborate with LGBTQ education organizations and with teachers, invite guest speakers and trainings, offer teacher resources and professional development, and provide library resources to support LGBTQ inclusion in classrooms across the curriculum.

The clearest opportunities for LGBTQ inclusion are in literature and social studies. Throughout history and across cultures, LGBTQ people have expressed themselves through literature. Literature classes can include readings with feature LGBTQ characters, acknowledge the LGBTQ identities of existing authors of study, or even read texts with a LGBTQ lens (Clack & Blackburn, 2009; Meyer, 2010). As with other kinds of readings, different LGBTQ-inclusive texts should be included in different units of study, in order to avoid essentializing the experience of LGBTQ people, to present gender and sexual diversity as part of the human experience, and to avoid the "foods and festivals" pitfall (Clack & Blackburn, 2009; Kenney, 2010; King & Brindley, 2002).

Colleary argued that one goal of social studies is to prepare students to be active citizens who work toward positive social change, this cannot happen if one segment of the population is ignored or vilified (as cited in Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002). Where possible, LGBTQ topics can be included in the existing curriculum, such as civil rights movements or the study of World War II and the Holocaust. More opportunities and flexibility exist in social studies electives, such as sociology and anthropology, government and civics, and international relations (Meyer, 2010; Sieben, 2010).

Further opportunities exist in sciences and health. Science classes, particularly biology and life sciences, can explore gender and sexual diversity in nature, such as same-sex sexual behavior and non-binary genders in vertebrate animals. Science classes should also discuss scientific objectivity and gender bias in scientific writing (Meyer, 2010; Roughgarden, 2004). LGBTQ content is often most needed, but most likely to be excluded in health classes. Damaging messages are sent to students when LGBTQ people are only mentioned in the

context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic or are treated as abnormal or sick. The school library can be especially valuable in health education by providing inclusive resources for both teachers and students.

Conclusion
School libraries provide resources and leadership within their school communities and are uniquely positioned to support LGBTQ-inclusion through collections, library activities, and curriculum support. By adopting a human rights based framework, school libraries around the world can begin to create safer learning environments for LGBTQ students. Although barriers to LGBTQ inclusion may exist even in supportive environments, barriers can be overcome through creating a support base, planning, challenging bias, and adopting appropriate policies. The school library can support LGBTQ inclusion within the wider school community by developing inclusive collections and activities. With an LGBTQ-inclusive collection and library activities, the school library is ideally situated to support LGBTQ inclusion across the curriculum by providing resources, using inclusive teaching strategies, collaborating with teachers, providing professional development, and working with LGBTQ community organizations. School libraries cannot afford "neutrality" as their students struggle to find their own lives and experiences reflected in literature and information resources. School library staff must have ethical standards which do not allow for the exclusion of one segment of the population and must actively work to create a library which accurately reflects the gender and sexual diversity in the world and supports a more just society.

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