



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

School of Arts, Social Sciences & Management

Division of Psychology, Sociology and Education

X4078 Professional Enquiry into Practice

Matriculation Number:	20000009
Submission Date:	28/04/2023
Word Count, excluding title and references list	8327

How Can Teachers Challenge Homophobic Attitudes in the Classroom?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for all of their support over the past 5 years of my teacher training and especially during this practitioner's enquiry. Without the following people I would not have made it through my degree!

Firstly, thank you to Dr Síân Jones, my supervisor, who helped guide me with positivity and always made me feel capable and confident in my writing throughout the entirety of the programme. Extra thank you to my fellow topic group: Ben, Abidha, Cerys, Hannah, and Aimee, for dragging each other through the past semester and being the best imaginary school team.

My partner Cameron, for being a constant force of positivity in my life and always making me laugh even when I felt like I couldn't. Thank you for loving and accepting me for me and being the best part of my life. Also, Molly the pug for being the best de-stresser.

To Fiona, Stephanie and Kelly, the best mentor teachers I could ever wish for, and for trusting me with your amazing pupils and showing me truly what makes a great teacher. Additionally, I want to extend my thanks to Aurica, Tanya, Carole, Rachel, Sharon, Claire, Amber & Erin for your unwavering support throughout placement.

Thank you to all my friends, new and old, for listening to me ramble on and always being there for help and support every day.

To the whole course; we did it! I am so proud of everyone for getting through the pandemic, and overcoming odds to get to where we are today.

This enquiry is dedicated to every queer pupil represented in every statistic.

You are enough.

ABSTRACT

This practitioner's enquiry investigates the significance of challenging and addressing homophobic attitudes in primary and secondary aged classrooms in an international context by discussing the repeated notion of presumed innocence. Through a review of existing literature, the qualitative data highlights the need for a multifaceted approach through the areas of teacher identities, inclusive curricula, effective school input through policies and ethos as well as the overall confidence of teachers in order to create a safe and supportive environment for pupils. However, the research acknowledges that steps found to be effective in challenging homophobic attitudes in classrooms are not an immediate fix, and a wider school approach must be considered to accommodate cultural, religious, and social differences. Overall, the common findings of the enquiry link back to initial teacher education the inclusion of gay themes within modules, comprehensive policies regarding anti-bullying and curricular representation as well as ensuring an equitable and inclusive school ethos in order to be able to sustain interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

A child's development from early childhood to adulthood can be impacted by several factors (Sroufe *et al.*, 2005), the earliest of which occurs during a child's school life being peer relationships (Hartup and Moore, 1990). These relationships set up the potential building blocks for social and emotional skills, including empathy (Pepler and Bierman, 2018). These can be hindered when impacted by homophobic attitudes experienced in the classroom by their peers, resulting in poor mental health and trauma (Bradlow *et al.*, 2017). Despite most research into homophobic attitudes development and how to challenge them being conducted within the secondary school age educational setting, it is worthwhile to continue to research this topic across both primary and secondary school in order to challenge the notion of 'presumed innocence' amongst younger children (Renold, 2002), especially those in lower primary age can be challenged. This notion is the assumption held by adults that children are not aware of the topics surrounding homophobia, homosexuality, or sexuality in general, further denying that they hold the ability or need to develop ideas of homosexuality or sexual diversity in any sense, towards themselves or others (Renold, 2002). Overall, the notion argues for later age development and introduction of these concepts. Presumed innocence has been disputed by research, with evidence of sexuality being seen in girls and boys of primary school age (Renold, 2002; Wong and Hodkinson, 2012), in both a positive and negative light through discussion and discrimination. More so, there is direct evidence of the existence and awareness of homophobic attitudes within primary schools, not just secondary schools. 69% of those surveyed identified homophobic verbal instances, and 49% homophobic bullying between children, displayed in primary classrooms (Wong and Hodkinson, 2012). Despite this, the idea of presumed innocence creates a barrier towards intervention, with 42% of primary school teachers reporting that they

do not challenge homophobic language (and therefore homophobic attitudes) every time they hear it (Guasp, Ellison and Satara, 2014). This is also reflected in the secondary setting, with 55% of teachers also reporting on the same statement.

Overall, the aim of this paper is to understand how teachers could take steps to challenge these homophobic attitudes in the classroom and how this can be very important in the prevention of these attitudes manifesting into later primary and secondary education. This aim will be completed by discussing and analysing the relevant literature conducted into a review. The literature research investigated homophobic attitudes across both primary and secondary school pupils internationally within a classroom context to get the widest scope under the necessary criteria and include as many participant types as possible, data investigating primarily teachers and pupils as well as parents. The literature was then narrowed down further to focus on the four main sections under the aim of: representation in the curriculum, teachers' own confidence, teachers' own identities and school input through policy and ethos. The practitioner's enquiry also outlines the main concepts in context as discussed in the body of teachers, classrooms and homophobic attitudes exemplified before discussing the main points as mentioned above, reflecting on the implications on practice in the future, before concluding on how teachers can challenge homophobic attitudes in the classroom, as displayed in literature research.

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

“Teacher”

A teacher, and teaching as a profession, can take on many forms. Rajagopalan (2019) refers to the act of teaching as being the act of transferring information, experience and/or skills from one person to another, thus making an individual a teacher. By this definition, many

individuals can be placed under the criteria of a teacher. Attaching this to an institutional school context, Cambridge Dictionary (2023b) defines a teacher being someone who is simply employed to teach within a school; again, leaving a broad scope of inclusion on who comes under the teacher label. The Department of Education (2011) discusses who is a teacher by focusing on qualities held. They state teachers as being people who prioritise the education of their students, while representing and demonstrating high standards of academic performance or attainment and behaviours. Additionally, they summarise that teachers endeavour and demonstrate keeping their ongoing continuous training in professional development current, hold value in building relationships with the parental wider community and always act in the best interests of their individual students.

In this enquiry, the term “teacher” has been narrowed down with the above qualities and definitions in mind. The intended definition of “teacher” used throughout (and as reflected in literature) refers to the educator(s) who helps plan, assess, and evaluate the needs of learning and assist in accessing the curriculum within the areas of primary and secondary education. This definition encompasses sole classroom named teachers, job sharing teachers, as well as head teachers, among others, who are responsible for the delivery of the curriculum and wellbeing at a school level. This term was chosen rather than the term “educator” in order to narrow down on the practitioners who spend time with most of the children, the majority of the time, including transition times. This does not include pupil support assistants, specialists, or outside agencies due to the classroom context within literature. The term is mentioned with the intended view of a teacher not only as a professional employed within a school, but as a person with thoughts, opinions and factors affecting their practice, comfortability and views outside the context of school and the workplace.

“Classroom Context”

In this enquiry, the term “classroom (contexts)” is mentioned with the definition of the main learning environment used by both teachers and learners day-to-day in the areas of primary and secondary education. Due to the international nature of this research, yet being written within Scotland, information relating to countries with differing educational systems will remain in the age range of 5-18: the common age ranges from the start of primary to the end of secondary education within the United Kingdom (The Heads' Conference, 2023; Scotland, 2023). Solely the area of the classroom will be discussed, omitting discussion pertaining to other areas within the school such as playgrounds etc due to the likelihood of the absence of the classroom teacher in these contexts.

“Homophobia”

Homophobia, a term that was originally used to refer to the feeling of fear brought upon being in the close proximity to gay men and women, along with hatred and distaste, was first coined by psychologist George Weinberg (1972) to shine a light on the experiences of gay individuals. Weinberg then went on to flip the idea that gay individuals are a ‘sickness’, to then label homophobic individuals as the one who are sick, or unhealthy with their views, creating the “Healthy Homosexual” (Weinberg, 1972). Despite holding the suffix “phobia” denoting a fear, often irrational that cannot be controlled (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023a), such as arachnophobia, a fear of spiders, homophobia tends to drift towards a more opinionated attitudinal standpoint rather than an irrational fear (White, 1999). The organisation Stonewall (2011) defines homophobia in this vein as being the dislike, negative attitude, or alarm based on prejudicial negative views about lesbian or gay individuals, including the denial or refusal of that person’s

self-identified expression. They also define homophobia as having the potential not only to be targeted at those who outright identify as lesbian or gay, but also target those who are perceived to be lesbian or gay based on stereotypes of masculinity or femininity amongst others (Mittleman 2022).

In this enquiry, the term “homophobia” and “homophobic” is used with the attitudinal outlook, with the intended definition of the dislike and negative outlook upon those who identify as, or are believed to be, a lesbian or a gay man or boy, purely based on their (believed) sexuality, generated through prejudice, stereotype and opinion. Although the term homophobia can also apply to the experiences of sexually diverse others such as bisexual or queer individuals, as well as transgender people, the literature has been narrowed down to primarily look at the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals due to the lack of research pertaining to the others mentioned. Despite this, the findings of this enquiry could still be applied to the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and diverse others) community in a wide approach. Where the term LGBTQ+ or the umbrella term ‘queer’ (Chase and Ressler, 2009) is used, the effort to narrow down data to only reflect lesbian and gay experiences has been made.

“Homophobic Attitudes”

The titular term of “homophobic attitudes”, an extension of the enquiry definition of “homophobia”, refers to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are exemplified under the attitudinal displays of homophobia. This can be seen to include displays such as prejudicial negative opinions and preferences, homophobic language, direct bullying, using stereotypes and displaying negative emotions towards identity, among others. Although bullying is included, in forms such as name calling, attitudes can also be represented in other ways such as “that’s so gay” (Woodford *et al.*, 2012) when not directed at an individual.

WHO IS REPRESENTED IN THE CURRICULUM?

Following both the removal of legislative and policy barriers and the enactment of protective acts, the state of gay inclusive education has improved slightly over the years. For example, the 2003 removal of the British ‘Section 28’ (British Government, 1988) legislation, stating that school authorities should not show or discuss differing sexualities within lessons, or show acceptance towards differing sexuality in a curricular family context. Once removed, it paved the way for schools to have the ability to teach inclusive curricula. Despite this, 56% of primary school teachers in the United Kingdom stated that they have not discussed same sex families in an inclusive context within health and wellbeing topics (Guasp, Ellison and Satara, 2014). However, this statistic comes within the UK before the monumental enactment of Scotland’s 2018 rule to make its educational system the first in the world to ensure LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum in public schools (Stone and Ferrar, 2021), by applying it to the Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2023b) namely through the area of relationships, sexual health, and parenthood (RSHP, 2023), providing a great example for other countries to strive for through implementation. Even though Scotland sets the precedent, other countries, and states of power within the world still prohibit or restrict inclusive curricula. For example, many southern states in the United States of America, such as Texas, Florida, and Mississippi (Rankin, 2021; Branigin, 2022) have banned gay people from appearing in materials in school due to the belief that it is ‘promoting it’. However, representation can show itself in many forms, ranging from more controversial topics such as RSHP, also known commonly as sex education (Proulx *et al.*, 2019) to simpler presentation such as textbooks and imagery (Kelly, 2012).

Ioverno *et al.*, (2022) discusses curricular representation when examining student’s observations of curricula representation and interventions with homophobic name calling within

Italian high schools. This representation specifically takes the form of LGBTQ+ issues, however it is not explicit in what these issues are other than positive representation. The study uses a 3-level approach of observing, a survey, and discussion of results, choosing to focus on the observation data for the paper. 1,296 pupils participated in total, 43.57% of which were female, with 84 classes in 22 high schools within Rome, Italy. This study, unlike those who came prior to it, looks at the actual interventions as they occurred, rather than they pupil's unbased or unevicenced willingness of intervene. The main finding of the study was the association between pupils who experiences, and perceived LGBTQ+ representation as a positive thing, and the resulting statistical likelihood that they intervene themselves, as well as observe others doing the same, when encountering homophobic name calling within their classrooms. This shows that when representation is effectively implemented and shown positively, it provides students with the awareness and confidence to challenge any arising homophobic attitudes, reflecting established classroom norms and expected behaviours (Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt, 2017). However, an expansion on specifically what 'gay issues' were included, would provide even more benefit towards teachers reading this study. These findings were also furthered when teachers themselves were also seen publicly intervening, furthering classroom norms (Kam, Greenberg and Walls, 2003). However, the study only focuses on high school students in Italy, albeit a wide scope of multiple schools, it still yet creates a limitation to the study as it does not account for the views and interventions of younger students. In spite of this, it must be considered that due to the high religious presence in Italy, with 67% of the population surveying as Catholic Christian (United States Department of State, 2021) the church actively scrutinises and involves itself with any attempt towards the inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics within Italy (Heywood, 2015; Callahan and Loscocco, 2021) showing the existing difficulties within high

schools, which would seemingly be amplified within younger years due to the idea of innocence (Renold, 2002). This can be furthered down by the chosen study area of solely Rome, having 82% Catholic population (Cheney, 2022), resulting in negative connotations as Catholicism historically and in traditional areas of the world, such as Rome, have been seen to have homophobic cultures and ideals (Loughlin, 2018). As a result, the inclusion of these topics differs massively from classroom to classroom, with it being up to the teacher's discretion (IGLYO, 2018), considering outside pressures and beliefs, rather than school to school, due to the lack of common policy with schools referencing to gay issues, such as representation or bullying. This is also reflected at a governmental level in Italy, with no protective laws for LGBTQ+ individuals (Schillaci, 2022; Beaugmont and Maguire, 2013). Overall, considering the environment that surrounds the study, the resulting findings and wide pool of participants gives, to an extent, good findings relating to the correlation between representations' role in peer intervention towards homophobic attitudes.

Lipkin (1994) agrees with the main findings above, discussing the change of outlook inclusive curricula can have against homophobic attitudes and prejudices. However, unlike Ioverno *et al.*, (2022), primarily discussing the representation of 'gay issues' in lessons, Lipkin (1994) details the possibility to avoid controversy of the wider community by having broad use representation across the curriculum, as opposed to teaching specific gay issues or only gay sex education, which could be considered by some to be promoting the assumed 'negative lifestyle' to 'innocent' children (Renold, 2002), especially by those belonging to a traditional religious culture such as Catholicism (Ioverno *et al.*, 2022) or Islam (Siraj, 2012) where homosexuality is discussed as a sin. Lipkin (1994) identifies the main source of controversy within integrating LGBTQ+ issues in schools to be the transition from strictly heterosexual to gay inclusive

education alone (Goldstein, Collins and Halder, 2007), rather than the school working their way up to it within other curricular areas. However, parents have been seen to be increasingly welcome and open to the idea of inclusive sex education over the years (McCormack and Gleeson, 2010) which in years to come could be increasingly easier to implement. It is stated that it can be achieved more successfully through normalised representation in areas such as maths, literacy, and art, through imagery (Kelly, 2012) and role models (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011). An example resource that fulfils this is ‘Time for Inclusive Education’, known as TIE (2023b). TIE offers primary *and* secondary normalised representation through resources such as worksheets in maths detailing worded problems involving same sex lesbian and gay relationships scenarios, for example “Anna and Beth think each of their wedding guests will have two cupcakes each. They have 50 wedding guests. How many cupcakes will they need?” (TIE, 2023a, p.1). The existence of the primary resources helps to provide opposition towards the idea of innocence (Renold, 2002), by providing these scenarios in the same vein as heterosexual relationships. These are supported by specialist training provided to teachers as well as workshops for pupils.

Overall, the inclusion of gay issues and topics within school curricula can be seen as an effective tool towards normalisation, representation, and challenging homophobic attitudes through peer intervention. Despite this, cultural contexts such as religious involvement must be considered when evaluating the ease of implementation by ensuring wide scope representation in imagery. However, being seen to be implemented more at a classroom level, this cannot achieve successfully and effectively without the confidence and willingness of classroom teachers.

HOW CAN TEACHERS BE MORE CONFIDENT?

Research findings have consistently demonstrated a link between how teachers can challenge homophobia in the classroom, and raising their confidence to do so, with the most recurring recommendation being found to be the development of the lack of structure of initial teacher education (ITE) inclusion modules at universities, therefore addressing the barrier at its starting point (Matthews *et al.*, 2006; Prinsloo, 2017).

Johnson (2016) details this need for effective teacher education programmes in South Africa to not only feel comfortable having pupils of differing sexualities but to challenge any arising homophobic attitudes as a result of it. This study was conducted in a semi-structured group interview format, with student teachers across 3 universities split into 2 groups per university, compiling 35 participants in total. Additionally, lecturers on these courses, compiling 14 further participants, were interviewed within a similar semi-structured format. These groups discussed their learning on the course, previous experience and how prepared they feel in order to engage with homophobic attitudes in the classroom, with lecturers discussing their views and reflections from a staff viewpoint. Finally, an overall evaluation of the course outline was also conducted, with what it includes or lacks, in terms of inclusive LGBTQ+ themes. By using qualitative interviews, Johnson allows for the voices for all those involved to be heard, focusing on depth and the exploration of the opinions of these students and staff, creating a great advantage into how they can become more confident in their own opinions. Through the use of these interviews, Johnson identified within the students that they felt unprepared overall, despite having a certain extent of awareness surrounding the topics of homophobia and sexual diversity, showing a lack of translation between awareness and actual application in classrooms, where awareness only allows for showing the issue at its face, but no practical solutions to problems

that could arise, while application allows for tangible options for teachers to effectively intervene (Pereya, 2015). A strong need identified was the student's need to have a safe space in seminars to reflect and access knowledge based on assumptions of beliefs (Mulryan-Kyne, 2019). Students both identified themselves as feeling unconfident due to the course itself lacking in support, but also identified others as being unwilling due to homophobic attitudes in their behaviour (Bhana, 2012). They additionally concluded that homophobic attitudes within student teachers themselves must be addressed in tandem to the development of these programmes. However, as the students were chosen by the course staff themselves, the research creates a potential limitation and bias in the creation of groups, leaving an opportunity for warped results, rather than randomised groups of students. Despite this, the points brought up are also backed up through the evaluation of the course outline, which does not have any reference or identification of need regarding the call for teachers to be educated about 'gay issues', which in turn would prepare them to challenge homophobic attitudes. However, the author identifies within the research that at the point of writing, there was a lack of enacted policy relating to the mandatory of LGBTQ+ issues within higher education teacher training, showing the barrier existing at a larger level, and not just at a programme level, akin to that of the Section 28 removal within the UK, as previously discussed, with the source of problem being at a governmental, not school, level (Stonewall, 2019). The inclusion of a course outline evaluation helps create an advantage by further backing up, or disproving, any points of concern brought up within the interview groups, thus negating any bias limitations. Overall, through qualitative research, Johnson (2016) helps to shine a light on student teacher's voices to conclude that development must occur within ITE to ensure inclusivity and applicable knowledge to prepare teachers for practice (Zack, Mannheim and Alfano, 2010).

When discussing the recurring issue of ‘awareness not application’, researchers have also discussed the difference between challenging homophobic attitudes alone and preventing them through environmental influence. Collier, Bos and Sandford (2015) discuss the importance of this by being confident to not only act upon observed active behaviours (Johnson, 2016), but taking steps to create a safe environment for gay students, thus creating a positive, continuous ethos preventing attitudes from arising. More so, the authors conclude with applicable written situations to apply to ITE training modules, where the aforementioned author does not, such as role model stories and role play. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research, amongst both papers, on how to sustain the potential developed modules into the teacher’s careers through continual professional development (CPD), although mentioned as a possibility (Johnson, 2016).

McCormack and Gleeson (2010) attempt to fill in this gap by identifying the need for effective CPD to take knowledge learned at developed university courses, or improve upon the lack thereof, throughout their career. In this paper the authors explore the view of parents and pupils in Ireland following a new secondary programme exploring masculinity as well as related topics such as domestic abuse, depression, sexuality, and homophobia in curriculum. This is conducted through a survey passed down from pupils via school. Following the survey, 24 telephone interviews were held with randomly assigned participants to expand upon data. The author's main conclusion within the study was found to be the surprising willingness of the parents to involve their child(ren) in LGBTQ+ and homophobia themes, but there were concerns relating to the effective teacher development being received in order to support it safely and successfully. Stonewall (Guasp, Ellison and Satara, 2014) agreed with this, reporting that only 8% of primary school, and 17% of secondary school teachers say that they have had specific training on tackling homophobia in schools, thus showing a potential area for development. The

authors expand on this area for development and further identify the lack of consistent and balanced CPD, providing teachers with awareness, not application, a common theme shared amongst research (Johnson, 2016; Pereya, 2015; Collier, Bos and Sandford, 2015). This need for effective CPD is agreed upon with research conducted within the Department for Education and Skills (Warwick *et al.*, 2004) especially development conducted by those who exist in this area of expertise, such as TIE (Time for Inclusive Education, 2023), in order to meet the needs of gay identifying learners (Wright and Smith, 2013). However useful the parent's views are, a major limitation of the study is that of the pupils' views. The survey itself is passed down from pupils to parents via school for completion. Due to this chosen method, opportunities for the pupils to throw away, forget, or purposefully avoid the survey could be made, as reflected in only a 20% survey completion rate. Additionally, data included relating to the pupils themselves were reported by the parents as they see fit, further creating an opportunity for falsified data as to not show their child in a bad light.

Overall, through research findings as discussed, teachers (established and trainees alike) can become more confident in challenging homophobia in the classroom by engaging and being offered structured, effective, and meaningful training that can be applied and not just heard throughout university and consistently into their career through CPD.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER IDENTITIES?

As well as representation in the curriculum and the confidence to challenge homophobic attitudes outright, the importance of representation and confidence has been found in other areas of education, one of which being the importance of the identities and comfort of gay teachers. Prior established research would suggest that around a third of gay teachers in the United States

have the belief that their job would be at risk from administrative or senior leadership teams if they were explicit about their sexuality (Wright and Smith, 2013). This prior research identified their wish to remain as invisible as possible in order to avoid unwanted attention or negatively assumed consequences such as contract termination (Lee, 2019) or a negative impact with their students (Lipkin, 2003).

Relating to this idea, Kosciw *et al.*, (2018) uses a national survey through the LGBTQ+ organisation GLSEN, to collect opinions of LGBTQ+ pupils in the United States. The study was conducted through an online survey posted to social media sites, with 23,001 pupils between the ages of 13-21 within the grade ranges of middle to high school. This upper age range comes with the assumption that they are a result of a combination of adult learners as well as individuals resitting or being held back in the school year, a potential limitation to the study as this is not outright commented on. Despite the larger age range, the statistics found within the study still hold use due to the average age being 15 years old, and the largest age range being between 13 and 16 years. One of the findings of the study was the lack of 'out' teachers (open with their sexuality) within schools, with 56.3% of participants identifying that there was no openly LGBTQ+ teacher at all within their school, showing a possible lack of comfort or openness. Within the same study, 47.2% of students identified that all staff never intervened upon hearing homophobic remarks, furthering a heteronormative environment for other staff and students (Vega, Crawford and Van Pelt, 2012). Suggesting that comfortable and open teachers result in more intervention, Lee (2020) agrees with this, discussing how open teachers are likely to identify subtle upsets and advocate more for compassion and the commitment of inclusion. When comparing pupils with no support school staff, the survey identified that 38.8% who identified greater than 11 supportive staff, regardless of sexuality, were less likely to identify the

feeling of being unsafe and therefore miss school. Meanwhile, the same pupils were more likely to feel a sense of wider school community and belonging, showing the importance of having comfortable teachers as only 8.2% of participants identify no use of homophobic language in schools. Therefore, creating a link between the importance of gay teachers being open, and being able to challenge homophobic attitudes more effectively, resulting in better outcomes for gay pupils through intervention and representation (Gastic and Johnson, 2009), and more importantly, providing the gay role models that LGBTQ+ identifying children need (Wright and Smith, 2013). However, a potential limitation to this study is the nature of online survey self-reporting – a common theme amongst research relating to gay themes. More so, the majority of ways to fill out this survey was through social media and following relevant gay organisations – resulting in people who felt more unsafe, or who were not on social media, being more unlikely to participate. This can be reflected in the comparison of participants, 23,001, and the estimated number of LGBTQ+ individuals within a similar age range, being 1,994,000 (Conron, 2020). Additionally, the data found does not explicitly highlight that of specifically gay students, or teachers, opting to group under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. However, similarly to age, the majority surveyed were found to be gay or lesbian (41% compared to the remaining percentage being split amongst 6 categories, the next highest being bisexual with 27.5% comparatively). Despite this, findings only relating to specifically homophobic, or generalised data has been extracted for the purpose of this enquiry.

Similarly, to prior research, relating to the confidence of teachers when challenging attitudes enacted, research also commonly discusses the development of ITE in helping teachers feel more comfortable in their identity. Donahue (2007) discusses raising the comfort levels of gay student teachers in the United States by pairing them with a gay mentor throughout

placement. Participants included 13 lesbian and gay teachers, matched with lesbian and gay (LG) identifying teachers during placement between 1998 and 2004. Additionally, 10 former and current students (9 lesbian, 1 gay) agreed to be interviewed further. Throughout this, the author discusses findings relating to the effectiveness of gay mentorship towards student's perceptions of being a gay teacher in the classroom context (Wright and Smith, 2013), with the hope of making them more comfortable in their own identity by the time they have their own class through presentation, observation and honest conversation, thus showing the importance of open gay teachers to begin with. The participant pool is very advantageous to the study due to its large lesbian ratio, a methodology pool rather uncommon in research relating to homophobic attitudes (e.g. Mayo, 2008). However, all participants graduated from the same programme, resulting in a limitation of the knowledge and teachings of a singular programme taught at one institution, rather than an array of comparable data. However, the study overall holds advantage as Griffin (1992) identified less than 10 studies focusing on the first hand told experiences of educators who identify as gay within the US. Donahue found that the use of mentors had a great effect on the outlook of the students, leading to statements such as being able to disprove fears and see representation of how gay teachers exist in a school environment, providing them with confidence to be open themselves.

Although the findings were found to be extremely positive, a limitation to the study is that not all participating teachers were explicitly out, with 4 out of 10 teachers not being explicitly or implicitly open about their sexuality; thus, resulting in the participating students to have vastly different experiences to base interviews on, some teachers being open to students and some being completely private. Therefore, despite the positive results, the true benefit of gay mentors towards student teachers cannot truly be applied in the authors recommendations due to

the lack of applicable action; as to reach the point where teachers are comfortable within their identity, the existing and established teachers have to be comfortable to the point that they can volunteer to be a mentor, something the author identifies to a certain extent by calling out to teachers to be more open within the conclusion, however lacking any real advice, further perpetuating the idea of awareness, not application. Wright and Smith (2013) tackle the gap in existing teachers by discussing mentors as well as ideas relating to existing teachers. The findings agree with Donahue (2007) in the outlook that gay mentors hold a significant value in challenging homophobic attitudes and raising the comfortability of student teachers. However, unlike Donahue, the author expands on this point in terms of converting it through a teacher's career. When discussing the fear that gay educators have, the authors directly attribute the cause to school leaders' lack of provision towards a safe, inclusive ethos. Therefore, by combining the findings of the above papers, we can draw the following conclusion: the importance of gay teacher identity can be reflected in findings relating to the wellbeing and lack of victimisation amongst gay students, and furthered by the reverse if there is a lack thereof. This importance can be maintained and helped through mentor programmes within ITE, but only if existing gay teachers are supported through effective CPD, and a supportive ethos, thus allowing the student teachers post-mentorship to transition into a supportive school environment to use their identity to further support gay pupils in challenging homophobic attitudes.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO HELP?

The effort towards challenging homophobic attitudes, as reflective in literature, should not solely fall on the shoulders of teachers and their identities, across the world; other school staff and senior leadership also play a massive part in structurally creating a positive school

climate to protect their pupils and staff. This in turn, therefore challenges homophobic attitudes by creating a basis for any intervention to be created on or surrounded by. One of these ways that schools can have a role in challenging homophobic attitudes is the role of policy implementation. These policies can vary in type, with the main two being discussed in literature being anti-bullying policies (Hall, 2017) and policies relating to sex education (Garg and Volerman, 2020). It is reported that 69% of teachers state their school does not have (or they do not know if they have) an explicit policy regarding homophobic bullying in schools (Guasp, Ellison and Stara, 2014), highlighting a common theme of the lack of explicit mention (Adams, Cox and Dunstan, 2004). The benefit towards policy is highlighted in research also, with it being reported that students who have a well-rounded, explicit, policy regarding homophobic bullying were less likely to hear homophobic language used and were more likely to see intervention in the form of teachers and peers (Kosciw *et al.*, 2018).

Rudoe (2017) details this importance of school wide policy implementation by leadership teams, by surveying the opinions of gay identifying teachers. The policies discussed related to both sex education and anti-bullying interventions. Rudoe conducts their research through semi-structured interviews with 12 lesbian and gay teachers in English and Welsh primary and secondary schools. The personal experiences of these teachers are examined before broadening the findings to apply to the experiences of pupils. The main finding of the study, through these interviews, was although perceived to be beneficial by lesbian and gay teachers, policies are difficult to implement alone. Rudoe argues that although policy is enacted by senior leadership and administration, it is truly implemented by teachers themselves, primarily being identified through sex education and curricula representation that is already established within classrooms. They argue that the benefit of these policies needs to stand on the shoulders of curriculum,

training, and inclusion in order to truly be implemented and received by pupils. This relates to the findings relating to the implementation of curriculum in the curriculum, requiring a broader range of inclusivity to avoid controversy and create a basis (Lipkin, 1994), which in this case can apply to policy relating to sex education, requiring curriculum to surround it. The findings can be considered to be very useful due to the range of which they are surveyed; lesbian and gay opinions, from both primary and secondary schools in more than one country. However, the language used can be considered to be slightly misleading in their inclusivity as out of 12 schools, only 2 were found to be primary, and only 1 school overall was Welsh. Due to this, the study is actually lacking in terms of inclusion of participants as the vast majority were actually found to be English secondary schools. More so, the author had no access to any written policy documents or any documents relating to the sexual health education lessons, resulting in the basis of data falling on teacher narrative alone, entrusting it to their spoken views.

In contrast, Fredman, Schultz, and Hoffman (2015) argue that often a lack of specific policy can enable teachers to be able to create changes more, by not being forced to conform to a specific way by senior leadership. Yet, to be able to apply this argument, Rudoe (2017) amongst others previously mentioned (Johnson, 2016) identifies the innate need for teacher training to fully engage with challenging homophobic attitudes. More so, this argument fails to consider teachers with religious beliefs that interfere (Goldstein, Collins and Halder, 2007), as well as teachers who have homophobic attitudes themselves (Bhana, 2012). Despite these limitations, the inclusion of gay teacher voices and having the confidence to participate, is a major benefit towards change (Rofes, 2000) as well as towards research in this area, providing inclusion and real life scenarios to base information on. Goldstein, Collins and Halder (2007) agree with the identification of policy's benefit, by investigating policy implementation with Canadian primary

and secondary aged schools. This was investigated through an 18 month long study involving five hundred and fifty five schools. They emphasise the findings of Rudoe (2017) by highlighting that enacting policy against specific actions and/or individuals, without an effective implementation by teachers across the whole school through ethos, representation and inclusion then negates any desired effect the original policy brief held. The organisation RespectMe (2023) is a useful resource towards the main findings of the above authors, providing guidance for not only teachers and children about the specifics of bullying, including that of homophobic attitudes, but they also provide specific policy and ethos guidance for schools developing their climate. This guidance outlines the findings above relating to training, curriculum, and inclusion, with an emphasis on the idea of respect overall to limit the amount of pushback from religion and personal beliefs (Carrara *et al.*, 2016).

In summary, these studies have shown that although policies can hold great benefit towards challenging homophobic attitudes, the previously mentioned sections detailing the need for curriculum representation, teacher confidence, and teacher identity must be used in tandem to create attribution for basis towards these policies regardless of topic; thus, creating an established and whole school ethos (Warwick and Britain 2004).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Many of the points discussed by the above authors can be seen reflected in my prior placement experience within Scottish primary schools and further applied towards my future teaching career as a registered teacher, post-reflection. These experiences have followed the standards for provisional registration (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021). However, my immense privilege of having these experiences must be acknowledged, as mentioned prior, as

Scotland can be seen as leading the example towards LGBTQ+ representation and inclusion (Stone and Ferrar, 2021), when compared to experiences within other countries (Rankin, 2021). This has led me to be incredibly fortunate in my observations within schools due to the support network and resources already established within the country's education system when implementing LGBTQ+ inclusive education.

In general, my placement experiences as a queer identifying student teacher have been widely positive, with no pushback or instances of complaint about my presentation or believed identity. However, I have never been outward about my identity towards pupils at any point throughout placement. This was not due to any particular reason, and since reviewing literature pertaining to the identities of teachers (Donahue, 2007), I would opt to be as open as appropriate and honest when needed. Staff within these schools presented as very supportive and open to hear my opinion when challenging homophobic attitudes in classroom situations themselves. This was increasingly obvious to see due to a positive all-round ethos within these schools, affirming their actions. The schools discussed throughout my experiences were all situated within the same local authority within Central Scotland. By using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2020), a resource used to identify areas of deprivation by postcode, with 1 being the most deprived, and 10 being the least, my early years placement had a SIMD score of 10, my first level placement had a score of 1, and my second level placement also scored at a 10, showing the varying areas of the local authority. Therefore, experiences discussed (unless explicit about a specific stage) occurred in all 3, showing commonality regardless of socio-economic environment, and a further positive commonality of LGBTQ+ education and challenges occurring within the early years, negating the idea of presumed innocence (Renold, 2002).

Throughout all of my previous placement schools, teachers I observed were, in my opinion, competent and confident in challenging homophobic attitudes, often following a school wide restorative approach backed up by a comprehensive anti-bullying policy with homophobia acknowledgement (Goldstein, Collins and Halder 2007). Although stemming from various backgrounds, ages, and countries of origin, they all shared the same willingness to adapt and learn based on their own learner's individuality, engaging in training when offered to them. All of the schools had diverse learners within the catchment and emphasised respect above all, offering a whole school approach towards community and value.

One of the most encouraging things to me as a student teacher has been the increasing amount of representation of LGBTQ+ individuals and issues in curricula. I have observed teachers using LGBTQ+ character books, lessons on historical figures and events, and general representation through situational worksheets in areas such as mathematics. However, there was a consistent lack of general representation through premade hard resources such as textbooks or teaching guides which had a set publication date. After completing this enquiry, it has shifted my view on this being a deliberate exclusion, to now consider lack of funding and resources when updating and keeping them current. This was further solidified when observing teachers using online, often teacher made, resources such as Twinkl (2023) and TES (2023), both of which are UK based websites with ready-made resources to buy or download that are constantly updated and made tailored to curriculum, showing representation often in its content. However, it is unclear if these resources are made by primarily gay teachers themselves, or whether this is a new UK push by teachers following Scotland's announcement. This beneficial representation has also been seen in observed RSHP lessons, with teachers opting to use the ready-made resources at varying stages, at appropriate age levels.

I have little experience to discuss relating to LGBTQ+ teachers. The grand majority of the gay teachers I worked with were not open towards pupils, only being open (from what I observed) towards staff and fellow adults in social situations. It is unclear to me whether there are specific reasons for this, as I did not work with them personally. Very few were open, to an extent, by displaying photos of their families and small pride imagery such as flags. Regardless of personal choice, the above observations were solidified and supported by a comprehensive anti-bullying policy, creating a zero-tolerance effect within the school ethos, resulting in a safe environment feel.

Overall, all of my experiences within schools within this local authority seemed to be on top of challenging homophobic attitudes and setting a school ethos in place, emphasising respect, tolerance, and inclusion to further support this. The interventions and preventions put in place were also observed further up into secondary school within the cluster, with LGBTQ+ imagery.

Through spending time with this enquiry topic, I feel as if I have developed my ideas of challenging homophobic attitudes and representation. In the past, the majority of my criticisms were linked to the idea that it was mainly deliberate exclusion or lack of care resulting in low representation and high instances of homophobic attitudes. However, after spending time in schools as well as reading relevant literature, I have developed my understanding from the viewpoint of existing teachers, as well as understanding their workload overall. From finding that homophobic attitudes need a cohesive school approach, I now understand that if a teacher's fellow school team does not share the same commitment to LGBTQ+ education and inclusion, it can reflect badly on the individual teacher, resulting in causation and frustration that previously attributed to conscious decision making. Overall, I think challenging homophobic attitudes

within the class is a necessary part of establishing a successful, safe, school, to at least a certain degree of acknowledgement and respect, as it ascertains the ethos and safety of the class as a whole. How teachers do this, I have learned, is never going to be a 'one-way fits all' situation due to a number of reasons; nothing previously mentioned is an overnight fix. In today's society, especially in urban areas, classrooms are rich in culture, language, and religion (Skepple, 2014), through its pupillage and requires care from the class teacher to assess what is best for their learners without causing more disruption yet not ignoring it, transparency, communication, and trust in the wider community.

In literature, I believe more needs to be done still within the younger years to create examples for countries where LGBTQ+ education is still a challenge. More so, this needs to be more inclusive in terms of sexuality, especially lesbian teachers, and additionally queer teachers of colour; the study participant pools should reflect their pupillage and population in a realistic and applicable light.

Going forward in my teaching career as a queer educator, I feel very confident overall towards challenging homophobic attitudes within my future classrooms. This is in part due to my fortunate experiences in initial teacher education, relating to inclusive modules and an overall social justice theme, as well as Scotland's outlook and ability to have LGBTQ+ education and rights often in the news in a positive or critical light, constantly informing practice. This has equipped me with the necessary skills, as identified as a need in literature (Johnson, 2016; McCormack and Gleeson, 2010), post university to create applications. However, going forward in my practice, I will endeavour to continuously engage in relevant and new training relating to inclusion and challenging homophobic attitudes to keep my knowledge relevant and engage in reflection throughout my career. By being transparent about my practice and having a wider

community outlook, I intend to limit any controversy surrounding LGBTQ+ inclusion, identity, and policy, to in turn challenge homophobic attitudes by non-conventional interventions, by highlighting the theme of respect and kindness within the school and classroom ethos.

CONCLUSION

The studies discussed within this enquiry have highlighted the importance of addressing and challenging homophobic attitudes amongst students within classrooms across the world, whilst giving recommendations towards specific steps and actions that can be undertaken. It has highlighted that the need for challenging homophobic attitudes within schools is still very much apparent, despite a certain extent of improvement over the years. The qualitative research presented in this enquiry has shown it's worth through providing a form for the voice of pupils as well as LG teachers to be heard, whilst truly giving insight into classrooms of today. However, the research also highlights potential limitations and areas for further development, such as the need for more inclusive and representative research samples to include the lacking areas of primary schools and lesbian teachers, as well as sustained recommendations with the idea of generating application, not just awareness.

One of the main findings throughout the studies was the importance of effective teacher training, mentor programmes, and continual professional development courses. The need for application, not just awareness, applied to all 3 of these areas, equipping student teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to foster a positive classroom ethos as well as enact policy effectively. The development of teacher training modules within university programmes is necessary to prepare teachers as well as being able to provide them with a safe reflective space to challenge their own bias and prejudices.

Another key finding in the studies was the need for school policy implementation in the form of anti-bullying and representative sex education. These can be vital in fostering the idea of an inclusive environment, but they must be implemented effectively by class teachers while being surrounded in a wider inclusive curriculum and positive ethos. The research has shown that policies alone are not enough and must be supported, linking back to the need for teachers to be trained in order to challenge homophobic attitudes effectively, and therefore ensuring policies are implemented. Additionally, this representation through the curriculum was shown to have benefits towards normalisation and inclusivity. This was amplified further and found to be easier to implement when done gradually and from a wider scope such as textbook imagery and lessons pertaining to role models.

Furthermore, research has also shown the importance of teacher identities and the need for gay teachers to feel comfortable to be open about their sexuality. This provides students with representation, role models and a normalised inclusive environment that allows them to feel safe and supported. The research has shown that schools with a higher number of openly supportive staff have a lower rate of victimisation and a stronger sense of community amongst students. This reinforces the need for teachers to challenge homophobic attitudes and to create a safe and inclusive environment.

However, the steps found to be effective in challenging homophobic attitudes in classrooms are not an immediate fix alone. A wider school approach must be considered due to the diverse learners in modern schooling, resulting in cultural, religious, and social differences. These too must be acknowledged under the theme of respect in the wider school community, encompassing parents, to limit controversy and build trust through transparency.

Overall, the research has shown that challenging homophobic attitudes in schools requires a multifaceted approach. Teacher identities and comfortability, inclusive curricula and overall confidence are all essential components of creating a safe and inclusive environment for gay pupils but can only be supported by a supportive and inclusive all round school ethos including policies regarding anti bullying. To ensure these policies are implemented and are effective, continual specialist professional development is also needed by organisations such as TIE (2023), to ensure the needs of pupils are being met continuously and effectively. The findings of this research can be applied to wider education systems to ensure all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, feel safe and supported in their identity, learning and individuality through an inclusive and equitable environment for all.

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