

# Exploring the Impact of an Anti-Homophobia and Anti-Transphobia Program on a Teacher Education Program: LGBTQ+ Pre-Service Teachers Identify Benefits and Challenges

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*Anti-oppressive pedagogical practices that counter the marginalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer, and/or questioning youth continue to foster new understanding in teacher education. Researchers note that many pre-service teachers are not prepared to address classroom concerns regarding homophobia, heterosexism, and cisnormativity, fail to identify biases in curricular materials, and resist ideas related to the intersectionality of race, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, and sexuality. While Canadian teacher education programs generally espouse a commitment to equity education, there continues to be a need to provide explicit education on how to create safe and inclusive classrooms and schools for LGBTQ+ learners. The voices of LGBTQ+ pre-service teacher educators are particularly important in terms of understanding what challenges are reduced or remain in teacher education programs adopting an anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic stance. Results from our ongoing work suggests that when faculties of education advocate for safe and positive climates, LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers can bring their full selves into the program. In this article, we explore how the anti-oppressive training related to LGBTQ+ learners and inclusive curricula impacted the experiences of pre-service LGBTQ+ teachers in our program, as presented through their perceptions of who they were in the program, their concerns about who they might be in schools, and their suggestions for acknowledging and implementing anti-oppressive education in formal and informal educational spaces.*

*Les pratiques anti-oppressives pédagogiques qui combattent la marginalisation de jeunes personnes lesbiennes, gaies, bisexuelles, transgenres, bispirituelles, allosexuelles ou en questionnement (LGBTQ+) continuent à favoriser une nouvelle conception de la formation des enseignants. Les chercheurs notent que plusieurs enseignants en formation ne sont pas prêts à traiter des questions en classe qui portent sur l'homophobie, l'hétérosexisme et la cisnormativité; ne savent pas reconnaître les préjugés dans le matériel pédagogique; et résistent aux idées liées à l'intersectionnalité de la race, la classe, l'ethnicité, le genre, la capacité et la sexualité. Alors que les programmes de formation des enseignants au Canada adhèrent de manière générale à un engagement envers l'éducation équitable, le besoin de fournir une éducation explicite sur la création de classes et d'écoles sécuritaires pour les apprenants LGBTQ+ persiste. Les voix des formateurs LGBTQ+ d'enseignants sont particulièrement importantes pour comprendre les défis qui sont amoindris et les défis qui subsistent dans les programmes de formation*

*d'enseignants qui adoptent une position anti-homophobe et anti-transphobe. Les résultats de notre travail en cours portent à croire que lorsque les facultés d'éducation préconisent un climat sécuritaire et positif, les enseignants LGBTQ+ en formation ont l'occasion d'être authentiques et entiers dans le programme. Dans cet article, nous explorons l'impact qu'a eu la formation anti-oppressive en lien avec les apprenants LGBTQ+ et un curriculum inclusif sur les expériences des enseignants en formation dans notre programme, tel que révélé par leurs perceptions de la personne qu'ils étaient dans le programme, leurs préoccupations quant à la personne qu'ils pourraient être dans les écoles et leurs suggestions portant sur la reconnaissance et la mise en œuvre d'une éducation anti-oppressive dans des milieux éducatifs formels et informels.*

Teacher educators globally are facing critical challenges, particularly in how to prepare pre-service teachers to view schools as situated in broader social contexts and to foster their understanding of social justice advocacy as part of their responsibilities. Given the complexity of teaching students from diverse backgrounds, teacher education has responded in different programmatic ways to address interlocking forms of oppression around race, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, and sexuality (Cochran-Smith, 2004). While anti-oppressive pedagogical practices that counter the marginalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer, and/or questioning (LGBTQ+<sup>1</sup>) youth continue to foster new understanding in teacher education (Batchelor, Ramos, & Neiswander, 2018; Brant, 2017; Clark, 2010), researchers note that many pre-service teachers are not prepared to address classroom concerns regarding homophobia and heterosexism (Grace & Wells, 2006; Kumashiro, 2002, 2004; Stiegler, 2008), fail to identify biases in curricular materials (Brant, 2017), and resist ideas related to the intersectionality of race and sexuality (Shelton & Barnes, 2016).

Although Canadian teacher education programs generally espouse a commitment to equity education (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2017), most do not provide explicit education on how to create safe and inclusive classrooms and schools for LGBTQ+ learners (Brant, 2017; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2011). Teacher education programs, generally, are documented as failing at providing safe learning environments for LGBTQ+ teacher candidates (Airton & Koecher, 2019, 2014; Cosier, 2016; Dykes & Delpont, 2018; Fleet, 2016; Grace & Benson, 2000). As faculties of education are being called to be leaders for social justice (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2017) we need to examine the spaces we create for visible and invisible minoritized groups.

We are mindful that sexual minority and gender non-conforming individuals have not enjoyed the same protections or experiences in law or the workforce as their cisgender and heterosexual (CH) peers. In Canada, up until 1969, non-heterosexual relations could be punished by law (Egan & Flavell, 2006). In 2005, gay marriage became legally acceptable in Canada, yet there is still a “pervasive homophobic culture of threat where physical, emotional, and psychological violence remain realities for many queer persons in everyday life, learning, and work spaces” (Grace & Wells, 2006, p. 828). Later in the paper, we examine the global context of LGBTQ+ education.

To push back against cis-normativity, homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity and to prepare pre-service teachers to oppose their presence in schools, scholars argue, LGBTQ+ awareness education is essential in teacher education programs (Callaghan, 2018; Goldstein, 2019; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Robinson & Forfolja, 2008; Niemi, 2016; Schneider & Dimito, 2008; Short, 2013). The teacher program within which this study is situated is one of the few

with an explicit mandate to do this work (Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2014a; Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2014b; Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2017; Mitton-Kükner, Kearns, & Tompkins 2015; Tompkins, Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, 2017; Tompkins, Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, 2019). Our longitudinal study has been exploring how pre-service teachers take up social justice education within a B.Ed. program where there is a mandate to develop social justice within the faculty, to name and examine different forms of oppression, to model anti-oppressive teaching practices, and to share these values across courses and disciplines. The voices of LGBTQ+ pre-service teacher educators are particularly important in terms of understanding what challenges are reduced or remain in teacher education programs adopting an anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia stance (Airtton & Koecher, 2019). As cisgender, heterosexual teacher educators, we felt it was necessary to write this article to show what we are learning about the LGBTQ+ awareness education training program through the perspectives of LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers. Results from our ongoing work suggests that when the climate improves, LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers can bring their full selves into the program. Our focus in this article is to explore the experiences of four pre-service LGBTQ+ educators in a two-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program who identified what they learned in response to the program's explicit articulation of creating positive spaces for LGBTQ+ learners as it informs anti-oppressive pedagogy.

### **Teacher Education and LGBTQ+ Pre-Service Teachers**

Teacher education programs that hope to challenge systems of oppression must help teacher candidates recognize the multiple and often subtle and nuanced ways that teaching is set within power dynamics in public schooling. Callaghan (2018) recently noted how “many twenty-first century studies continue to reveal oppression and discrimination towards sexual minorities in school settings (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Goldstein, 2006; Meyer & Stader, 2009)” (p. 24). Further adding to the hostile climate that LGBTQ+ students face in schools is research (Eribon, 2004; Taylor et al., 2015) that noted how the overall teaching profession trails other professional workplaces in acknowledging and protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. Cosier (2016) argued that “teacher education programs worth their salt engage students in praxis that enables them to enter the profession armed with a full understanding of the politics of teaching” (p. 369). However, Taylor et al. (2015), in a national survey of LGBTQ+ and CH<sup>2</sup> Canadian Teachers about their preparedness to take up LGBTQ+ education, found some very discouraging results:

Almost two-thirds of participants who completed their B.Ed. degrees in the previous five years reported that they had not been at all prepared for sexual and gender diversity education in their B.Ed. degrees. Participants reported that few courses, if any, incorporated LGBTQ+ content. (p. 24)

The same educators in the study felt even less prepared to engage with issues around gender diversity in schools, and “64% of participants felt that they were not prepared ... and only 4% felt they were very well prepared” (p. 137). In addition to feeling unprepared and uninformed about LGBTQ+ issues, many teachers reported that they were actively counselled to avoid engaging in disrupting discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation during their teacher education studies. The research surfaced that this situation is far more problematic for LGBTQ+ teachers. As pre-service teachers, they were far more likely, by a wider array of individuals, to

have been discouraged from challenging heteronormativity and transphobia in schools: “In all instances, LGBTQ+ educators were more likely to have received advice and more likely to have been advised never to bring LGBTQ+ issues up in class” (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 138). Family members, other students and supervising teachers [during field placements] were more likely to advise them to never bring up LGBTQ+ issues in the class.

Taylor et al.’s study supports subsequent research by Meyer and Leonardi (2017) in which the authors noted that pre-service teachers received little formal instruction on leadership topics related to sexual and gender diversity in their teacher preparation programs. Dejean (2010) declared there is a continuing “discursive silence around queer matters in education” (p. 234) in most teacher education programs, which is problematic for LGBTQ+ youth but equally so for LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers as they enter their field experiences and later their future classrooms as educators. Pre-service teachers who aim to engage in social justice education are vulnerable, as they are learning in systems in which the power differential with their cooperating teacher and university faculty advisor is considerable. LGBTQ+ candidates are even more precariously positioned than their CH peers in this manner (Taylor et al., 2015).

Wright and Smith (2015) noted that being unable and unsure of how to advocate on behalf of the LGBTQ+ students is very problematic and a source of conflict for LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers. Their own level of safety positions them precariously and limits their ability to advocate. To be effective advocates “educators need to feel safe and accepted to provide the best education for their students” (p. 395). Likewise, knowing whether one should come out as an LGBTQ+ pre-service teacher is unclear in many school climates. In our own research, in which we followed queer pre-service teachers into fulltime teaching, we noted that they were very unsure of whether to come out in field placements, job interviews, and subsequently in teaching positions (Tompkins et al., 2019). Coming out is complex, complicated, and can have benefits and risks associated with it (Butler-Wall et al., 2016; Cosier, 2016; Lunden, 2016; Rudoie, 2014). It is an important personal and professional question for LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers, and it is most often “silenced” in teacher education programs. It is problematic on several levels. Firstly, not feeling safe to be out, reflects a discriminatory school climate.

... no number of classroom discussions about gender stereotypes and homophobia will create a nurturing environment if teachers and parents are afraid to come out. A school that’s a protective community for LGBTQ+ adults is a school that’s going to be safe for kids. (Butler-Wall et al., 2016, p. 24)

Secondly, Tompkins et al., (2019) noted that not being out, and accepted, led to a sense of personal and professional isolation for some beginning LGBTQ+ educators. Considering the role teacher collaboration plays in building the competence and confidence of early career teachers, perceptions of professional isolation caused them to be professionally isolated. Such experiences can negatively influence a teacher’s career. Harris and Gray (2014) remind us that

Working within the heteronormative space of school has sometimes devastating effects upon queer people working and studying in such places...schools are spaces that position sexuality as private while simultaneously enabling heterosexual teachers to speak about their sexual identities unproblematically (Gray, 2013; Harris, 2013; Horvitz, 2011, Grace & Benson, 2000) and this leads to ontological, epistemological and spiritual isolation for queer teachers. (p. 4)

The research literature to date, while limited, does suggest some immediate actions that teacher education programs can take to better mentor and support LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers. Taylor et al. (2015) suggested that the professional development of university faculty supervisors to learn and discuss how LGBTQ+ content can be incorporated in course and field experiences is essential. They also urge teacher educators to ensure the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity curriculum standards from K-12 in all subject areas through partnerships with education ministries, school districts, and teacher organizations. Pascor (2007) noted that Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), commonly used to support LGBTQ+ students in public schools, can create social and professional support for LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers.

### **Providing a Broader Context for LGBTQ+ Education**

Jones (2019) has criticized research on LGBTQ+ education within teacher education programs as too narrow in focus. Jones (2019) found that most of the literature on LGBTQ+ education in pre-service teacher education is from the United States (U.S.), Canada, or South Africa and that these research studies relied on “contextually-specific factors” (p. 287), factors not transferable to other global contexts in which many educators may find themselves. The journey towards LGBTQ+ rights and later LGBTQ+ education varies from country to country and within countries. Within many Commonwealth countries, often legislation, sparked by lobbying, paved the way for social change. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) protects citizens from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Since education in Canada is a provincial responsibility, different provinces further entrenched LGBTQ+ education with particular policy documents. In Ontario in 2009, for example, the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* was created which provides directions to all schools on how to reduce discrimination such as homophobia (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009; as cited in Jones, 2019). In the United Kingdom, the *United Kingdom Equality Act* (2006) was created which soon evolved into the *United Kingdom Sexual Orientation Regulation* (2007), whose purpose was to reduce homophobia, while the Australia Human Rights Commission (2007) introduced legislation protecting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (Jones, 2019).

However, in the U.S., efforts tended to be more grassroots led. Gay Straight Alliances or GSAs (more frequently called Gender Sexuality Alliances) were created at schools led by coalitions of LGBTQ+ students, families, and some educators. A network of committed educators in Massachusetts created GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) in 1990 to “ensure that schools are safe places for all students by calling attention to homophobia and devising ways to eradicate it” (Jones, 2019, p. 291). In reaction to notable increases in teenage suicides among LGBTQ+ individuals, American human rights activists launched an internet campaign “It Gets Better<sup>3</sup>” (Savage, n.d.). However, there has been considerable pushback to LGBTQ+ education in public schools in the United States. In response to GLSEN’s National of Day of Silence to draw attention to homophobia and transphobia, the organization Focus on the Family (FOTF), in collaboration with the Alliance Defence Fund, (a US Christian non-profit organization), has created counter demonstrations, such as the Day of Dialogue<sup>4</sup> (Jones, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2013).

Globally there are many countries in which LGBTQ+ individuals face discrimination ranging from sanctions to the death penalty (Jones, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2013). The world is far from an even playing field when it comes to protection against discrimination based on sexual

orientation and gender identity. Using a human rights approach, one can understand the various international organizations and non-government organizations that support LGBTQ+ education internationally. The list includes The United Nations Human Rights Council (2011), UNESCO's policy consultations on bullying of LGBTQ+ students in schools, (2012); the Global Network Against Homophobia and Transphobia Bullying in Schools (Kosciw & Pizmony-Levy, 2013), and the World Health Organization's promotion of LGBTI rights in education (2016). Equipping all pre-service teachers with this human rights approach will enable future teachers to feel empowered to see possibilities for action and change that they may not otherwise.

### **Context of Study: Sequencing of Curricular Expectations in our Teacher Education Program**

Our teacher education program uses anti-oppressive teaching practices to challenge racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia. As part of mandatory foundation courses, all pre-service teachers in this B.Ed. program are required to participate in LGBTQ+ awareness education. The design of the two-year, four-term, Bachelor of Education program and its entrenched LGBTQ+ awareness education program has been described elsewhere (Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2014a; Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2014b; Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2017; Mitton-Kükner, Kearns, & Tompkins, 2015; Tompkins, Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, 2017). LGBTQ+ education is embedded in compulsory courses in Year 1, Terms 1 and 2, with opportunities for further education in Year 2, Terms 3 and 4, as illustrated in Table 1. Anti-oppressive teaching practices are intentionally set into the rhythm of two Year 1 courses (EDUC 433 and 435). EDUC 433 aims to establish inclusive learning spaces, with particular emphasis on interrelated issues of power, privilege, equity, social justice, race, class, gender, and sexuality, while EDUC 435 endeavors to examine instructional and assessment decision making with the aim of creating and sustaining inclusive classroom environments. By situating the compulsory LGBTQ+ awareness education program in core mandatory courses, pre-service teachers experience foundational content that prepares them social justice and advocacy roles in schools. In doing so, intentionally and explicitly, this approach has meant that we go beyond simply presenting LGBTQ+ identities in that individuals' identities are understood as intersecting with interconnected forms of experience (race, gender, sexual orientation, class etc.) to inform all parts of life. For example, in discussing gender we have found that in the courses we teach and in the training of the LGBTQ+ awareness education program, we must focus on transgender concerns within the LGBTQ+ acronym to differentiate between gender and sexuality (Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2017).

Important to note is that in response to pre-service teachers' positive responses to the training in Year 1 of the program, we developed Level 3 as further opportunities to enhance their professional learning with a specific focus on LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum in year two. The Level 4 Train the Trainer equips pre-service candidates with workshop facilitation skills.

By situating the compulsory LGBTQ+ awareness education program in core mandatory courses, pre-service teachers experience foundational content that prepares them for the kinds of topics and issues to be discussed as part of the training. We believe this relationship between the program and courses contributes to their participation in the optional workshops held in Year 2 in Terms 3 and 4 and willingness, as well as competencies, to implement LGBTQ+ inclusive practices during classroom field experiences. In response to pre-service teachers' positive responses to the training in Year 1 of the program, we developed Levels 3 and 4, as

Table 1.

*LGBTQ+ Awareness Education Program in The Two-Year B.Ed. Program*

Year 1 Term 1 Compulsory	Year 1 Term 2 Compulsory	Year 2 Term 3 Optional Opportunity	Year 2 Term 4 Optional Opportunity
EDUC 433 Sociology of Education	EDUC 435 Inclusion 1	Students take a range of courses	Students take a range of courses
LGBTQ+ Awareness Program: Level 1 (2.5 hours)	LGBTQ+ Awareness Program: Level 2 (2.5 hours)	LGBTQ+ Awareness Program: Level 3: <i>Exploring Curricular Possibilities</i> (2.5 hours)	LGBTQ+ Awareness Program: Level 4: <i>Train the Trainer</i> (4 hours)
Field Experience (5 weeks)	Field Experience (6 weeks)	Field Experience (5 weeks)	Field Experience (6 weeks)

further opportunities to enhance their professional learning with a specific focus on LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum in Level 3 and the goal of becoming trainers of the LGBTQ+ awareness program in Level 4.

**Theoretical Framework**

Informing our thinking in the engagement of this study, are two conceptualizations of anti-oppressive pedagogy that we have come to understand as interrelated. First, Kumashiro (2002) emphasized that to embrace and implement anti-oppressive pedagogy, knowledge that counters the marginalization of individuals and groups is required, particularly in how educators need to understand the necessity for unsettling dominant knowledge systems. From this position, Kumashiro asserted, learning about diversity is not about alleviating knowledge gaps, but is about “disrupting the knowledge that is already there (since the harmful/partial knowledges that an individual already has are what need to change)” (p. 42). Underpinning this assertion is the idea that mainstream knowledge is never value free; for example, why ideas like heteronormativity and cisnormativity in schools are positioned as social norms in how they are unidentified and exclude individuals of non-conforming gender expression, embodiment, and sexual orientation (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018;). Cumming-Potvin and Martino (2018), for instance, described heteronormativity and cisnormativity in schools as rituals in which the absence of texts and content portraying LGBTQ+ lives are communicated and normalized through formal and informal curricula.

A second key construct on which we draw are the different levels of disruptions and ally work as identified by Goldstein, Russell, and Daley (2007). Goldstein et al. explicitly defined the terms safe, positive, and queering moments as part of anti-oppressive work to clarify the variety of approaches students and teachers implemented, experienced and witnessed in schools in terms of LGBTQ+ oppression. We agree with Goldstein et al. and interpret their creation of “safe” spaces for LGBTQ+ youth as a commitment an individual makes to human rights where no person is negatively singled out because of race, religion, ability, gender, or sexual orientation. An approach that may be more actively observed in someone’s actions is the commitment to creating “positive” spaces for LGBTQ+ youth, particularly methods that demonstrate inclusion and affirmation for LGBTQ+ identities through curriculum, pedagogical practices, and inclusion of LGBTQ+ community members in and outside of school. Of the three

approaches conceptualized by Goldstein et al., the formation of “queering” spaces in schools is more tenuous to describe. Goldstein et al. expressed it as moments of disruption in which individuals create spaces that deconstruct heteronormativity and cisnormativity, spaces which challenge “notions of sex/gender, race, class, and religion among other social locations” (p. 187), in which LGBTQ+ individuals are not oppressed.

In our interviews with pre-service teachers, regularly, we have been able to identify how the LGBTQ+ awareness education program has informed pre-service teachers’ consciousness of homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity in schools, and, perhaps, more importantly, their responsiveness to disrupting such occurrences as well as proactively seeking opportunities to be inclusive in their teaching practices and act as LGBTQ+ allies. In this article, we show how the training impacted the experiences of pre-service LGBTQ+ teachers in our program, as presented through their perceptions of who they were in the program, their concerns about who they might be in schools, and their suggestions for improvement in our teacher education program.

## **Methodology and Methods**

As researchers, we embrace the tenets of qualitative research and its emphasis on rich, thick descriptions and the understanding that emerges over time through inductive analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Key to understanding qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell assert, are four interrelated characteristics, which emphasize the following: a focus on meaning making and understanding, the subjective perspective of the researcher as part of data collection and analysis, construction of new understanding happens inductively, and the representation of findings are highly descriptive. The characteristics of qualitative research informed the research design for this ongoing multi-year study (Kearns et al., 2017; Mitton-Kükner et al., 2015; Tompkins et al., 2019) into the impact of the LGBTQ+ awareness training program upon pre-service teachers’ knowledge of, willingness, and competencies to create inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ youth and allies in schools. As qualitative researchers drawing upon a critical worldview (Kumashiro, 2002; Goldstein et al., 2007), important for this study was to consider the interplay of the LGBTQ+ awareness training program, the pedagogy of compulsory courses, and the expectations of our teacher education program, and on participants’ lived experiences as LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers in the midst of all that. The purpose of this particular thread of the study, where we engaged pre-service teachers who identify as LGBTQ+, emerged out of our interactions with these individuals as they engaged in course work, with the training program, in the hallways and informal learning places in the education faculty, and finally as they became trainers themselves, eager to facilitate the program in schools once they had graduated and moved into fulltime teaching careers. To better understand the experiences of these pre-service teachers we conducted a group interviews in March 2014, in the final term of their B.Ed. studies and prior to their final field experience. The participants who took part in this group interview were out in their program and had taken up roles as trainers in the LGBTQ+ awareness training program upon completion of their own training in Levels 1-3.

We chose to conduct a group interview as the primary method of data collection as all participants had knowledge of the topic (LGBTQ+ awareness education program), had completed all levels of training, and all had the opportunity to implement what they had learned from the training during classroom field experiences. This method was also well aligned with previous years of the study in which we had engaged former pre-service teachers about the



impact of the LGBTQ+ training program upon their understandings of social justice pedagogy. The composition of this group interview was unlike previous interviews,<sup>5</sup> in that these individuals identified as LGBTQ+. This specific group conversation happened on March 6, 2014, was approximately 90 minutes in length, and was transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. This method was well aligned with our understanding of critical qualitative research, as it enabled us to foster conversation amongst a group of individuals whose lived experiences as LGBTQ+ individuals could potentially inform our teacher education program, and contribute to how we engage in and prepare our pre-service teachers to engage in anti-oppressive work. During the group interview, there was a great deal of interactivity amongst the participants, as they knew each other very well having been classmates for two years. We set the interview up in this manner, as we knew the conditions were there for respectful, insightful conversation based upon what we had observed of them over time in the B.Ed. program.

We do acknowledge that one group interview is limited; however, because these individuals were our students throughout the duration of the program, we were unable to interview them until near the end of their studies. Ideally, a group interview would have happened each time they experienced a new level of training. This interview happened at the end of their time in the B.Ed. program, when they were no longer our students and when concerns about assessment no longer played a role in our interactions. In doing so, we believe we have some insights into their perspectives on the LGBTQ+ awareness education program while it was still a part of their recent memories.

Each researcher read the transcript of the interview individually and coded for recurring ideas, forming tentative ideas about the possible thematic categories. We then met to discuss our individual understanding of the data, shared identified codes and possible themes. Looking to create themes that were based upon patterns we had all found, we were mindful of establishing themes that were responsive to the original purpose of the research, were mutually exclusive, provided meaning of the phenomenon under inquiry, and were conceptually harmonious (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process enabled us to pinpoint four major themes, which captured participants' understanding of the impact of the LGBTQ+ awareness education program, as it is situated within the overall teacher education program, upon their experiences and understanding of who they could be as teachers: (1) being out in the program and feeling safe, (2) seeing teaching as opportunities to be advocates, (3) acknowledging multiple levels of heteronormative and cisgender oppression in formal and informal spaces, and (4) concerns about transitioning into the profession in unfamiliar settings.

## **Findings**

In our analysis, we found that the participants responded positively to the LGTBQ awareness education program and described the importance of its positioning within course work in relation to the B.Ed. program's explicit focus on challenging genderism, heteronormativity and cisnormativity. In response to these conditions, participants explained they felt safe being out in the program and this further enabled them to take on explicit advocacy roles to foster awareness of LGBTQ+ learners in school contexts and to disrupt social norms that excluded individuals of non-conforming gender expression, embodiment, and sexual orientation. As part of this recorded conversation, they also expressed their worries about moving into new, and unknown, school settings following graduation and how this transition might inform who they could be as educators. They also shared their experiences outside of our classrooms that challenged their

beings as they continuously navigate heteronormative, cisnormative spaces.

**Theme one: Being out in the program and feeling safe.** Pre-service teachers spoke about their ability to be safe and out in our teacher education program. They emphasized the training, and its positioning as part of Year 1 course work, was important and helpful in several ways. It enhanced their understanding about the possibilities of being fully part of this teacher education community; they felt their identities were valued; and they witnessed the impact the training, and course work, had on their peers, as they all learned about the necessity of disrupting homophobia and transphobia in schools and strategies for LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum. For example, Rose, as she looked back on her first year in the program, and a moment she experienced during Level 1 training in Term 1, said the following:

In the first year, I wasn't trying to hide it [identity] or anything, but I wasn't openly like: 'Hey everybody I'm gay' ... during our community circle [in class] everyone was just so supportive of what was going on and telling these different stories ... I had just experienced, a week before, being called a dyke [on the street], which was the first time I had experienced something like that, and so my heart was beating out of my chest, but I felt just so comfortable to tell that story and I came out to the class ... I felt supported. I felt cared for, and I wanted to share the story of what it was like being called a dyke to the class and then by the time [Level 2 happened in Term 2] by that point, I was an advocate.

As Rose shared what had been a hurtful incident, we were struck by her emphasis on the support she felt from her classmates and how their positive response to the training seemingly informed her decision to share this story, and her ability to be, later, more explicit in her advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights and inclusive education. Important to note is that Rose experienced Level 1 training as part of the course EDUC 433, approximately midway through the course at week 5.<sup>6</sup> The timing of the training is important, as by that point students had learned about a number of topics (power, privilege, equity, social justice, race, class, gender, and sexuality) that are critical to inclusive education and had also, under the guidance of the instructor, built a classroom community, and relationships, shaped by agreed upon social norms.<sup>7</sup> Kumashiro (2002) emphasized that to embrace tenets of anti-oppressive pedagogy, disrupting knowledge systems perceived as dominant is critical. The Level 1 training that Rose positively experienced lived in relationship with five weeks of mindful teaching in which her instructor spent time building community while she interrupted unsettling perceptions with topics that exposed and countered the marginalization of individuals and groups in society and schools.

All of the participants described similar positive experiences; Dennis, a pre-service teacher who had done his first undergraduate degree in an urban context, extended his story to explain that what surprised him was the success of the training in light of where the program is located. Dennis explained,

So it was really refreshing to come to these two [Levels 1 and 2 training] sessions which are in rural Nova Scotia. One of the reasons why I chose this program is because of the strong social justice component ... to actually see people be so receptive to LGBTQ+, to have people that are so open to social justice, and LGBTQ views, is so refreshing and it's just not what you expect when you come to such a small town. I have had nothing but great experiences.

Dennis's comments in this moment reaffirm what we have observed and experienced over many years with pre-service teachers as facilitators of Positive Space Training. Investment of time,

programming nuanced to teacher education, a willing faculty, and supportive administration, in combination with the intent to create a positive learning climate, we believe, has informed the impact the training has made upon participants.

**Theme two: Seeing teaching as opportunities to be advocates.** Participants described how participation in the LGBTQ+ awareness education program allowed them to examine and re-conceptualize their own experiences of oppression and transform it into activism and leadership. During the group interview, participants explained that some of what fueled their own confidence to intervene, when necessary, and proactively advocate, were the activities they experienced in the training as well as the resources they had received. All of the pre-service teachers had been able to show how the training, that is the combination of activities and the resources shared with them, positively impacted their teaching as articulated through examples from the field. For example, Kelsey, reflecting upon a recent classroom moment explained,

So just in regards to professional development ... if I hadn't had a train the trainer experience [this moment I am about to share would have been challenging] ... one day I was teaching and one of my kids in grade seven and a little boy in grade eight, who I had never met before, looks at the other one and says 'You're a fucking faggot.' I was in the middle of a lesson and (angry sigh) ... I was like 'those words are not accepted here. If [name of cooperating teacher] had heard you, you would be right down to the office. But I am going to give you one chance because middle schoolers say things they shouldn't all the time. It is part of their brain makeup ... So this is your one chance. I don't want to hear that language here.' In my head, I was so mad at the same time. They [the students] saw it, and they were like 'thank you for giving us another chance.'

We note the importance Kelsey assigned to the training for handling what must have been a challenging teaching moment. Her willingness to address the language rather than remove the student from the classroom, as she seemingly had observed her cooperating teacher do, suggests she was confident in her ability to identify the root of the problem (the language being used) and in her competency to use student friendly language to show how the language was not a welcome part of this classroom and their responsibility to think upon the language they use in the future.

Another pre-service teacher, Craig, attributed the resources he received from Levels 1-3 training as playing an important part in creating an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum. Craig commented,

Resources that I have gotten from all three sessions [Levels 1-3] have been incredible. Like just last semester I taught the pursuit of justice in history twelve...we did essentially case studies...we went through different justice issues with the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, Aboriginal rights...and one of the issues that we talked about was LGBTQ+ issues and, kind of, the history...I had planned to only spend a period on LGBTQ+ issues but my students just got so into it...we spent two and a half periods on it. Because they just had so many questions, they had so much they wanted to talk about, and there was more research they wanted to do. It was awesome, so I got a lot out of it. I became more prepared. Even me, being a gay man, it doesn't necessarily mean that I have all the tools to support other LGBTQ+ students right? I got a lot out of the training in the sense that being able to support students as well.

Craig's enthusiasm for the training and his emphasis on the professional learning he

experienced in response, highlights the potential, and complexity, of this kind of explicit training. Making explicit the activities, content and strategies used as part of the training, seemed to create for Craig what Goldstein et al. (2007) refer to as a “queering moment” in that he learned how he might create such curricular spaces in his own teaching to challenge notions related to interlocking forms of oppression. We were struck by Craig’s description in that not only did he feel personally supported, but it also enabled him to be an inclusive curriculum planner and facilitator and see how the process of teaching and learning could also be infused with advocacy.

**Theme three: Acknowledging multiple levels of heteronormative and cisgender oppression in formal and informal spaces.** Our LGBTQ+ awareness education program encourages pre-service teachers to move towards “queering” and name and challenge the oppressive subtleties in schools and society are systematic and largely invisible to heterosexual and cisgender teachers and administrators. As pre-service teachers who identify as LGBTQ+, our participants were able to describe moments of conflict with how they were seen and how they saw themselves. For example, Kelsey identified how her personal appearance seemed to shape how others thought they should, and could, interact with her. Kelsey noted how societal expectations about gender presentation are imposed frequently imposed upon her and explained,

And I find because I am more masculine [in appearance] ... a lot of times my straight friends, they punch me or hit me because I’m masculine and I am like How? Why? And just really aggressive towards me and I am a sensitive soul. And I am like ‘Why are you doing this?’ ... I was talking to the girls downstairs in my building, [and I told them] I was talking to my mom last night, [and my Mom said] ‘I am really going to miss you.’ [The girls downstairs said] ‘You cry?’ And I am like ‘Are you kidding?’ It is just like those stereotypes and then having that conversation with my girlfriend. My girlfriend is super feminine [in appearance] but, realistically, she is more masculine than I am. I cry over writing a damn paper...and she is like ‘You’ll get through it. It’s fine.’ Gender [expression] is a huge topic on top of LBGTQ ...

Kelsey reminded us that although our teacher education attempts to espouse inclusive teaching and learning environments, curricula, and practices, challenging heteronormativity and cisnormativity in and out of school, as someone who is LGBTQ+, it is challenging to navigate and reveals how such rituals (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018) are deeply engrained with many of the pre-service teachers we teach. Kelsey suggested that troubling in this moment was how her friends’ views of her appearance seemed to narrowly shape their understanding of her. To encounter such moments repeatedly, we believe, must be simply exhausting and further emphasizes the importance of gender education in schools alongside LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum. Re-teaching gender and re-thinking curriculum that is inclusive, we believe, is a task for all teachers; deconstructing the gender binary, seeing gender as a continuum full of identity possibilities and acknowledging the complexity of relationships is crucial work.

While the participants of the group interview were in fierce agreement on this point, it was also apparent that engaging in social justice work can be challenging. Dennis, for instance, showed how he felt in response to such involvement during field experience.

I really only had experience with the grade sevens I taught; but, the first time I heard a derogatory term it, sort of, brought me back to a very vulnerable time that I had and I didn’t stop [the students]. The second time it happened, I did. I felt a lot more, I guess, equipped in going back and seeing my

material I had in my binder from [Level 1 Training] and knowing what things to say and how to say it ... I can't speak for everyone, but, for myself, hearing someone at that age say something like that brought me back to a time where I felt very powerless ...

As Dennis shared, he articulated that he knew the importance of intervening, and yet, he acknowledged, was unable to in this moment. On an optimistic note, Dennis showed how he learned from this encounter and returned to his classroom feeling more prepared to interrupt and educate in ways that were respectful all in the room, including himself.

In these learning conversations we were reminded and humbled as teacher educators that the attitudes present at the macro level can be and are replicated at the micro level of the informal and formal learning spaces in our program. Dennis, quite hesitantly, explained an incident where LGBTQ+ posters were removed from an informal learning space in our program.

There have been a number of [LGBTQ+ positive] posters that have been taken down [in a resource center]. There is one still up ... I never want to read into things too much but whenever you see stuff being taken down and I still have the posters. I took them from the garbage can and I took them to my place. There was one about the two moms and the one with the soccer player. You don't want to jump on conclusions and you don't want to make assumptions. But a lot of them had been exposed by the sun and they were peeling. Lamination does not last forever despite what some people say. But ... I just ... It made me really really think twice and I don't know ... yeah ... I still have the posters if you want them. It kind of bothered me that out of the four posters that were thrown in the garbage three of which were [LGBTQ+ focussed] ... But there have been more things that have been thrown out ... We were going through the process of purging lots of older books, again I don't want to make an assumption. At times, I guess it just crossed my mind I guess.

In a society where homophobia and transphobia are still present in so many ways and knowing how often institutions like public schooling and teacher education has failed to take up the calls to provide safe, positive or queering education, Daniel is left wondering if this was a deliberate act of discrimination. While it is true other materials were being purged, in a still largely heteronormative and cisgender climate, there are so few visible representations that present a wider spectrum of gender and sexual orientation realities. As teacher educators, we were not aware of this and only heard it for the first time as part of this group interview. Knowing this humbled us and made us realize that, although we can take pride in the work, we have done queering the formal curriculum of teacher education, we need to pay greater attention to all the informal spaces outside of our classrooms. It also reminded of the need to provide continual professional learning on LGBTQ+ education to all faculty and staff in our program.

**Theme four: Concerns about transitioning into the profession in unfamiliar settings.** How new teachers challenge power structures in schools, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ+, and their deep awareness of how heteronormativity and cisnormativity in schools are positioned as social norms surfaced an important pattern during this group interview. They contrasted the acceptance they had experienced in our teacher education program with what might happen as they moved into new school contexts upon graduation. They described some anxiety about not knowing about the kinds of acceptance and support they may, or may not, have as LGBTQ+ in-service teachers. Craig suggested, in not knowing, he questioned the kinds of things he might be able to do. Craig said,

And because I am going to a town that I don't know ... what if I want to start a GSA in my school? Are

there going to be repercussions? Am I outing myself? And even in my job interviews I kept thinking to myself: What are they thinking? Do I have to come out? What is the process here? Would I not get hired because of it? I know they can't legally do that; but, that's just the things that I think about and I am just wondering what my school community is going to be in this town, in this city that I have never been to? I am nervous, I am excited, but I am very strong willed and I would never change who I am or back down because of other people, but it doesn't change the fact that I could be met with some hostility.

In moments such as this during the conversation, it was clear that Craig, and his peers, felt caught in a position between doing what they knew to be morally correct with the realities potentially shaping their new schools. The power difference between these new teachers with their school administrations and colleagues was tangible.

The group was acutely aware of the politics involved in establishing a career path that secured permanent teaching contracts. Rose explained,

I'm like pretty nervous, I guess; especially as an elementary teacher ... depending on where I am, like, if I am in Toronto ... I'll be out open at least with my co-workers. But if I was to go to Alberta, I don't know how ... if I would be able to be open. Yeah, so with elementary, I find even though they need to hear it, they need to know that some of their teachers are gay ... that line with children and gay; I don't know.

Rose acknowledged the uncertainty of her future. She seemed to feel pulled between her own beliefs and societal perceptions of who she might become. We note that although Rose's wakefulness of her own competencies as an advocate of the LGBTQ+ learners had been amplified in response to the training, it also bumped against her fears of how others might regard her identity and views as inappropriate in an elementary classroom.

### **Discussion: Learning from Pre-Service Teachers who Identify as LGBTQ+**

The existing literature on the experience of LGBTQ+ teacher candidates (Dykes & Delport, 2018; Fleet, 2016; Nixon & Givens, 2007) is sparse and paints a picture of a chilly climate in teacher education in which heteronormativity and cisgender are the accepted norms (Airton, 2014; Fleet, 2016; Grace & Benson, 2000). Too often LGBTQ+ teacher candidates experience the erasure that comes, as Adrienne Rich described, "When someone with the authority of a teacher ... describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing?" (as cited in Sapp, 2016, p. 439).

Unlike previous findings regarding the negative experiences of pre-service teachers who identify as LGBTQ+, the participants of our study reportedly did not experience a private/professional divide and felt they could openly share who they were. Although participants were able to identify numerous benefits in response to the training as embedded in compulsory course work, their stories also revealed the multiple and lingering ways that heteronormativity and cisgender privilege continue to exist in teacher education, in ways that are often invisible to CH teacher educators. For example, in what participants experienced during field experience as they bumped into disparaging comments issued by students and stereotypes perpetuated by in-service teachers (Dykes, 2010). Teacher educators must take up the challenge the multiple ways that heteronormativity and cisnormativity play out in schools on a daily basis. Cosier (2016) asserted that teacher educators need to be social justice mentors.

[Pre-service teachers] need to be guided by teacher educators who have spent time thinking long and hard about such matters, and who can guide them in developing a critique of a culture that sees girls as object of male desire, and children who do not fit into a false gender binary as a source of the problem. They also need to learn how to queer the curriculum so that it works for positive change, and how to access resources that can help with all this. (p. 371)

On a hopeful note, participants reported that although negative experiences did happen as part of their field experience, they also noted how the training enabled them to disrupt such moments in ways they felt were respectful of who they were. Further still, participants saw teaching as opportunities to be advocates for LGBTQ+ learners and attributed the training as providing them with the experiential knowledge and resources to pragmatically achieve LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum. While the research literature is inclined to highlight the significance of using curriculum as a means to address LGBTQ+, transgender, and gender non-conformity issues (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2011; Palmer, Kosciw, & Bartkiewicz, 2012; Rands, 2009), few studies plainly pinpoint how this might be logically accomplished (Ryan, Patraw, & Bednar, 2013).

Yet, despite the positive reports from the participants of this study, we remain cautious for two profound reasons. First, we learned that although we are preparing pre-service teachers to support learners who face oppression in and beyond the classroom, some of these new teachers still face their very own hardships, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ+ regarding acceptance within their own families and communities. Second, participants had very real fears about moving forward into full-time teaching positions. We acknowledge their fears as very real and, sadly, we could not reassure them that upon graduation they might be welcomed into safe, welcoming and open school communities. Taylor et al., (2015) have provided important research into experience of LGBTQ+ teachers as they navigate the educational terrain of Canadian schools. Their findings suggest that environments vary from being supportive and welcoming to hostile and isolating for LGBTQ+ teachers. Dykes and Delport (2018), in their study of 10 LGBTQ+ teachers from across the US, found that participants reportedly experienced bullying from students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. They also emphasized that participants noted a lack of sexual diversity training in teacher preparation programs and continued to experience its omission in in-service teacher training (Dykes & Delport, 2018).

In our own anti-oppressive work, we are mindful of Kumashiro (2002), who urges educators to be

constantly looking to the margins to find students who are being missed and needs that have not yet to be articulated. Educators could create safe spaces based on what they see is needed right now but constantly re-create the spaces by asking, whom does this space harm or exclude? (p. 38)

In our discussions with LGBTQ+ pre-service educators, we were humbled to learn about the harm caused by the removal of positive visible representations in a common learning area in our building. We were deeply troubled. We were worried that “social justice can fall by the wayside as [these pre-service] educators struggle to keep their heads above water without proper support” (Cosier, 2016, p. 371). As a response, together with our pre-service LGBTQ+ trainer and research assistant, we created a rainbow shelf with multiple texts that were LGBTQ+ focussed from grades primary to twelve, along with teacher resources (Leblanc, 2016). This was

a small attempt to make LGBTQ+ peoples and concerns visible in a permanent way. As CH faculty members, we are continuously learning with and alongside our students, and recognize the need for ongoing dialogue with them.

Our intent in sharing the successes and limitations of our LGBTQ+ awareness education program is not to suggest that the training we provide is a universal fit. While our ongoing study provides concrete examples of how social justice education can be explicitly present in a teacher education program, we note its embedded nature has collaboratively emerged over time. Our program is nuanced in structural realities in that we are small, rural, and located in Eastern Canada. Yet, we do acknowledge there is something to our approach, particularly our unapologetic, explicit attention to LGBTQ+ focused curricula and awareness training as it is threaded over four terms of a two-year program. As Brant (2017) asserted, “it is not enough ... for preservice teachers to be taught about issues of LGBTQ+ equity as a part of their teacher preparation programs. They also need to develop ... self-efficacy in working with and for LGBTQ+ students and their families” (p. 36). We concur; but, stress that for self-efficacy to develop, it takes an intentionality that is well-articulated and communicated. For the pre-service teachers involved in this group interview, as well as the others we have previously written about (Kearns et al., 2014a; Kearns et al., 2014b; Kearns et al., 2017; Mitton-Kükner et al., 2015), our attention to such details reportedly works. By embedding the training into the formal curriculum of compulsory foundations courses, we argue, we have been able to model to pre-service teachers how to disrupt and deprivilege heteronormativity and problematize narrow constructs of gender.

Moreover, we now see with fresh researchers’ eyes, just how important a place teacher education holds in promoting LGBTQ+ education. Niemi (2016) highlighted the crucial space that teacher education holds to provide LGBTQ+ education for LGBTQ+ teacher candidates and she reminds us of the ways that teacher education has taken up social justice education for other groups who are/have been marginalized in the wider society.

## **Conclusion**

Education about and for LGBTQ+ individuals has powerful implications for the development of pre-service teachers’ awareness of their role as allies and advocates, it also provides insights into the potential of teacher education programs to be safe and welcoming spaces for individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. While hopeful, participants’ stories also serve to inform teacher education programs of the work that still needs to be done to create truly safe, positive, and queering moments in classrooms. We have learned, it is not enough to simply provide the LGBTQ+ awareness education program. In fact, the training they receive is one aspect of the larger program of study in which they are intentionally taught to acknowledge their efforts to be allies and advocates, and to understand how all efforts are situated in complex educational structures of not only queer, but also of class, race, gender, ability, language, religious, and ethnic power dynamics. The positive impacts of inclusive curriculum in schools are well known in the research literature, particularly in how it has made an incredible difference for LGBTQ+ students in terms of attendance and acceptance (GLSEN, 2011; Kosciw, Gretak, Palmer, & Boesen, (2014). Less is known, however, about the positive impact inclusive curriculum focused on LGBTQ+ content, individuals, and issues can have on LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers. It is this particular gap in the literature that our work is situated; as cisgender heterosexual teacher educators, supported by an explicit mandate in our program to do this work, we feel it is



necessary to draw attention to the significance of curriculum alignment when discussing inclusive education. To make a real difference for LGBTQ+ pre-service teachers, we argue, teacher education programs must move beyond the hope that admission policies supportive of LGBTQ+ preservice teachers, and other diversities, will create benefits for them and others. Impact, we believe, happens through the unapologetic alignment of program goals with course work and intentional design of curriculum that targets course outcomes, content, and pedagogy as situated within ongoing inquiry.

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## Notes

1. LGBTQ+—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirited, Transgender, Queer, Questioning
2. Cisgender and heterosexual
3. We make this claim tentatively, as it is very possible that other pre-service teachers who identify as LGBTQ+, participated in our study, but did not disclose this information to us.
4. Courses are nine weeks in our Bachelor of Education program.
5. Social norms that are commonly established in EDUC 433 and, later during, EDUC 435 emphasize the inclusion of all identities, the sharing of classroom “air time”, the importance of self-monitoring and modeling of inclusive language, and the acknowledgment of one’s own power and privileges.

*Dr. Jennifer Mitton* is an Associate Professor of assessment, literacy, and qualitative research methods in the Faculty of Education at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. Dr. Mitton previously taught in the School of English Language and Graduate School of Education at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. Prior to university teaching, she taught in secondary schools in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Turkey. Her research interests include adolescent literacies, disciplinary literacies, classroom assessment, pre-service teachers and LGBTQ education, teachers as researchers, and teacher/student experiences in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Her research articles are published in various journals including articles in *Professional Development in Education*, *Learning Landscapes*, the *McGill Journal of Education*, and the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*. In addition to her scholarship, Dr. Mitton works closely with Nova Scotian teachers as part of professional outreach initiatives and presently serves as the Chair of the Nova Scotia Inter-University Doctoral Studies in Educational Studies Administrative Committee.

*Joanne Tompkins* is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at StFX University, Canada. Joanne worked in Nunavut from 1982-1996 and her book, *Teaching in a Cold and Windy Place: Change in an Inuit School* (1998), details one school's decolonizing journey. Equity, decolonization and social justice in schooling are themes that have been Joanne's teaching, research and service foci for over two decades. As a teacher educator she has been active in developing teacher capacity within both Mi'kmaw and Inuit educators. At the pre-service and in-service level, Joanne teaches foundation courses which challenge power imbalances in schools. Two of these mandatory courses, *Sociology of Education* and *Inclusive Practices 1* offer the Positive Space Training Program to all pre-service teachers. This course is team planned and team and Joanne has taught this course with Dr. Kearns and Dr. Mitton. It is out of that teacher partnership that the collective interest in researching Canadian pre-service and in-service teachers' experiences challenging homophobia and transphobia in schools grew. From 2011 to 2017 Dr. Tompkins served as Chair of the Department of Leadership and Curriculum.

*Laura-Lee Bellehumeur Kearns*, PhD (OISE/University of Toronto), is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at Saint Francis Xavier University. A former primary and secondary school teacher in Canada and abroad, her teaching and research reflect her interest in exploring the stories and knowledge of historically marginalized people (whether that be due to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, language), with a view of encouraging a more equitable present and future. Her research publications may be found in the *Canadian Journal of Education*, *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, *The McGill Journal of Education*, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, and the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*. Her focus on social justice also stems from the commitment to the Métis Nation of Ontario, of which she is a member, and Indigenous people and decolonization. Her book chapters may be found in *Métis in Canada*, *Diverse spaces: Examining identity, heritage and community within Canadian public culture*, *Honouring our Teachers*, and the forthcoming *Métis Rising*.