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Writing the Rainbow: Facilitating Undergraduate Teacher Candidates' LGBTQIA+ Allyship Through Multimodal Writing

Judith Dunkerly-Bean

Old Dominion University, jdunkerl@odu.edu

Julia Morris

Minnesota State University, Morehead, Julia.morris@mnstate.edu

Valerie Taylor

Old Dominion University, vstaylor@odu.edu

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Writing the Rainbow Facilitating Undergraduate Teacher Candidates' LGBTQIA+ Allyship Through Multimodal Writing

Judith Dunkerly-Bean, Julia Morris, & Valerie Taylor

Abstract

This yearlong qualitative descriptive case study conducted by an interdisciplinary team of education faculty with pre-service elementary teacher candidates sought to disrupt heteronormativity and to increase candidates' awareness and preparedness for inclusivity with future LGBTQIA+ elementary students. Central to our findings was that in researching and authoring multimodal texts addressing topics and concerns faced by the LGBTQIA+ community for their future classrooms, there was a shift in the perceptions and preparedness of the candidates toward working with children identifying as LGBTQIA+. However, we also encountered resistance and/or apathy that led us to develop an analytical framework for disrupting teacher candidate cisgender heteronormativity and facilitating their progression toward allyship.

Introduction

Elementary teachers are on the front lines of addressing injustice and inequalities in schools. Yet, few primary teacher education programs specifically include LGBTQIA+ issues in their methods courses. Some may consider any LGBTQIA+ topics too advanced for elementary school children, and thus not

Judith Dunkerly-Bean is an associate professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. Julia Morris is an assistant professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at Minnesota State University, Morehead, Minnesota. Valerie Taylor is associate director of clinical experiences at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. Email addresses: jdunkerl@odu.edu, julia.morris@mnstate.edu, & vstaylor@odu.edu

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pertinent to elementary teacher preparation. Indeed, many banned or challenged books for this age-range are frequently targeted for LGBTQIA+ content (Avila, 2019). In the research that informs this article, our pre-service elementary education candidates were asked to navigate the sometimes controversial nature of introducing LGBTQIA+ topics to children (Blackburn & Clark, 2011). While the vast majority of teacher education programs routinely address the societal injustices of racism, xenophobia, and (dis)ability, etc., oftentimes they resist the topic of LGBTQIA+ is excluded from the curriculum. Unfortunately, this leaves their candidates underprepared and without the resources needed to actively engage with children and/or parents identifying as LGBTQIA+, and especially with transgender individuals (Miller, 2019; Hansen, 2015).

We report here on the findings of a year-long qualitative descriptive case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002), undertaken by an interdisciplinary team of university faculty to disrupt pre-service elementary teacher candidates' notions of heteronormativity (Marchia & Sommer, 2019; Warner, 1991) through engaging in multimodal writing and text production (Cappiello & Dawes, 2013). The multimodal approach to the integration of LGBTQIA+ diversity in classrooms proved a valuable medium by which students explored their thoughts through writing and creating. As a cultural construction, heteronormativity has been deeply embedded in society, including institutions of higher education and the public-school system (McEntarfer, 2016; Blackburn & Clark, 2011). Moreover, similarly to the ways that white teachers may use whiteness as a construction to silence, distance, and oppress students of color (Casogno, 2014; Fasching-Varner, 2012; Love, 2019), we contend here that a similar lens of cisgender heteronormativity may be utilized to silence and "other" members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Hansen, 2015). As Pallotta-Chiarolli (1999) argues:

Prejudices such as racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism now generally sit securely within this "safe" category, although it certainly was not always the case and in the 1970s and 1980s early proponents risked all the reactions that are now reserved for the "unsafe-to-challenge" category of prejudices. 'Unsafe-to-challenge' and 'inappropriate-to-challenge' prejudices such as homophobia and heterosexism are still being denied, silenced, and ignored even as teachers espouse support for an "inclusive curriculum" and "safe schools." Homophobia presently sits in this "unsafe" category. (p. 191)

Despite parallels to other historically oppressed groups, LGBTQIA+ individuals are further marginalized when the injustice they face, as well as the organized and individual resistance against injustice, are not explicitly addressed in elementary teacher education programs.

Despite this, the use of LGBTQIA+ children's and young adult literature in the classroom (Blackburn, Clark, & Nemeth, 2015; Blackburn, 2011; Clark & Blackburn, 2009) has been increasing, as have the instances of Gay/Straight Alliances in high schools and some middle schools (GLSEN, 2016). However,

little has been enacted in teacher education programs—especially at the primary/elementary level. We believe that providing pre-service elementary teacher candidates with the knowledge and dispositions to address issues facing LGBTQIA+ youth is imperative and represents a significant gap in the current literature.

Our candidates ($n=73$) were asked to research relevant issues and then create LGBTQIA+ picture books, infographics and other similar multimodal products that could be shared to a digital repository for use in Kindergarten - 6th grade classrooms. However, this approach was by no means straightforward or successful with every student. Instead, their reactions and engagement with the topic seemed to fall along a continuum (as evidenced in their written reflections, artifacts, classroom discussions and open-ended interviews.) In order to understand this continuum, we drew from Westheimer and Kahne (2004) citizenship model to create a framework of the stages students demonstrated ranging from apathetic and disengaged through the demonstration of active allyship in order to facilitate both our understanding of their positions and to inform practice in elementary teacher preparation.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we utilized the theoretical lens of queered pedagogy to encourage students to read, and in our case, write, through the perspective of queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Miller, 2015; Simon, et al, 2019; Blackburn, 2011). As defined by Matthew Thomas-Reid (2018):

Queer pedagogy draws on the lived experience of the queer, wonky, or non-normative as a lens through which to consider educational phenomena. Queer pedagogy seeks to both uncover and disrupt hidden curricula of heteronormativity as well as to develop classroom landscapes and experiences that create safety for queer participants [online].

Heather McEntarfer (2016) extends this idea by positing, “queer pedagogy asks both students and teachers to look inward. It asks us all to be open to a “reflexive and tentative journey into the unknown and unexamined ‘differences and oppressors within’” (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 300). Rob Simon and the Addressing Injustice Collective (2019) insist teachers and advocates must be, “working consciously to expect and prepare for individuals of multidimensional gender identities, sexualities, and family structures” (p. 143). This work also considers how a queer lens contextualizes childhood, and by extension, educating a child. Dryer (2019) states that “the queer contours” of childhood allows for a broadened consideration of normalcy and, in fact, resist normative assessments of social and emotional growth (p. 6).

In fact, drawing upon the work of Gill-Peterson (2018), Meiners (2016), and Sheldon (2016)—who also consider queer and trans-theories of childhood—a queer lens allows for a perspective of childhood education that helps name and theorize

the curiosity and imagination of childhood in order to protect the identities youth might claim in the future. The “tyranny of adult authority” in classrooms often overpowers the organic expressions of creativity and identity by children (Dryer, 2019, p. 6). By considering childhood as inherently unable to quantify or normalize, educators can empower children through their ability to play and create and form a world that does not reengage systems of oppression and, hopefully, interrupt the cycle of social reproduction.

Yet, as with much in educator preparation, if not explicitly addressed in the education program, the stereotypes, biases, and past experiences of candidates may become the default lens from which they view the world. Similarly to the ways that unchecked whiteness oppresses students of color, heteronormativity enacts hegemony. As Keenan (2012) elaborates,

The relationship between race and sexual orientation is not merely analogous. Rather, the socially constructed categories of race and sexuality are inseparable and sexual orientation—at least as it appears in current debates—is structured on racial terms. Ultimately, I suggest that racial thinking marks homosexual bodies (p. 1243).

For example, in speaking to white resistance to addressing structural inequalities, Christine Sleeter (2001) wrote, “white preservice students interpret social change as meaning almost any kind of change except changing structural inequalities” (p. 95). Perhaps mirroring the ways that white people have been conditioned to avoid talking about race to deny inherent structural racism (Tolbert, 2019), straight, cisgender individuals are “imbued...to expect heterosexuality” (McEntarfer, 2016, p. 38) which then perpetuates a rigid, socially constructed definition of gender and sexuality that oppresses those who identify beyond the binary. While sometimes controversial in the literature, we contend that socially constructed categories of what constitutes normative were evident and markedly influenced how our candidates framed their responses to their experiences in this study. In the next section we examine the challenges and consequences imposed on children and adolescents when schools are spaces of threat rather than learning.

Invisible Rainbow: LGBTQIA Topics in Teacher Education Programs

According to “The 2015 National School Climate Survey” by GLSEN, many LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression with 85.2% experiencing verbal harassment, 27% experiencing physical harassment, and 13% experiencing physical assault (GLSEN, 2016). Negative experiences in school led to absenteeism, lower GPAs, depression, and self-esteem issues (GLSEN, 2016). In addition, the dominance of heteronormative positions can be traced to the global issue of homophobic and transphobic bullying in violation

of human rights (UNESCO, 2012). While middle schools and high schools often have Gay/Straight Alliances and more visible resources for students, they are less frequently available in the primary/elementary grades.

Moreover, elementary teachers are often more reluctant than their middle and high school counterparts to address the identities of, and issues faced by, LGBTQIA+ children out of fear of parental or administrative pushback over the “appropriateness” of the topic, materials used, or whether it belongs in the classroom at all. Meyers (2018) found that elementary educators were also less likely to report participating in LGBTQ-inclusive efforts at their schools than secondary educators by a wide margin: 22% vs. 47%. Additionally, 20% of all participants in Meyers study reported that their students are too young to discuss LGBTQ topics in their curriculum (Meyers, 2018).

Indeed, the common statement within the age-appropriate discourse is: ‘they’re too young to know about sex and to understand sexuality’, even as the ‘heterosexual matrix’ is at work within schools and before children have even entered school settings (Curran, Chiarolli & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2009; p. 166). As a result, children identifying as LGBTQIA+ in elementary schools experience being stigmatized and face greater risk of bullying, depression and self-harm—even at young ages. Although children identifying as LGBTQIA+ do so as young as in kindergarten (McEntarfer, 2016), elementary teacher education programs are woefully underprepared to address the particular needs of LGBTQIA+ children as part of their curriculum (Clark, 2010).

In our own program, well over 65% of candidates felt that they were either “under-prepared” or “not at all prepared” for LGBTQIA+ students in their classroom, closely mirroring the statistics above. This was especially true of the candidates being confident or comfortable in welcoming children who identify as transgender. Over 36% of students in initial survey data reported being either confused or struggling with how they felt about transgender individuals, while almost 3% reported they couldn’t accept them at all. Given the challenges faced by transgender students, especially in liminal stages, it is critical that we prepare teachers to provide support and assistance to trans children to minimize the risks they face.

Organizations such as GLSEN (2017) among others report that transgender children and youth are especially a risk in schools. Recent data indicate that 75% of the more than 150,000 transgender students in middle school and high school in the United States felt unsafe because of their gender expression. As the mother (first author) of a transgender teen, I see my own child in those statistics (Dunkerly-Bean & Ross, 2018). As a teacher educator, it is clear that more needs to be done to address this in teacher preparation programs. Indeed, Martino (2013) calls for:

[N]ot only a special focus on transgender and nonconforming identities in teacher education curricula but also a systematic effort and critical commitment to addressing the very privileging of the hegemonic systems that constrain and curtail a more just politics of gender expression and embodiment within the context of teacher education. (p. 171)

Without inclusionary and anti-oppressive instruction in elementary teacher education programs, the colonizing effects of heteronormativity manifests, especially as it relates to cisgender assumptions of teacher candidates.

Methodology

The data reported here draws from a larger qualitative descriptive case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002) that began as an answer to a university-wide call to improve undergraduate interdisciplinary writing across five domains ranging from identifying a topic to formulating conclusions and reflecting on learning. In our response to that call, we drew together colleagues teaching four different courses in two different colleges and departments. Participating departments included Women's Studies and Teaching and Learning. However, given that we focus here on pre-service teachers, we do not include data from the Women's Studies courses as students were not pre-service teacher candidates. Given that within the teacher preparation program we were noting a resistance to topics and materials, such as children's literature, centered on LGBTQIA+ individuals and experiences, we decided to focus our response to the writing initiative by asking two questions that would frame our approach:

1. How might researching LGBTQIA+ topics to create multimodal writing projects contribute to combating heteronormativity and cisgender assumptions with preservice elementary teacher candidates?
2. What (if any) shifts in pre-service elementary education teacher candidates' perception or beliefs about working with children and/or families identifying as LGBTQIA+ occur after engaging in this project?

Our methodology allowed for the extrapolation of information by engaging participants in open dialog in a familiar setting—in this case, college classrooms. As Creswell (2003) recommends, this approach allowed us to interact with the participants on a human level and listen to and respond to their experiences while collecting rich and textual artifacts to describe both the process and experiences of the participants.

Participants

Seventy-three pre-service candidates participated in the study over the course of two semesters. They ranged in age from 21-45, although the majority were between 21-27 and would be considered "traditional" full-time students. Of those reporting demographic data in a pre-study survey, 34 % identified as Black, 12% identified as Latinx and 54% identified as white. 100% were identified/assigned as female at birth (AFAB). However, one student identified as male, and one identified as non-binary. The vast majority identified as cisgender female.

Context and Materials

Our study took place in the College of Education at a large urban university in the Southeastern United States. The larger research team was comprised of five cisgender females, one of whom identified as a lesbian. Two members were tenured faculty members, one was an untenured senior lecturer, and two were (then) doctoral candidates in the Department of Teaching and Learning. The authors of this article taught or assisted in two different courses (Instructional Technology and PK-6 English Language Arts Methods) over two semesters (Fall 2018 and Spring 2019).

In a shift from prior approaches to these courses, we created assignments with a tripartite purpose: (1) they met the objectives of the respective courses, (2) they addressed the requirements of the grant we received to improve undergraduate interdisciplinary writing, and (3) they provided the teacher candidates with the opportunity to conduct meaningful research and produce multimodal texts that addressed topics relevant to children and/or caregivers identifying as LGBTQIA+. We drew from Cappiello & Dawes (2013) definition of multi-genre, multimodal text that includes an array of digital texts, including podcasts, videos, photographs, artistic works and performances in addition to traditional print-based texts.

Within the courses, students selected an LGBTQIA+ topic or issue of concern they wanted to focus on to promote inclusivity. We selected the Queer Critical Media Literacies Framework (Leent & Mills, 2018) to assist them in their research as it speaks to pedagogical and learning experiences across our courses. According to Leent and Mills (2018) this framework, “synthesizes key LGBTQIA+ research sources to distill and refine a set of pedagogical approaches to ... critique heteronormative assumptions of texts... and multimodal and digital practices” (Leent & Mills, 2018, p. 403). Students then identified relevant knowledge and credible sources related to this topic. Each student had the opportunity to choose a topic, which digital tool(s) to use, and the artifact’s final form. This approach allowed for each instructor to address the writing standards required in the grant, and our focus on LGBTQIA+ issues in complementary but course specific, ways. For example, in the English Language Arts Methods course, a student opted to use a free digital storytelling tool to write a story for young students about her own sibling’s coming out as transgender using the allegory of a butterfly. In the Instructional Technology course, students created infographics about LGBTQIA+ issues, such as gender neutral bathrooms and pronoun usage.

In addition to the resources we were able to provide as faculty such as exemplar picture books and websites, we also invited community members from the local LGBT Outreach, student members from the campus GSA, as well as the first author’s transgender teenaged son, Cam, to come in and talk with our candidates about their experiences. It should be noted, however, that Cam only participated

in the second semester as those students seemed especially resistant to accepting trans students. Upon hearing about this, he volunteered to come in to the class to help the candidates see that “he was just a regular kid.”

Data Sources and Collection

Data for this research includes the participating students’ written and digital artifacts, surveys of attitudes and dispositions about the LGBTQIA+ community, instructor lesson plans, and transcripts from focus groups with participating students collected within the two teacher education courses over the two semester period. Participants were duly consented and had the option to not participate in the study. However, all students were asked to complete the assignments as part of the regular classwork. For students who claimed to be gravely disturbed by the content of the assignment, an alternative topic related to diversity was made available in keeping with IRB requirements. Only one student took this option, and their artifacts are not included in the data.

Data Analysis

Analysis of these data utilized initial *in vivo* coding (Saldana, 2016) drawing from the participants own words and writing. The research team then utilized collaborative coding (Smagorinsky, 2008), to review, discuss the codes emerging from each class set of data together. Smagorinsky asserts, “we reach agreement on each code through collaborative discussion rather than independent corroboration” (p. 401). Codes were then organized by themes that emerged as the result of deep engagement with the data as well as from in-depth conversations to their meaning. Thematic analysis yielded a continuum framework to explain the range of reactions and texts produced by the teacher candidates that we denoted as “Dimensions of Allyship.”

We created this analytic framework drawing from a model that describes three dimensions of citizenship (Westheimer, 2015; Westheimer & Kahne 2004). These researchers categorize levels of participatory citizenship across three dimensions. The personally responsible citizen uses individual action to contribute to society. For example, this individual might contribute to a local book drive. At a somewhat higher level of involvement, the participatory citizen would engage in organizing the book drive. Finally, the third level involves proactive engagement, which mirrors some of the tenets of critical literacy/pedagogy such as challenging unjust societal structures, and promoting the voices of the silenced. The justice-oriented citizen seeks to advocate and act for systemic change in the conditions that perpetuate issues of access and inequity and illiteracy in underserved populations. In perceiving parallels between citizenship and allyship, we shifted the focus to engagement with and advocacy for, LGBTQIA+ students, parents and the issues facing the community *writ large* to create this model of ally-citizenship.

Although Westheimer and Kahne do not describe these dimensions as hierarchical, we position our dimensions along a continuum ranging from disengaged/apathetic to ally/advocate (see Figure 1.) As illustrated here, the dimensions we describe create a continuum from Disengaged through Ally, and reflect codes that we believed fell within these larger themes. We will next discuss these dimensions, and their implications for candidates and teacher education faculty.

Findings

Our findings suggest that a queered pedagogy in elementary teacher education programs is needed in order to proactively combat heteronormativity in schools. Findings indicate that teacher candidates experienced shifts in their acceptance of, knowledge about, and understanding of LGBTQIA+ topics and issues during the course of the study, especially in regard to transgender individuals. For example, while over 80% of students indicated that they were openly accepting of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in initial survey data, only 59% felt the same way for transgender individuals. By the end of the study, though, nearly 79% of students indicated they were openly accepting of trans individuals. However, in answer to the question, “As a future teacher, how comfortable would you be discussing, planning activities or advocating for LGBTQIA+ issues and students with other teachers?” there was only a 16% increase in students responding that they would be either “extremely comfortable” or “moderately comfortable” doing so in their future classrooms.

While these survey findings were encouraging, we did not find them entirely reflected in the artifacts the candidates produced, or in the focus group conversations and final reflections. While some students created projects that demonstrated

Figure 1
Dimensions of Allyship



reflective thinking as their understanding of their topic shifted and became more expansive, we found that a significant percentage of students who reported that they were accepting of LGBTQIA+ children or families in a survey, still created texts that reflected apathetic or disengaged themes. We found this dichotomy to be both interesting and challenging as we worked with students to create multimodal texts that would be inclusive, but still act as a catalyst for meaningful dialogic exchange on a subject that genuinely worried many of them. We turn now to the themes that illustrate the range of candidate responses and artifacts.

Disengaged to Passive Engagement: Circumnavigating the Space

In providing examples of the candidate's artifacts and interview comments, we seek here to illustrate how we engaged in dialogic exchange (Bahktin, 1981) to push back at their resistance rather than criticize or demonize their responses. In the case of disengaged candidates, we found that their artifacts and comments centered on themes of isolationism. Many focused on sexuality rather than gender as well as "othering" (for example, students used phrases like "they" choose this lifestyle...) members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Most also expressed profound fear of negative consequences from various stakeholders for engaging with the topic. In regard to whether or not the topic should be broached in K-5 classrooms, one student wrote in a reflection:

While race and the issues that come along with race have always been taught in the classroom, sexuality has not. This will be something new in the classroom and I think that is where my discomfort comes from. I think with time the schools and teachers will become more comfortable teaching this subject, but as of now, I would not want to go [in the classroom] and teach on this topic. (Candidate Reflection, Fall 2018).

She was not alone. Over the two semesters that this study took place, a number of students were very resistant to the thought of independently addressing LGBTQIA+ topics in the classroom, and often cited personal religious beliefs. For example, one student created a book entitled, *Harper Lester and her Boyish Ways*. In this book a young girl named Harper, dresses in what other characters in the story perceive as "boys clothes" and engages in activities that may be considered traditionally "male." However, while we acknowledge that the student was making an honest attempt to be accepting on nonbinary individuals, everything in the book was presented as a "choice" Harper was making, rather than an innate part of her identity (see Figure 2.)

[insert Figure 2. Exemplar of a Disengaged Text approximately here]

Other approaches taken by students who we saw fitting into the disengaged or apathetic stage created texts that vaguely and opaquely addressed LGBTQIA+

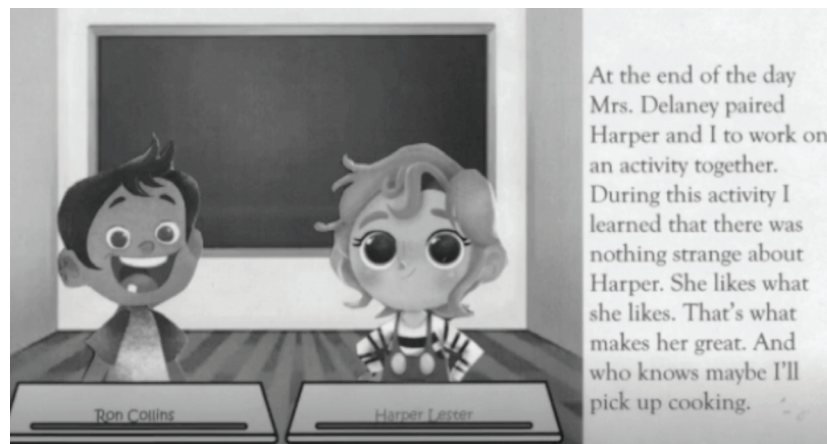


issues under the guise of being generally tolerant of difference. This was frequently portrayed as a character “not quite” fitting in, or being excluded for quirky personality traits or clothing choices. One such author, reflected that she wished, “we just didn’t have to talk about this.” while in a classroom discussion another student flatly stated, “I’ll never discriminate, but I can’t condone this either. It is against my beliefs.”

While she did face some backlash from her peers for this position, as critical educators, we aimed to make space for all voices. Students who were apathetic or even diametrically opposed to the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ in primary classrooms, were encouraged to participate in dialogic exchange and share their views and the conflicts they were experiencing. We saw this as an opportunity to acknowledge their position and yet, also draw parallels between civil and human rights that cannot be subject to individual viewpoints or religious beliefs. We were also able to discuss recent scholarship calling for religious schools to recognize that the discrimination directed at LGBTQIA+ youth is antithetical to Christian ethics of justice (Joldersma, 2016). Moreover, for students who were tempted to ridicule or chastise those who were disengaged, there was an opportunity to discuss anti-religious views as a bias within itself (McEntarfer, 2016).

In contrast, the students who reflected passive engagement tended to circumnavigate the issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community by comparing their experiences to those who are discriminated against because of race or culture, but in a manner analogous to the problematic “colorblind” approach. We described this as circumnavigating the issues at hand, rather than directly addressing them. In our use here, students who were “circumnavigating” acknowledged that people

Figure 2
Exempolar of a Disengaged Text



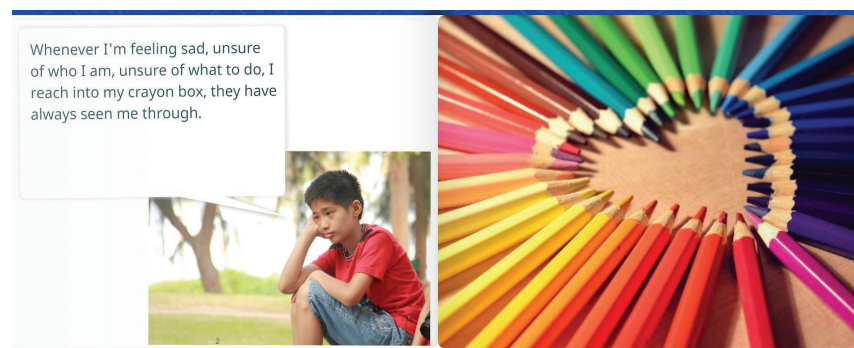
need support and that we should all accept our differences, however LGBTQIA+ difference was just one of many permutations.

These students' texts featured characters defying gender stereotypes in action and dress, or used comparisons to race and culture, or sometimes both. For example, one student created a picture book about a young African-American girl named Mia, who wanted to play football. Although her friends ridiculed her, Mia's parents offer encouragement and support. Another student used the analogy of a box of crayons to illustrate her view that all colors are important and everyone has a role to play in creating the "big picture." A third book portrayed a female cat that liked to wear a blue ribbon instead of a pink one. Her friend, the dog, at first mocks her but then complements her on her choice. However, there remains the implication that these are choice to be supported, rather than innate and integral embodiments of identity (See Figure 3).

In classroom discussions and in the focus groups, students who were in this stage would say things like, "I can't understand why people get upset—it's not that big a deal" in describing others' intolerance. However, another student, clearly frustrated, asked our LGBTQIA+ consultant, "Can't we just teach the idea of acceptance, without breaking it down into all this [LGBTQIA+] stuff?" Her question was honest, yet it belied the undercurrent of positioning that defined this group: It is enough to be accepting of all people; we don't really need to differentiate between groups. For example, one student reflected:

As a future teacher I understand that I have to train myself not to associate things with gender. This can really limit the students' dreams and beliefs. Overall, I learned that these concepts don't have to be awkward or turned into a big deal. These are concepts that should be presented and acknowledged in a positive way—just like everything else. (Candidate Reflection, Spring 2019)

Figure 3
Exemplar of a Passive Engagement



While these viewpoints provided an opportunity for dialogue as well, in many instances, these students held more steadfastly to their viewpoints and were less easily moved than the apathetic or disengaged. Much like the manner in which whiteness frequently operates as covert oppression amongst preservice teachers (Fasching-Varner, 2012), we saw that this position held a cisgender and straight perspective as normative. The majority of these candidates simply believed that being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community was not unlike being a member of any other institutionally or colonially oppressed race or culture.

While we do not contend that the historic oppression between various groups are equivalent, we do see parallels in the belief systems operationalized here. These candidates' artifacts and comments centered on tolerance and acceptance of different people or even nonbinary self-expression, however it was always measured against a traditional gender role, straight, cisgender identity. Of all of the stages in our framework, this group was perhaps the most challenging, as their positioning was the most resistant to engaging in allyship, as they believed tolerance alone was the goal.

Empathy to Allyship: Decentering Heteronormativity and Cisgender Assumption

In this section, we describe the remaining two stages of our framework, that of Empathetic Responsiveness and Allyship. While these two stages somewhat resemble each other, there are some notable differences. Namely, teacher candidates exhibiting empathetic responsiveness focused on combatting stereotypes (i.e., same-sex parents, traditional gender roles). Additionally, their artifacts looked to normalize a variety of gender expressions of identity (i.e., pronoun use, non-binary appearances, etc.). For example, a student who we felt represented this point in the framework said, "I think we should definitely provide resources [about LGBTQIA+] to our kids. If we show them it's normal, then it's normal."

A student who expressed similar opinions created a book entitled, "*Pronouns for You and Me!*" which took an informational text approach to discussing pronoun use. Using cartoon figures, the author explained that pronouns should not be assumed. It also provided the reader with helpful phrases to use in the instance of misgendering a new acquaintance. Another book, "*All About Me*" addressed nonbinary identities and claimed names. Both of these texts were written in very child-friendly language and truly aimed to normalize the topic for younger children (see Figure 4).

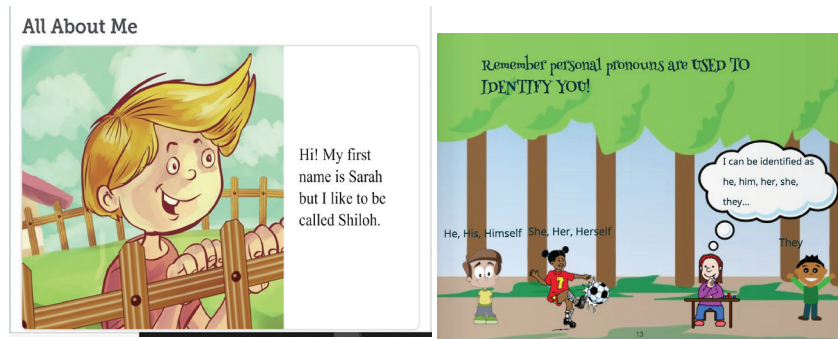
Examples such as these seek to normalize, but stop short, of cisgender allyship. For the sake of operationalizing the definition of allyship, we draw from GLSEN who espouses that allies recognize intersectionality, use their own cisgender privilege to combat oppression, recognize Black & Brown queerness rather than only LGBT white individuals, and finally promote greater acknowledgement of trans people (GLSEN, nd).

By contrast, those candidates whose comments and artifacts reflected allyship advocated for straight and/or cisgender people to use their privilege to actively engage in anti-discriminatory practices and to stand with the community. These texts placed teachers as front line defenders of LGBTQIA+ students and reflected a desire from the candidates to “learn more so that I can do more.” The texts and conversations that were identified as fitting in this part of the continuum exemplified teachers as advocates in close alignment with the GLSEN definition as well as descriptions of what it means to be an ally or accomplice with and for Black and Indigenous People of Color (Love, 2019). For example, one student’s final reflection spoke to this activist stance:

Through creating this book I learned that being an ally takes so much more than being there for your friends who identify as gay, lesbian, bi, etc. or even standing up to people who degrade the LGBTQ+ community. While these actions are a part of being an ally, it does not make up the entirety of it. This was new information to me and it really opened my eyes to how little I do to support the LGBTQ+ community. While I do stand up to people who use derogatory terms, I do not go out of my way to stay up to date on what is going on concerning issues with the LGBTQ+ community. I ultimately learned that I need to do more to learn about the diversity I will encounter in my classes and how much of it I will experience in the classroom. (Candidate Reflection, Spring 2019)

Similarly, the texts produced challenged the reader to action and sought to do more than merely promote tolerance or inform. Infographics from the Instructional Technology course, for example, promoted the need for gender neutral bathrooms, and advocated for bisexual individuals. In the Language Arts methods class, one particular book stood out by providing a guide for children to be allies, while another challenged the reader to do more than be a curious onlooker at Pride events, and instead engage with and support the LGBTQIA+ community all year, not just during Pride Month (see Figure 5).

Figure 4
Exemplar of Empathetic Responsiveness



It was in these students that we observed significant shifts in perception and perspectives. While most began the study as reporting general acceptance and tolerance of LGBTQIA+ individuals in general, they enthusiastically took up the subject and went beyond acceptance to wanting to become advocates.

Discussion and Implications

We believe that the implications for the framework for elementary teacher preparation addresses a gap in the current literature by providing a model for reflection and action on the part of faculty and candidates by creating space for not only LGBTQIA+ awareness, but also allyship. However, this is not without its challenges for all involved, and will likely lead to crisis for some. Yet, as Kumashiro (2000) reminds us: “Educators should expect their students to enter crisis. And, since this crisis can lead in one of many directions such as toward liberating change, or toward more students to work through their crisis in a way that changes oppression” (p.7).

While having candidates engage in discussions with LGBTQIA+ community members, conduct research and create multimodal texts is only one point of entry, we believe it to be a meaningful one. In addition, our data reflected that candidates felt more prepared to welcome LGBTQIA+ children and families into their future classrooms, and believed themselves to be more knowledgeable and empathetic than they were at the start. However, as we have illustrated, this was not the case for all students and indicates the need for the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ topics in the elementary teacher preparation. Although individual teacher candidates themselves may well be anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic, they are not given the tools,

Figure 5
Exemplars of Allyship Texts



Now Daisy is an ally
because she wants to help.
At the first sign of trouble
she'll let out a yelp.

experiences or resources to extend their personal beliefs into their professional identities and practice. As McEntefer (2016) argues:

If gendered ways of being are formed in part in schools, and if heteronormativity and homophobia are experienced in different ways by boys and girls in schools, then the men and women who show up in teacher education classrooms as teacher candidates may have been differently shaped by the very discourse we are trying to prepare them to work against. (p. 56)

What is needed then is purposeful allyship in teacher education programs. This begins with being actively cognizant of the students we teach and an open willingness to learn more as teacher educators. Establishing a culture that speaks out against injustice may change the overall atmosphere of a campus or program and have a positive impact on the well-being of those in marginalized communities (Cornell Health, 2019). However, allyship is a practice that requires sustained efforts to create change and to disrupt the status quo when met with resistance (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Students and educators alike must be open to examining their own biases (Rife, 2019). Ultimately reflective examination can help teachers, both in-service and pre-service, disrupt prejudicial notions that inform prejudicial practice (McGregor, Fleming, & Monk, 2015).

There are multiple approaches to establishing a culture of allyship in education. Teacher education programs should provide experiences that are designed to alter or shift one's belief system (McGregor, Fleming & Monk, 2015). This may include action research and non-traditional fieldwork (Groff & Peters, 2012) in community outreach programs or learning centers. Likewise, opportunities should be available for narrative methods of critical reflection that allow for the examination of personal and professional identities (McGregor et al, 2015; Rife, 2019).

Neoliberal considerations that education is "objective" and approaches to diversity should utilize "even-handed relativistic neutrality" promote what Jones (2019) calls a "false equivalence" amongst diverse perspectives (p. 305). Thus, presenting reliable accounts and sources that are authored and promoted by LGBTQIA+ scholars and communities is essential. By engaging students in processes of identity exploration and knowledge construction they are better prepared to facilitate these undertakings for their own students.

Assignments in teacher preparation courses could begin to more consciously incorporate critical dialogue surrounding intentional allyship that can then become tangible products for curricular and pedagogical inclusion. For example, Pérez Echeverría and Scheuer (2009) describe how writing can shape knowledge and perceptions. "External representations [such as writing] are essential to construct knowledge, refine it, modify it, share and appropriate it" (p. 13). Certainly, easy/low-stake opportunities such as writing, can be facilitated in education methods courses to: promoting safe-space inclusion of members and allies of the LGBTQIA+ community, present texts that celebrate diverse family structures, and implement

pedagogical choices to foster identity development that may/not conform to adult-imposed heteronormative conjectures. Lownethal (2020) asserts that promoting inclusive classrooms should utilize assignments that promote previously “unheard voices” and “challenge assumptions” through GLSEN *Ready, Set, Respect* tools (2020). These curriculum tools are developed based on GLSEN partnerships with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Beyond these practical implementations, broader and intentional implementation of allyship is required across education programs in order to promote action, rather than isolated reaction. The passivity of bystanding while social inequities continue is found to be just as harmful as the promotion of social inequities (Dryer, 2019). Thus, a more intentional approach in educator preparation is required that considers allyship an issue of human rights, rather than an isolated politically correct maneuver. There is a gap in the development of preservice education that allows for the promotion of LGBTQIA+ equity only as a *reaction* to overt discrimination, rather than the intentional *action* of allyship (Hansen, 2015). Teacher preparation programs must be accountable for communicating relevant democratic, human rights perspectives to bridge the gap in preparation for dealing with the diverse and complex education contexts their candidates will encounter.

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