

EXPOSED PEDAGOGY: INVESTIGATING LGBTQ ISSUES  
IN COLLABORATION WITH PRESERVICE TEACHERS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of  
Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2005

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## ABSTRACT

Preparing teachers to serve the needs of children who have been historically marginalized is difficult work. Although a growing body of scholars and researchers has attempted to describe the complexities, challenges, and promises of such work, we are far from understanding how to do it well. While much of this discussion has addressed issues of race and ethnicity, LGBTQ concerns have been glaringly omitted. By continuing to overlook LGBTQ issues in education, we perpetuate heterosexism and maintain LGBTQ youth's marginalization. Considering previous research that suggests teachers lack knowledge about LGBTQ issues and are ill-equipped to construct pedagogies that are supportive of LGBTQ youth and families, this research aimed to create a joint learning project to foster greater LGBTQ competencies in the context of teacher preparation.

My belief that long-term, collaborative inquiry might better support pre-service teachers in understanding issues related to LGBTQ concerns guided this research. This action-oriented, qualitative research project emerged from a critical, feminist paradigm and relied on narrative methods. During the 2002-2003 academic year, the activities of nine student-participants were recorded. Data was primarily in the form of written responses to experiences at the university and reflections related to the larger community-based experiences our collaboration provided. Participants' responses to inquiry

experiences related to LGBTQ issues were collected in the form of written papers and taped transcription of classroom conversations. In addition to the “texts” that students produced, the data corpus for this study consisted of my own reflective journal writing and field notes. Analysis and interpretation was conducted to develop understandings of the ways student-participants made sense of the experiences our LGBTQ-focused collaboration had provided.

This report offers a description of our year of inquiry. Our collaboration was influenced by the relationships that emerged among participants. Community development was essential to our collaborative work. In community, we were able to seek out experiences that assisted us in moving beyond the university in order to reflect on our own unexplored biases related LGBTQ issues. Following an emergent curriculum, striving for greater teacher/student parity, and collectively scaffolding experiences for one another were the kinds of practices that allowed us to expose these biases and take small steps toward activism. These practices resulted in what we came to call an *exposed pedagogy*. This research, then, offers pedagogical implications for engaging pre-service teachers with LGBTQ issues. It describes, in essence, how a group of unlikely collaborators came to implement an exposed pedagogy to explore lives beyond their own.

## DEDICATION

To my teachers: Allison, Amber, Dan, Jill, Jonathan,  
Lindsay, Meredith, Shannon, and Whitney

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## PUBLICATIONS

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2. Conley, M.D. & Colabucci, L. (2001). None of the above: Silence and invisibility in the lives of two gay educators. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 452 133).
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## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education  
Studies in Teacher Education, Diversity and Equity Education, and Early Literacy Education



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## CHAPTER 1

### THE IMPETUS TO EMBARK

#### *“School Outings: Experiences of a Gay Youth”*

*I can still remember the fall of 1983. I was an affable young teen—the kind of teen that grandparents bragged about, the kind of teen that sisters found insufferable. In early September of that year, I entered junior high at a small county school in rural Ohio. In out-of-school contexts I was good-natured and easy to talk to. In school settings I was a quiet, reticent teen, and as such, I never had too many friends. My personality changed each morning at around 7:10 when the school bus backed into my parents’ driveway, came to a stop, and opened its door. For the next 35 minutes each day, I would slouch low underneath the elevated, bottle-green seats of bus #10; waiting to be delivered to the place I feared most.*

*School was an intimidating and hostile place for an effeminate male. And as much as I tried to be overlooked, it didn’t take long for my peers to discover what I was in the process of discovering for myself. I remember being afraid that if my classmates knew the real me—the gay me—they would abhor me, ridicule me. I remained silent and was glad to do so [or had to do so].*

*I decided for some reason (and now I can't remember why) to go to the first junior high social event, a school-sponsored bonfire/pep rally. I remember spending that evening in much the same way I spent my day at school—namely, being very quiet and hanging around a small group of averagely popular girls. At the time, they offered me the most safety. Now, I realize that my being there with them only angered my male peers who clung tightly to gender norms and expectations.*

*I was wearing my school jacket just like everyone else—arms folded, shoulders rounded, eyes down, when I heard, “Hey Conley, do you like pussy?” I said nothing and the girls around me just rolled their eyes—neither making me feel comforted or more humiliated. “Hey, Conley, I said, do you like pussy?” The taunts and teasing lasted for what seemed like an hour. The bonfire which once seemed like a beacon for the new school year was now no more than a glowing piece of ash among the cinders. I remember being relieved when the bonfire was breaking up and glad to be walking to my uncle's house to call my mom to pick me up. Walking alone with my head down being careful to watch my step on the uneven sidewalk, I felt the sharp blow of an open hand to my back. “Hey Conley, what color is cum?” Pulling myself from the ground, I tried to run away. “Hey Conley, you don't know what color cum is?” I felt a swift punch to*

*my left cheek followed by some laughter and spitting. I didn't attend school for the next two days. I didn't attend another school-sponsored event for the next two years.*<sup>1</sup>

### **Responding to *School Outings*: The School Realities of LGBTQ Youth**

My journal entry exemplifies the harassment I experienced as a gay youth in school. Wearing the right clothes, getting good grades, and attempting to be “part of the group” were insufficient efforts to be accepted by my peers. Rather, my emerging identity as a gay adolescent made me a stranger to my peers, unusual in a way that was unsettling or hard to understand. As twelve and thirteen year olds in rural Ohio, we had little exposure to LGBTQ issues. Certainly, LGBTQ topics were never addressed in official school curriculum. Clinging to their fear of the unknown, and perhaps knowing no other way, my peers responded in cruel and hurtful ways.

Regrettably, my experiences as a student are all too familiar, even today, for those students who break from traditional notions of sexuality and gender. Scholarship documenting the school experiences of LGBTQ youth paints a discouraging and inequitable picture (Buckel, 2000; Gray, 1999; Jennings, 2000; Kozik-Rosabal & MacGillivray, 2000; Leck 2000; Lipkin, 1999; Owens, 1998; Rensenbrink, 1996; Rofes, 2000). My own journal entry supports the findings of many of these authors—namely,

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<sup>1</sup> This journal entry, “School Outings,” as well as excerpts from “Teacher Orientation” and “Eeeeew,” that follow, are pieces of writing that were shared with students-participants during our yearlong collaboration. As a pedagogical process, I (like student-participants) wrote 2-3 page reflective journal entries in response to weekly readings or out-of-university experiences. “School Outings,” for example, was the entry I submitted in response to the shared journal prompt: “What motivated me to join an LGBTQ collaboration?” Sharing these journal writings, here, in this chapter serves a different purpose. I “re-publish” them here as a means to establish a rationale for engaging in this research. My use of journal writing as a methodological tool is detailed further in chapter 2. Additionally, specific journal prompts are described in Appendix A.



that LGBTQ youth are more likely to encounter physical abuse in schools (Kozik-Rosabal & MacGillivray, 2000; Pohan & Bailey, 1997); more likely to experience abusive or assaultive language (Owens, 1998); and more likely to experience cognitive, social, emotional, and aesthetic isolation (Blackburn, 2001; Britzman, 1997).

Additionally, LGBTQ youth have higher rates of drop-out, substance use, and suicide than the general youth population (Kozik-Rosabal & MacGillivray 2000). Citing a 1999 Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) survey of 496 LGBT students from 32 states, Jennings (2000) reports:

- 91% heard antigay language on a daily basis in their school;
- 69% had suffered direct verbal harassment—half on a daily basis;
- 36% of them had witnessed a teacher use antigay epithets; and
- 40% had *never* seen anyone intervene in antigay harassment at their school

(p. 285).

Additionally, a recent GLSEN survey of 887 LGBTQ youth found that students who are frequently harassed on the basis of sexual orientation have lower grade point averages and are nearly twice as likely to not attend college as those students who reported no harassment (Yoo, 2003).

The above statistics suggest that schools become unwelcoming and hostile environments for LGBTQ youth. Overall schools seem to be places that allow discrimination and intolerance and where students learn that prejudice and hatred are acceptable. Within this context, LGBTQ youth learn to be fearful and self-hating (Raymond, 1994) and non-LGBTQ youth fail to learn that bigotry is wrong. Although the ramifications of heterosexism and homophobia are strongly felt by LGBTQ youth, *all* students are limited by its debilitating effects (Rofes, 1989).

The question of how to best support LGBTQ youth remains largely unanswered. Attempts, for example, at curricular inclusion have been explored (Athanases, 1996; Carlson, 1994; Corbett, 1993; Ormiston, 1996) but have been met with fear and resistance (Harbeck, 1992; Lipkin, 1999). And many proactive school-based programs such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are available only to a select population—namely, LGBTQ youth who find themselves in supportive environments and in larger, urban communities. Typically, schools avoid altogether the discussion of heterosexual privilege and do little to affirm LGBTQ youth. By refusing to acknowledge the presence of heterosexism and allowing LGBTQ youth to be marginalized, silenced, and made invisible, schools continue to do harm to *all* our nation’s youth. This reality poses several pressing questions. Namely, how does this legacy of bigotry and hatred manifest itself in the lives of contemporary LGBTQ youth? How are teachers and teacher educators implicated in this system? And how can we interrupt this legacy of bigotry and create safe schools that honor and support LGBTQ youth?

***“Teacher Orientation: Experiences in the Field”***

*My first year in the profession would have been described, by many, as an idyllic experience. How many first-year teachers are given the opportunity to teach a small, self-contained class of gifted and talented fourth graders? Teaching in a middle-class, all-white, conservative town did have its perks. Our school was well-funded with abundant parental and community support—support that aligned nicely to the traditional programs and curriculum the school system offered. However, this idyllic experience was complicated for me by my identity*

*as a gay man. Like many LGBTQ educators, I was out to myself, my friends, and my family but struggled to negotiate my identity in professional realms.*

*Long before I was aware of the concept ‘heteronormativity’, I felt its effects. I remember vividly several incidents where my peers’ presumptions of heterosexuality placed me in uncomfortable situations. The teacher’s lounge was a place I often avoided. It was in the teacher’s lounge where the personal was often made public. Here, my teaching peers would discuss their husbands and boyfriends. Invariably, one of them would ask me who I was dating or more directly, why I wasn’t dating. My response to these questions would be to lie, to hide my identity. “Oh, when would I find the time to date someone? I spent my entire weekend at school, planning, grading and changing bulletin boards.” Aware of the stereotype that positions gay men as sexual predators, I was fearful that I could lose the job I loved so much if I took a political stand and shared my identity.*

*During the spring of my first year of teaching, my principal called me into her office. She didn’t close the door, but said she wanted to talk to me about something personal. I was terrified. I was expecting the worse. I expected to be outed. Instead, she proceeded to ask me to go out on a date with her niece who also happened to be a teacher and conveniently was going to be home this coming weekend. She offered me Michelle’s phone number and some movie passes. She extended her hand to give me the movie passes. I didn’t know what to say. I was expecting her to question my sexuality. Instead, she was trying to fix me up with a woman! I walked out of her office trembling. Waiting just outside the door stood,*

*Sue. Sue was a preschool teacher in our building whose son, I would find out years later, was gay. She grabbed me by both hands and said in her usual warm, West Virginian inflection, “Hon, you just shake that off.” She smiled at me and headed into the workroom. I never talked directly to Sue about my sexuality, but I was convinced she knew.*

*The following day I put the movie passes back on my principal’s desk with a note that said I had plans the next couple of weekends, but thanks for thinking of me. Over the next several years, I had many more “movie-ticket” experiences. However, I never felt safe enough to out myself professionally. Though, I did learn strategies (exchanges like the one with Sue that relied on coded, collusive language to expose my identity) to out myself to a handful of peers and parents. Regrettably, I hid my identity from most people I came in contact with including the ones who could have benefited from knowing it the most . . . my students.*

### **Responding to Teacher Orientation: Adherence to the Heteronormative**

Schools are communities of people—people who are influenced by the same ideologies that limit the thinking and vision of our larger society. My interactions with my principal illustrate how heterosexuality is taken for granted, seen as natural, and thus normalized. Additionally, my journal entry demonstrates how these heteronormative practices kept me in a professional closet, thereby, exacerbating my struggle to openly discuss LGBTQ issues in my professional work. Indeed, homophobia and heterosexism

are not just perpetuated by heterosexuals. It was difficult for me, as a gay man and as someone who is passionate about these issues, to create a space to initiate honest conversation.

Due to misinformed notions of “recruitment,” and promoting personal political agendas as well as realistic fears of job loss (Kissen, 2002), LGBTQ educators are in precarious positions when it comes to initiating discussions related to LGBTQ concerns. Although some LGBTQ educators have shared their stories publicly (Boylan, 2003, Orimiston, 1996, Rensenbrink, 1996, Woog, 1995), heteronormativity serves as a powerful force to keep most LGBTQ educators in the closet. These same forces prompt heterosexual educators, like my principal, to assume all the teachers in the teacher’s lounge (as well as all the students in the cafeteria) are heterosexual. These assumptions, in direct and indirect ways, are passed down to the students we teach (Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002). Of course, it is possible to construct my principal’s offering of movie tickets as an invitation. Perhaps, she had noticed my tension, suspected I was gay, and by offering me the tickets, was creating an opportunity for me to share my identity with her. In this scenario, she may have been trying to affirm her suspicions. Once confirmed, these suspicions may have led to greater professional support or to the loss of my job. It was a risk I was unwilling to take. Most likely, however, she was working off the assumption that all teachers are heterosexual. Educators are not immune to sexual hegemony, leading even potentially supportive educators, like my principal, to erroneous assumptions and misguided actions.

The experiences I had with my principal serve as a powerful example of the challenges we face when it comes to dislodging widespread heterosexist beliefs.

Consistently, research has indicated that educators struggle to come to terms with their own heterosexual biases. Sears (1992), for example, surveyed the attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality of 258 teachers and found that some educators were “willing to curtail verbal harassment or attend school-sponsored workshops related to homosexual students;” however, they were unwilling to assume a proactive role in the school (p. 74). Additionally, Sears found that elementary teacher candidates were more likely to hold homophobic attitudes than secondary candidates. Sears concludes that given prospective teachers’ “expressions of high levels of personal prejudice, ignorance, and fear, the realities of their professional intervention and support [toward lesbian and gay youth] are negligible” (p. 29). In addition, Herek’s (1984) work suggests that teachers who have less contact with lesbian and gay men or who reside in the Midwest, South, or rural areas are more likely to harbor homophobic beliefs. Through intentional and unintentional acts, teachers uphold heterosexism through their unexamined beliefs and schools reinscribe inequity by perpetuating the status quo.

***“Eeeew: LGBTQ Issues in Teacher Education”***

*After teaching five years in the public schools, I had returned to the university fulltime to work on my master’s degree. I was sad to see my year of graduate study coming to an end. During my last summer quarter, I was enrolled in a small, graduate-level, early childhood education course. This was one of those pack-your-lunch, commit-your-entire-day condensed courses that met for extended hours over a three-week period. It was also the last course I needed to fulfill the requirements of my degree. On this particular morning, we finished a discussion related to developmentally appropriate science instruction, grabbed*

*our packed lunches, and headed to the patio where the seven students and our professor proceeded to have an abbreviated lunch with the promise of getting out early for the day. The lunchtime conversation drifted from the topic at hand to our undergraduate education experiences—particularly, life in the dorms. Over the sounds of crunching pretzels and the undoing of Twinkie wrappers, we each shared some sort of “horrible roommate” story. I wasn’t shocked by the usual stories of how my roommate broke my tape player or how my roommate stole my sweatshirt. However, when the last student in our small class chimed in, I was reminded of the tension I had felt during my years as a public school teacher. Tricia shared her story of moving to Columbus to be a freshman at The Ohio State University. She recounted the time when her parents dropped her off and how excited she was to have them meet her new dormmate. She had hoped that she and her new college roommate would grow to be best friends. However, by the end of their first afternoon together, her roommate confided in her that she was a lesbian. “Eeeeeeeew” was the simultaneous response I heard from both my peers and our professor. Folks had dislodged the peanut butter from the roof of their mouths quickly enough to offer a response that demonstrated their apparent disgust and revulsion. As the brother of a lesbian sister, I felt angered. As a gay man, I felt wounded. Instead of interrupting Tricia’s heterosexist comment, our professor chose to participate fully in a conversation laced with homophobia. After some laughter and a few more inappropriate comments, I excused myself from the picnic table, finding comfort in the isolation and on the other side of the propped open doors.*

## **Responding to *Eeeeeew*: LGBTQ Issues in Teacher Education**

If we are to demonstrate our commitments to LGBTQ students and social equity, we, as teacher educators, must create experiences for our students to confront their unexamined beliefs and critique schools as sites of heterosexist institutionalization. If we want our students to become professionals who interrupt homophobic name calling on the playground, who work diligently to disrupt gender bias, and who develop sustainable visions of social equity, we must equip them with the tools to do this work.

My own experiences in teacher education remind me that the challenges we face go beyond the teenage taunts of junior high school. Teacher educators are just as culpable for their actions related to the perpetuation of homophobia and heterosexism as the students we prepare. Part of the problem that perpetuates situations like the one above is the well established curricular absence of LGBTQ issues in teacher education (Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002). This absence offers one explanation for how fears, ignorance, and confusions are upheld. Yet, not including LGBTQ issues in the official curriculum, as this journal entry demonstrates, does not mean they are any less present. Grumet (1995) reminds us,

The parts of the world that are not spoken do not disappear. They are still there in the streets, on TV, and at home when school is over, and things both said and unsaid whisper in our minds even when the school has been boarded up and sold for condominiums and we can name hardly anyone in the faded class picture. (p. 13)



Whether we speak loudly, as Tricia did, or in whispers, as Grumet suggests, the challenges of increasing visibility and normalizing the way we speak about LGBTQ issues in teacher education is a daunting task. The legacy of silence and curricular invisibility makes any introduction of LGBTQ topics seem heightened, overly emphasized. Although it is difficult to justify my professor's response to Tricia's story, his actions or inactions represent the most common response to LGBTQ topics in all levels of education. Given the prevalence of heteronormativity and his position as a heterosexual man, my professor most likely lacked the requisite knowledge and skills to tactfully intervene during Tricia's telling. Indeed, deviating from heterosexual hegemonic norms in the context of lunchtime banter seems out of place.

Although I will not argue that allowing blatant homophobic remarks to circulate in classrooms is ever appropriate, there was little my professor could have done to confront Tricia's *eeeeew* comment in a casual, normal way. Heteronormativity promotes curricular isolation, contributing to classroom contexts whereby only skilled, prepared educators are able to effectively intervene in constructive, anti-homophobic ways. As teacher educators, if we are to increase our abilities to discuss LGBTQ issues in meaningful, integrated ways and confront heterosexism and homophobia with our students so that they may, in turn, create anti-homophobic contexts in their classrooms, we will have to increase our knowledge and skills related to LGBTQ inclusion (Lipkin, 1999).

To consider further how heteronormativity plays out in education contexts, take as an example, a preschool teacher who develops a unit of study related to family structures. This teacher might very naturally rely on books or photos of distinctively different family

compositions to demonstrate diversity in children's home environments. Very naturally, he might share images of nuclear families with a father and mother, single parent families, or even households with extended families living under the same roof. Yet due to heterosexual norms, books or images depicting households headed by two moms are rarely viewed by pre-kindergarten students, not because this family dynamic does not exist in the world, but because official school curriculum has been stripped of any potential gay content (Rofes, 1989). The legacy of this absence creates what Straut and Sapon-Shevin (2002) describe as an invisibility/hyper-visibility dichotomy. When any images outside "the norm" are represented, they are perceived as extraordinary. In the case of the early childhood educator who struggles with how to portray families headed by same-sex parents in a fully inclusive manner, "there is no 'normal' visibility . . . there is only invisibility or hyper-visibility" (Straut and Sapon-Shevin, p. 33).

This example demonstrates the parallels of silence which occur across all levels of education regarding LGBTQ inclusion. It also widens, I believe, the importance of LGBTQ inclusive work by extending awareness from the needs of LGBTQ youth exclusively to non-LGBTQ youth who live in and among LGBTQ families. As teacher education programs begin to address these issues, it may not be enough to merely "cover" LGBTQ-inclusive content if, in fact, we fail to recognize the complex realities that teachers face, or will face, in the field. Given this reality, there is much we need to know about the ways to engage pre-service teachers in experiences related to LGBTQ issues and communities.

## **Preparing Teachers for Diverse Classrooms: The Challenges We Face**

Preparing teachers to work with diverse student populations has consistently been a challenge for teacher education. Scholarship in teacher education has consistently found that pre-service teachers' deep-seated beliefs regarding diversity are difficult to change (Gomez & Tabachnik, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Richardson, 1996; Seidl & Friend, 2002a, 2002b; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996) even in rich contexts intentionally created to problematize ingrained patterns of thinking. Personal bias and cultural isolation limit teachers' abilities to reach students with social and cultural memberships different from their own. Oftentimes pre-service teachers enter preparation programs viewing student diversity as a problem (Paine, 1990). Gomez (1996) reminds us that "even in [teacher education] programs expressly designed with a coordinated set of experiences to challenge and/or to enhance prospective teachers' notions about teaching those unlike themselves, such change is difficult to effect" (p. 120).

Another issue concerning teacher education has to do with the discrepancies between the social and cultural knowledge of teachers given an increasingly diverse student population. In the 1990s, for example, the National Education Association reported that the typical elementary school teacher was a middle-aged, white, married woman (NEA, 1992). This same study reported that the percentage of nonwhite teachers represented approximately 13% of the total teaching force (NEA, 1992). By the year 2012, however, students of color are expected to make up 24 percent of the under-eighteen population. Students of color are expected to surpass 50% of our total school-age population by the year 2050 (AACTE, 1994). There exists, then, a widening discrepancy between who attends our schools and who teaches those who attend our

schools. While students from culturally rich and economically diverse backgrounds bring with them a knowledgebase that is situated in their family and community culture, white teachers typically bring a dominant Eurocentric, heterosexist view of the world with little experience outside their own immediate ways of knowing (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Sleeter, 1992). They do not have life experiences that allow them to know what it is like to be a political or numeric minority (Ladson-Billings, 2001). This, in turn, leaves prospective teachers unprepared regarding how to be effective educators in an increasingly diverse world (Osajima, 1995).

How do we begin to address the challenges of preparing teachers for diverse communities? The most popular and widespread approaches have been through short-term interventions ranging from workshops to multicultural coursework to urban field placements. These interventions have had some success but by and large have been ineffective (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998). In addition, the majority of the research in this area has investigated ways to assist middle-class, white pre-service teachers' in developing multicultural competencies—specifically, in regards to race, ethnicity, and class difference. Little inquiry into the ways teacher education programs are directly addressing LGBTQ inclusion has been conducted.

### **My Early Attempts**

My attempts to integrate LGBTQ study in teacher education began in the fall of 2001 as an instructor teaching in The Ohio State University's Master's of Education Program (M.Ed.). OSU's M.Ed. program is a five-quarter, fifth-year teacher licensure program. As is the case of most teacher preparation programs, many of the students admitted to our program have very little exposure to LGBTQ diversity/inclusion and

therefore know very little about issues pertinent to the lives of LGBTQ youth and families. And while several faculty members include LGBTQ topics in their course discussions related to diversity and equity, few have made this work central to their teaching at the university.

I first introduced LGBTQ topics while teaching an Early Childhood Foundations course at the university. The majority of the students in the class had hopes of attaining a Pre-k—3<sup>rd</sup> grade teaching license. The course was perhaps similar to courses offered at other institutions. We read and discussed issues related to developmentally appropriate practice, emergent literacy practices, social development theories, and multiculturalism. As we discussed these and other topics, I invited my students to begin to consider how various dimensions of diversity might influence young children's growth and development. In the syllabus I introduced LGBTQ issues as a "contemporary topic in education." Over three class periods we viewed the film, *It's Elementary*<sup>2</sup> and read the following articles:

Kozik-Rosabal (2000) "'Well, We Haven't Noticed Anything Bad Going On,' Said the Principal: Parents Speak about Their Gay Families and Schools,"

Mathison (1998) "The Invisible Minority: Preparing Teachers to Meet the Needs of Gay and Lesbian Youth," and

Casper, Cuffaro, Schultz, Silin, & Wickens (1996) "Toward a Most Thorough Understanding of the World: Sexual Orientation and Early Childhood Education."

These articles and the video supported the inclusion of LGBTQ issues in schools, in teacher education generally, and in early childhood education specifically. Over the next several weeks we wrote about and discussed how LGBTQ youth and families can be

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<sup>2</sup> *It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in Schools* is a 1996 Woman's Educational Media production that documents how several schools are successfully exploring LGBT issues in schools throughout the country. It was directed by Debra Chasnoff and produced by Helen S. Cohen.

included in the language of multicultural education. My goal was to challenge my students' sense of heterosexual privilege and to introduce LGBTQ content as worthy of discussion at all levels of education. Whereas the content may have been novel, I later realized, my pedagogical approach was not.

After our discussions, I asked students to write a summative response in the form of a three-page reflective paper. After reading their work, I was convinced that few had developed complex understandings of the ways in which heterosexism functions in our society and our schools. I was aware that my presence as an openly gay instructor caused tension and perhaps made some of my students uneasy as they tried to make sense of a disruptive, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. Given their apprenticeship with years of heterosexist schooling and participation in other homophobic institutions, some students were surely experiencing inner conflicts. This tension, I believed, was necessary to move them toward a more complex understanding of sexuality, particularly as it relates to the field of education. Cindy<sup>3</sup>, a married mother of two children, captures this struggle. Her journal not only records her initial uneasiness with this topic but demonstrates how curricular inclusion of LGBTQ content afforded her the opportunity to reflect thoughtfully from her position as a heterosexual woman.

*I have to be completely honest. Initially, this topic made me very nervous. Writing this journal entry for you, someone who identifies as a gay man, put a lot of pressure on me. I was afraid of saying the wrong thing, being insensitive, hurting your feelings, revealing my stupidity. I know many diverse people, but sexual orientation is not something that I have ever discussed in education*

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms have been used throughout this chapter to protect the identity of my former students.

*courses. I never would have guessed that sexual orientation would be a topic of discussion in how to teach preschoolers or kindergarteners.*

*My initial response was, “huh?” Is this age appropriate? But I have to admit, that after reading the articles and viewing the video, my horizons have broadened (and that’s always a good thing). I also have to admit to being ashamed of my ignorance about the ramifications of being gay or being the child of gay parents in regards to the amount of suffering that some children have to endure through verbal and physical abuse. The articles gave a poignant voice to an issue that for a lot of us goes unheard. Even without meaning to, well-intentioned heterosexuals can perpetuate misinformation and biases. I categorize myself as such, so I found the suggestion made by the gay parents in the video to be helpful. Their comments and suggestions apply to all groups of people that are discriminated against and that the same tools of awareness, education, and the teaching of understanding and empathy go a long way.*

Cindy’s journal reveals her willingness to change her thinking and problematize her previous beliefs. Cindy has taken the positive step of expanding her understanding of diversity to include LGBTQ students/families. Although awareness is a crucial first step, merely adding LGBTQ issues to an already long list of human differences seemed, to me, to be inadequate.

Other students, like Justine, engaged enthusiastically in discussions around this topic but failed to see the complex nature of diversity or her personal potential as an agent of social change.

*Our talks about gays and lesbians in schools were very enlightening and thought-provoking. It was really interesting to hear what others thought about this topic. I believe that all children should be accepted and all ways of life should be tolerated. Gay kids are no different from Blacks kids or Hispanic kids. I have no problem honoring diversity in my classroom. I am not only just talking about cultural differences but also sexual orientation differences. However, I am aware that society has a problem with this topic. I know I will have to teach to what society thinks is appropriate.*

Justine has learned to engage superficially with this topic, using language of “acceptance” and “tolerance.” However, she, like many of us, has not grappled with the complexities of multicultural, inclusive pedagogies. She remains at a *comfortable* distance from the issues. She writes, “gay kids are no different from Black kids or Hispanics kids,” suggesting that all minority identity markers are the same or similar. Justine does not identify as a lesbian, as Black, or as Hispanic. Her journal supports the findings of Seidl and Friend (2002a) who suggest some students conceptualize “difference” as a monolithic category thereby simplifying ‘diversity’ into something more easily talked about while masking its intricacies. Perhaps Justine’s conceptualization is representative of those students who are beginning to grapple with sexual diversity. However, the prospect of Justine contributing to a form of education that is transformative seems unlikely with her current stage of thinking. Justine writes, “society has a problem with this topic. I know I will have to teach to what society thinks is appropriate.” For the goals of multicultural, inclusive education to be realized with respect to LGBTQ students, prospective teachers, like Justine, will need to have a greater



awareness of their own personal agency. Educators will need to have experiences which allow them to reframe their definitions of equitable practice and their roles in making this happen.

Of course not all students reacted positively to the integration of LGBTQ content in our class in the ways that Cindy or even Justine responded. Several students in our class of 34 appeared unwilling/unable to recognize their privilege as heterosexuals. These students' resistance seemed to be based in embedded religious beliefs and tacit acceptance of heterosexism. As the instructor and a participant in our ongoing dialogue, I was uncertain what could be done to disrupt these students' existing beliefs. Rebecca, a special education major from a white, upper-middle class background, dismisses the importance of even considering LGBTQ issues.

*After seeing the video last week and reading the articles this week, I wasn't sure how I would respond or reflect on the studies that it included. Part of me wants to just easily say, I just don't get it. What I mean is that I just don't understand why on earth someone's sexual preference would matter to anyone and why anyone would ever support sexual orientation as part of the curriculum in primary grades. I wholeheartedly believe that tolerance is important but why do we need to focus on someone's sexual orientation. I feel like these articles were completely blown out of proportion and consistently found my notes saying, "who cares," "why is this important," and "how is sexual preference relevant to primary education?"*

*At one point in the article it says that gay members of the group felt that labeling defined their identity and gave them a sense of pride. I find it very sad*

*that someone would define their identity by labeling their sexual preference or being proud because they can freely share a very small part of their lives. The fact that I am heterosexual and married to a man is a very miniscule part of who I am and certainly does not define me. I am also a woman, teacher, daughter, sister, Christian, reader, boater, student, gardener, and friend. These are all the things that make up who I am and to pull any of them out to stand alone would never be able to define who I am as a person.*

The inclusion of LGBTQ issues in our class did little to displace Rebecca's previous beliefs. Her sense of heterosexual privilege remained intact. Like many people of privilege, she failed to examine how her heterosexual identity offers her freedoms and rights denied to others. For Rebecca, our discussions were heightened by her connections to religious values. And while many students in our class described "Christianity" or other identity markers as significant, Rebecca consistently used this aspect of her identity as a means to separate herself from engaging in our conversations regarding this topic.

Realistically in such a short period of time, I knew our dialogue around these issues would scarcely begin to undo years of homophobic conditioning. Rebecca's writing puts forward an underdeveloped understanding of the complex ways that heterosexism and homophobia impact young children and schools. She suggests that LGBTQ inclusion is inappropriate for early childhood education, perhaps, because she, like many heterosexuals, equate LGBTQ inclusion with sex education. She, herself, takes up multiple identity markers. Yet, both her writing and her comments in class suggest that she believes LGBTQ students, teachers, and parents should hide or diminish a particular aspect of their identity.

As a teacher, I anticipated this work to be greeted with resistance by some of my students. I expected that our conversations would be uncomfortable for some. Yet, beyond some awareness of their religious convictions, I did not know enough about my students' backgrounds and experiences to help them move from their homophobic positions. In the case of Rebecca, I was unsure how to respond, how to create alternative ways to communicate my objectives. Clearly, I had not considered adequately the multiple entry points through which my students would approach this topic. In the end, I felt my class had become more divided on the issues, and, unfortunately, I was at a loss for how to reestablish communication. Palmer (1998) writes:

If my private perceptions are the measure of truth, if my truth cannot be challenged or enlarged by the perceptions of another, I have merely found one more way to objectify and hold the other at arm's length, to avoid again the challenge of personal transformation. This view isolates the self, creates as many worlds as there are knowers, destroys the possibility of community, and finally makes the other an object of no real account. Whether I look upon your world with envy or disgust, it can never be my world. You and your reality are only objects to be viewed, not relationships to be entered. (p. 55)

By failing to enter into a relationship with this topic, Rebecca remained encapsulated by her homophobic thinking and continued to hold the LGBTQ community at arm's length.

Indeed, my own experiences with diversity education and LGBTQ inclusion corroborate the findings of the scholars above. That is, mere content integration through a short-term approach is ineffective in uprooting the deep-seated beliefs held by some students. Based on my experiences with Cindy, Justine, Rebecca and their peers, I knew

I would have to seek out alternative approaches to diversity education if I were to assist my students in developing more sophisticated understandings of the issues. Next, I explore some approaches in teacher education that have met with greater success—approaches that I believed might help me better support LGBTQ study in teacher education.

### **Alternative Approaches to Diversity Education**

Short-term interventions may hold some promise in the preparation of teachers for diverse classrooms, but the extant literature suggests that these approaches are not enough (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Seidl & Friend, 2002b; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). Indeed, my experiences with the students above demonstrate the limitations of short-term, decontextualized intervention. Moreover, this example illustrates the inadequacies of working in the relative isolation of a university classroom and the failure of traditional pedagogy to make meaningful gains in the complex issues related to diversity and equity education.

The challenges, however, that schools and colleges of education face are marked by a society that is divided rigidly along race, class, gender, and sexuality lines. The results of these divisions often create contexts whereby Whites are uninformed of issues related to differences within and across communities of Color. Similarly, heterosexuals often find themselves uneducated in the needs, interests, and ways of knowing of those within LGBTQ communities. These divisions create *social distance* which prevents us from knowing one another and thwart our abilities to foster relationships that lead to cross-community alliances (Anzaldúa, 2000). Increasingly, then, teacher education is

called to identify ways “to cross the schisms that divide us; to construct new ways of being together; and to learn about, with, and from one another” (Seidl and Friend, 2002, p. 144).

One way teacher educators have taken up this calling and created spaces that foster greater cultural competency among their students is through long-term, community-based internships (Noordhoof & Kleinfeld, 1993; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996; Seidl & Friend, 2002b). Zeichner and Melnick (1996) describe the significance of community relationships in the preparation of teachers:

as we think about the task of preparing teachers to educate all students to high academic standards in our increasingly culturally diverse and unequal society, the idea of community field experiences and the use of community people as teacher educators become crucial. (p. 177)

Community-based internships/field placements immerse pre-service teachers in longitudinal experiences in culturally rich settings. This scholarship suggests that sustained engagement in community field sites can play a central role in increasing pre-service teachers’ awareness of diversity.

The benefits of engaging pre-service teachers in long-term, cross-cultural experiences have been well established. As an example, Seidl and Friend (2002b) have described an ongoing and mutually beneficial relationship between pre-service teachers at The Ohio State University and the Mt. Olivet Christian Academy—an African American Baptist Church community. Additionally, Zeichner and Melnick (1995) have reviewed several teacher education programs that provide community-based experiences—namely, the Teach for Alaska Program at the University of Alaska (Noordhoff and Kleinfeld,

1993) and the Cultural Immersion Projects at Indiana University (Stachowski and Mahan, 1998). This literature suggests that community-based experiences hold promise in bridging the cultural divide that separates teachers from their students and are more effective than short-term experiences in fostering cross-cultural knowledge and relationships.

The belief that cross-community, experiential learning might better support pre-service teachers in understanding issues related to LGBTQ concerns guides my current work in teacher education. Considering the earlier statistics regarding LGBTQ youth and teacher's attitudes about these students, there is a dire need for teacher education to address this dimension of diversity and equity. However, LGBTQ communities are arguably less visible and therefore more difficult to access than other disenfranchised communities. Additionally, LGBTQ individuals hold multiple social and cultural affiliations. Considering this reality, we do not know enough about the potential and possibilities of engaging pre-service teachers in sustained experiences related to LGBTQ issues and communities.

### **Introducing the Study at Hand**

Based on my understanding of the above teacher education literature and given my prior experiences with Cindy, Justine, and Rebecca's class, I began to question more closely how I might construct a long-term, mediated learning opportunity with my students to address LGBTQ inclusion. Why, I questioned, are some students unwilling to examine their heterosexual privilege and to acknowledge the freedoms and rights they receive that are denied to others. Moreover, why do some students continue to cling tightly to their homophobic positions? Additionally, I began to consider how one's

personal identity markers influence the type and level of engagement with the topic. Certainly, my past experiences in the classroom, as a gay elementary teacher, presented me with a different set of concerns than my predominantly heterosexual students would face in the near future. From this, I started to question what experiences future teachers needed in order to develop the requisite skills to successfully integrate LGBTQ topics in their classrooms. More importantly, I wanted to learn more about the potential community engagement holds for helping bring LGBTQ awareness to pre-service teachers. Therefore, I proposed this study—a year-long collaborative investigation *with* students on what it means to develop anti-homophobic positions and be proactive in meeting the needs of LGBTQ youth and families in schools.

I entered with two broad questions:

- What beliefs do pre-service teachers in this particular setting embrace related to LGBTQ inclusion?
- And what significance does long-term, collaborative inquiry hold for both the students and the teacher engaged in this work?

My goal was to establish a collaborative, classroom-based inquiry environment that sought out experiences within LGBTQ communities. I envisioned this collaboration as both “research on teaching” and “teacher research” yet as neither precisely (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). In terms of students conducting, in essence, a shared form of teacher research, I hoped to work with them to create a learning space to examine their own socioculturally constructed thinking, to generate their own questions related to LGBTQ inclusion, and to determine the LGBTQ issues in education that were most important to them. In this manner students would drive the group process and ultimately share responsibility for their own learning. I had learned from my earlier attempts with

Cindy, Justine, and Rebecca's class that merely addressing these complex issues with traditional university pedagogy was an ineffective intervention. Traditional teacher education pedagogy enacted over a few short weeks failed to cause significant shifts in thinking. I hoped that a collaborative, inquiry-based class that was longitudinal and connected to experience might be more effective in increasing our abilities and widening our understanding of the issues.

I also viewed this project through my lens as a teacher educator. I hoped that this work would also contribute to not just some scholarly body of knowledge but would contribute in meaningful ways to my students' lives. As a teacher educator, my purposes were to help my students develop knowledge and skills related to LGBTQ issues and to assist them in developing anti-homophobic identities. In addition, I hoped to be able to step back and describe what took place in our collaborative inquiry. This would mean relying on more traditional interpretative research methodologies. As a researcher looking back at our experience, I wanted to be able to describe how the group defined what helped or hindered the development of greater awareness and skills related to LGBTQ issues; how students contributed to inquiry-group teaching; and how this type of collaborative context might be beneficial to not only my teaching at the university but to the larger community of teacher education. In this capacity, then, I was both a university teacher doing teacher research with my students *and* conducting research on my own teaching. Ultimately, I hoped our experience would lead to both personal and professional knowledge that would serve my students practically and contribute to the field theoretically.



## Context, Participants, and Data Sources

This current study, then, is located within The Ohio State University's Masters of Education (M.Ed) program. OSU's M.Ed. is a fifth-year, graduate-level program. Participants for this study were students seeking licensure in early childhood education. Traditionally, the program admits approximately 60 teacher candidates annually. As a doctoral student, I had worked within the M.Ed. program as a field supervisor and literacy instructor, and I knew the program and its faculty well. Consequently, I entered this work as an active member of an existing community. Ohio State's early childhood M.Ed. program is nationally ranked. Additionally, the faculty who work in the program have commitments to diversity education. It was within this larger educational environment that this study emerged.

As a way to increase knowledge and awareness related to classroom diversity, our M.Ed. students are required to take a diversity and equity course entitled: *Teachers and Teaching: The Changing Context in Equity, Diversity & Exceptionality*. The course description states:

The major focus of the class is on the role of teachers in building classroom communities where curriculum and instructional environments support all students. Students are asked to examine how class, ethnicity, race, gender, ability, and heterosexual assumptions influence the behaviors of educators, pupils, and parents. Students are also expected to begin to develop philosophies of inclusion and the concomitant teaching strategies that support these philosophies.

This class is typically offered as a ten-week course. However, within the M.Ed. program, students can elect to engage in more extensive studies related to cross-cultural education through immersion experiences in Chile or to engage in anti-racist education through a yearlong community-based internship in an African-American community. These

experiences are some of the first opportunities our students have to begin exploring their perspectives on race, class, gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, and ability. In addition, these experiences provide an opportunity for us, as teacher educators, to learn about our students' perspectives, and perhaps challenge and extend our students' understandings of issues related to diversity and equity education.

In September of 2002, I received faculty support to create an additional alternative to the required diversity and equity course. I proposed a yearlong inquiry group to investigate issues related to LGBTQ issues in education (See Appendix B for "Invitation to Inquiry" handout). Seen as both a class and a qualitative research project, this inquiry initiative relied on narrative sources of data. Data was primarily in the form of written responses to experiences at the university and reflections related to the larger community-based experiences our collaboration provided<sup>4</sup>. Participants' responses to inquiry experiences related to LGBTQ issues were collected in the forms of written papers and taped transcription of classroom conversations. In addition to the "texts" that students produced, the data corpus for this study consisted of my own reflective journal writing and field notes which I will elaborate on in chapter two. Finally, literature from the fields of narrative inquiry, participative action research, multicultural education, LGBTQ studies, and teacher education informed this research.

During their first autumn quarter seminar, I invited members of our incoming cohort of M.Ed. students to join me in an inquiry group related LGBTQ study<sup>5</sup>. As a

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<sup>4</sup> Each time we met student-participants and I submitted dialogue journals. The content of these journals varied from week to week and from person to person. Journal prompts included commenting on specific readings or out-of-university experiences. However, these journals were decidedly open-ended. Topics ranged from exploring motivations to sharing personal histories to unpacking heteronormativity.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for the chronology of our experience together.

result of this invitation, nine students and I began meeting to read widely in the field of LGBTQ studies and to discuss and reflect on experiences we created for ourselves within LGBTQ communities. Nine M.Ed. students and I were the participants in this research. Our inquiry group met, at minimum, every other week around participants' coursework at the university. We ranged in age from 23 to 50 years of age. In terms of race and socioeconomic status, our group was relatively homogeneous. We identified as white, middle-class individuals. Our group was characterized by heterogeneity in terms of age, gender, religious affiliation (Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Agnostic) and sexual orientation. Our group consisted of seven heterosexual females, one heterosexual male, and two homosexual men<sup>6</sup>.

This action-oriented research, then, sought out the understandings and points of view of the participants (Heron, 1985; Reason, 1994). More specifically, the research aimed to question, and perhaps lessen, the researcher/researched dichotomy by creating a research design whereby participants had autonomy in steering the inquiry, and thus, the research itself. Participants in this inquiry were seen as co-investigators who were active in developing questions, engaging in experiences, and generating knowledge. This practice was grounded in an ontological stance that understands reality to be multiple and a function of one's sociocultural experiences (Glesne, 1999). Whereas much research in the social sciences places the ownership of research (i.e., the task of data analysis and interpretation and thus the bulk of the learning) squarely on the shoulders of the researcher, this inquiry aimed to share ownership and knowledge construction with

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<sup>6</sup> Participants will be introduced with greater description in chapter 2. See also Appendix C for participants' demographic information.

participants. This research, then, was seen as a social project with hopes of directly impacting the lives of the participants. The specifics of the research design emerged as fieldwork unfolded. That is, the inquiry was shaped by those who participated, changing directions whenever possible to be responsive to the needs of all those involved.

### **Invoking Imagination: The Research Journey**

Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears . . . Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions.

Maxine Greene, 1995

Like Greene, I have come to envision collaborative research as a creative, imaginative process—a process which, in some small ways, might enable me to “cross the empty spaces” between the present silencing of LGBTQ issues in teacher preparation and the vision I hold for teacher education to contribute to a more socially just, fully inclusive future. Creating imaginative frameworks to generate new knowledge, however, inherently calls us to establish inquiry environments and personal relationships that are not currently present. Imagination calls us to envision something new. If we are to look through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears, we must create spaces that allow us to share one another’s insight and resourcefulness. That is, we must find co-constructed, non-patronizing methods to bring people together to work on shared concerns in creative, alternative, indeed, imaginative environments. This current research, then, sets out to explore the underdeveloped methodology of co-researching with participants, or as the title points out, “Investigating LGBTQ Issues in Collaboration with Pre-service

Teachers.” I have come to believe that through shared research—characterized by joint investment and ownership—we might create new, unforeseen paths on which to travel; we might develop new strategies for addressing pressing social issues. In the presence of imagination, inventive ideas can be developed; images of oneself in society can take focus; and new ways of understanding and acting in the world can be realized.

Creating alternative, collaborative research sites that honor the professional and the personal is a feminist calling (Fonow & Cook, 1991; hooks 1984; Lather, 1991; Olesen, 1994). Yet working collaboratively with students and placing the personal at the heart of research demand a rethinking of the very research processes on which we have come to rely. Notions of authority, power, and expertise are all called into question. This current research aims to testify to the potential of a small-group collaborative research environment to create a learning context that ruptures traditional notions of teaching, learning, and knowledge creation.

Moving from imaginary research scenarios to imaginative research practices asks us to embark on an uncharted, knowledge-seeking journey. Journeys to the unknown always involve some degree of risk taking. Yet, if we are willing to take this risk, reflect on our growth and development along the way, and stay open to the possibilities of the “alternative realities” about which Greene writes, we might come to articulate new knowledge claims and *create* new patterns of thinking and action for our lives.

In this chapter, I have laid out how I came to conduct LGBTQ-inclusive research with pre-service teachers. Through journal excerpts, I have reflected on some of my earlier experiences as both a student and a teacher that led me to look more closely at LGBTQ issues in the context of teacher preparation. Holding up my life experiences

served several purposes. First, collaboration implies shared practice. As both a collaborative researcher and a teacher educator, I could not ask student-participants to share intimate aspects of their lives without exposing the life experiences and beliefs that drew me to this work. The journal writing I have shared in this chapter locates me and my potential biases/subjectivities and positions me and my stories as subject to the same process of interpretative examination which I would be asking my students (as co-participants) to undertake. In this sense, my stories, like my students' stories, are data, shared not only here but with my student participants during the course of our collaboration. Additionally, my journal writing serves to illustrate, in concrete ways, how homophobia and heterosexism are manifested in educational contexts. That is, they provide a voice that too often goes unheard to be heard. In doing so, I believe my stories offer a rationale for engaging in anti-homophobic education.

As a group of collaborative inquirers, my students and I embarked on a journey together. The text that follows offers a narrative glimpse of that journey—a journey of how ten strangers, initially blind to one another's perspective came to examine issues of LGBTQ equity. Like any journey, this one is characterized by a point of departure—an anticipated destination. Invoking a metaphor of a journey implies that the process was mapped, that the destination was known and made visible even though the path or process was not completely determined. Our “journey,” however, did not unfold as simplistically, linearly, or as clearly as this metaphor may suggest. Instead, collaboration and co-participation prompted us to take into account the needs and interests of multiple travelers, prompting us to make several unforeseen stops along the way.

## Mapping the Text

My challenge as the writer of this research report is to capture, in words, this process—a process that is, perhaps, better understood through participation. This text sets out to provide a map of our experiences, offering snapshots of our work together. However, simple directions like: Turn left on “Self-Interrogation” Boulevard; precede three-tenths of a mile to “Gain-New-Knowledge” Street; the “Anti-homophobia” building is located on your right, are insufficient in capturing the complexity of our journey or the learning that took place. The reader will not simply encounter the questions, procedures, and findings of our work. Indeed, this report is not outlined like a traditional dissertation. Instead, literature is threaded across the chapters and method is embedded throughout, most explicitly in chapter two. As with much narrative research, the lines between data and analysis are blurred. Consequently, the text is organized around narrative vignettes—discussions, reflections, and stories of our time together. In these stories, I seek to capture the salient experiences that, I have come to believe, contributed to our personal growth and transformation.

In chapter two, I describe our *collaborative process*—how our LGBTQ classroom-based inquiry came into existence; how, that is, we “got started.” I go on to describe the multiple and overlapping intentions (goals and purposes) of our work. I share, for example, the goals of our classroom-based inquiry. Aligned with but seen as separate from *our* collaboration, I also describe *my* intentions from a teacher educator’s perspective—a perspective focused on interpreting our collaboration itself. By examining our collaborative process more closely, I illustrate some of the complexities of

working in collaboration with students. Additionally, I lay out the theoretical traditions upon which our collaboration drew, exposing issues of power and authority that were significant to our work together. I address how narrative practices were central to our collaborative process and how student-participants contributed in integral ways to this collaboration. For example, I describe how the workings of our collaboration shifted and changed in accordance to the needs and interests of the co-collaborators. Finally, in this chapter, I introduce my co-collaborators—the student-participants—and describe how their contributions were integral to our collaborative process.

In chapter three, I describe how our collaborative work resulted in a productive *community of learners*. Although community building was never a primary focus of this research endeavor, I argue that a community *did* emerge. In this chapter, I consider several commonly held conceptions of community and describe how our work is located within these definitions. Then, I describe the practices that fostered our unique community, characterized by differences in terms of investments, interpersonal identity markers, and personal disclosure. Our relationships with one another, I assert, were cultivated and sustained through these shared practices—practices that allowed us to learn from and with each other.

In chapter four, I present the pedagogical processes that we constructed. I examine more closely the kinds of practices that supported our collaborative inquiry and fostered the growth of an intimate learning community. We discovered that the practices that were most beneficial were the ones that forced us to move beyond campus, beyond reflection, and beyond inquiry. In this chapter, I describe in detail these three primary practices that exemplify the pedagogy in which we engaged. By working beyond



campus, beyond reflection, and beyond inquiry we forged a new, jointly-owned pedagogy—a pedagogy that served *our* needs as we learned ways to better serve the needs of LGBTQ youth and families.

Finally, in chapter five I cull together the central characteristics of our work by theorizing what we came to call an *exposed pedagogy*. By drawing together my learnings from across the previous chapters, I consider the implications of conducting LGBTQ-inclusive work with pre-service teachers. My intention as a teacher educator is to highlight the overarching themes and essential components of our work. In considering the implications of this project, I have come to believe what is most important is capturing for interested readers the nature of our inquiry and characterizing, more holistically, the pedagogy that was created. In this final chapter, I share, too, student-participants' final consensus writings. These final consensus documents constitute the summative results and implications of our investigation from students' perspective. In this way I hope to honor their contributions, remembering again to whom this work belongs.

Each of these chapters, then, analyzes key elements of what we did and what we learned on our “journey” together. Integral to any analysis of our work is my ongoing, reflective writing that anchored this study. Writing guided my moves as a teacher and researcher. Student-participants and I wrote consistently and shared our work regularly with each other. Since my reflective writing shaped so many aspects of this study from question formation to methods selection and from data collection to data analysis, my journaling is an essential component of each chapter. I invite you, now, to come along as I reminisce about our journey.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE MOST UNLIKELY COLLABORATORS

#### ***“From the Start”*** **Journal Entry (September)**

*I woke up early this morning to put the final touches on the “invitation” I had crafted for the M.Ed. students to join me in a collaborative, classroom-based LGBTQ inquiry. I had what a close friend of mine calls a “brick belly”—one part knot in your stomach, one part nervous butterflies, one part nausea. I had hoped to avoid this condition. Yesterday, I prepared for this day like any self-respecting, professional gay man would do. I got a new, much shorter haircut and bought a new outfit for today’s big invitation. In a hurried rush, I ironed my new clothes, poured some coffee into a travel mug, cleaned up the dishes from last night’s experimental tofu creation, and fed the cat on my way out the door.*

*Already, perspiration was showing through my new shirt. I wasn’t sure if this was caused by the summer-like temperatures of this autumn morning or my growing nervousness of the task I was about to undertake.*

*With their already hectic schedule I wasn’t convinced that our incoming students would be able to commit to such an extensive endeavor. “What would motivate them to undertake this ‘extra’ work?” I wondered to myself on my way to campus. I would like to think that some of them would be called to do LGBTQ*

*work because they care about diversity and equity issues in our schools. Yet, I recall being in their situation. Like them and so many novice educators, in the early stages of my teaching career, I was concerned with the pragmatics of teaching (classroom management, the reading curriculum, grouping strategies) not the larger sociopolitical realities of schooling (who we serve well, who gets overlooked, whose perspective is represented and why).*

*I think now that my brick belly grew out of an awareness that I was about to out myself to a room full of my professors and 58 prospective teachers (a dozen or so I had had as students previously in a reading course I teach to our undergraduates). I remembered having a similar feeling a decade earlier when I invited my mom out for ice cream to tell her I was gay. I guess I thought rocky road would make the news more palatable. This, however, was the first time I had ever announced publicly to this many people that I am gay. I was nervous about putting my identity on the line. I, like so many gays folk before me, felt like I might be read as “pushing” a private agenda by promoting an issue of which I was so obviously personally connected. When I share personal aspects of my identity with people with whom I don’t have a close or intimate relationship, I feel vulnerable. Others are always free to do with the information what they may. It’s just always hard to gauge the reaction of strangers. Would I expose personal aspects of my life only to be rejected or chatted about in hushed tones for months to come as I passed students in the hall?*

*My presentation was brief but hectic. Our students, in order to secure field placements, are required to have finger prints on record. My presentation*

would have to wait until the first group of students dirtied up their hands, I was told. “Great!” I thought to myself as my stomach did a flip flop. “I’m a mess. Now, they’re going to be a mess.” As the chaos shifted from crazy to manageable, I distributed my “Invitation to Inquiry” handout (See Appendix B). Given only ten minutes, I had to speak quickly about the possibilities and benefits of investigating jointly LGBTQ issues as they relate to our personal and professional lives as educators. I looked over the sea of preoccupied faces. The sound of three-ring binders popping open as students made room for my invitation among the mountain of other “important” papers they had received on this their introductory seminar, causing me to wonder how we manage to prepare teachers as well as we do. I reported that LGBTQ issues are an aspect of human diversity that is often overlooked in education. I reminded them that this proposed experience would be a joint endeavor to increase our competencies related to LGBTQ concerns. Additionally, I told them that this experience would be shaped by the interests and needs of those who signed up and that we would be involved in systematic reflection on the experiences we created for ourselves. I concluded by thanking them for their time and made my way to the back of the room. I passed along a Kleenex box that was making the rounds for those students who had ink on their fingers. Our program manager asked another group of students to go out in the hallway for finger printing. This was my opportunity to make a graceful exit. I had done what I came to do.

As I passed the group of students who were queuing up for what looked like a regimented and closely controlled task of finger painting within the lines, I

*caught the gaze of Lindsay. She had tears in her eyes. “Surely, seminar hadn’t driven her to tears,” I thought to myself. I smiled at her and noticed her coming my way.*

*“Thank you so much,” she said. “What you talked about is so important. I want to be part of the group.”*

*“You’re welcome,” I responded in a socially awkward way. “Send me an email with your contact information.”*

*“I’m sorry for being emotional, but this topic is so important to me,” she repeated.*

*Lindsay introduced herself formally, gestured as if to give me a hug, and then got back in line. “Well, at least one person was listening to my presentation,” I thought to myself as I walked away. “Why,” I wondered, “were LGBTQ topics so important to Lindsay?” In time, I’d learn the answer to this question.*

### **Framing the Chapter**

Throughout this chapter, I use excerpts from my teaching journal, like the one above, to demonstrate the narrative nature of our work. The intent of this chapter is twofold. First, I help clarify my methodological positions. In the section that follows, for example, I attempt to “show” the reader how my writing was analyzed. How, that is, I created understandings through writing. Later, I describe the early goals and purposes of this collaborative endeavor. I also frame the collaboration within the epistemological

stance that I brought to this research. Lastly, I discuss briefly issues of power and authority in collaborative spaces. Broadly, then, this chapter sets out to locate the collaborative inquiry.

The second objective of this chapter is to describe how our collaboration emerged by offering descriptions of the participants and our practices. I have made a conscious choice to explore an alternative writing process, foregoing a traditional representation of data and research. Like Tuchman (1989), I believe “the writer’s objective is—or should be—to hold the reader’s attention . . . I want the reader to turn the page and keep on turning to the end” ( *New York Times*, February 2, 1989). As such, I rely on the pages of my journal, creating a text that weaves in and out of story. Richardson (1994) reminds us that “just as a piece of literature is not equivalent to its ‘plot summary,’ qualitative research is not contained in its abstracts. Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading” (p. 517). For us, as collaborative researchers, reading, writing, and researching were always intertwined.

### **Writing and Researching**

Throughout our year of LGBTQ study, student-participants and I wrote. Student-participants primarily composed pieces of writing in response to course readings, discussions, and out-of-university experiences. I, too, participated in this practice. Additionally, I made notes related to what I saw, what I heard, what I felt, and what I wondered about. Throughout our inquiry, writing sustained me. Writing gave me the time and space to reflect on students’ work/contributions, to critique my pedagogy, and to make connections to theory and literature. Writing, too, helped me locate my own subjectivities.

The above journal entry, “From the Start,” can be found in the pages of my teaching journals. I say “journals” because different types of writing were stored in various locations throughout the investigation. My teaching journals contained short reflective writings, like those shared in chapter one, and more extensive stories, like the entry above. The above entry from my teaching journal describes how I initiated this collaborative, classroom-based inquiry with pre-service teachers. This entry captures my emotions and uncertainties related to inviting students to take part in this collaboration. This entry, too, describes how I went about soliciting participants. Part of the reason I share this story is to inform the reader of how *access* and *entry* took place. Unlike the students whose writing is shared in the previous chapter, student-participants in this study self-selected not only to learn about LGBTQ issues in education but to be contributors to this research project.

Formal journal entries and analytic memos were written and saved on the computer. Furthermore, I wrote field notes during and immediately after inquiry sessions on scraps of paper, post-it notes, or on the back of handouts. In addition to these writings, I wrote journal entries which at the time I understood to be for *my eyes only*. These entries were closely aligned to what Richardson (1994) describes as *personal notes*. These journals contained my feelings about the research and my student-participants as well as my doubts, anxieties, and pleasures. Each of these various forms of writing captured the partial happenings and goings on of my life during our year of LGBTQ study. I used them as a way to make sense of and construct meaning related to our inquiry group experiences. As such, the writing served as both *data* and *method*.

## Narrative as Data

Leaning on the distinctions made by Hankins (2003), I understand the data in this study to be twofold. First, there are the narratives that are created during an event, such as conversations and stories that participants told; and then there are narratives that are created as a result of an event or experiences, such as pieces of response writing or autobiographical writing. Second, there are interpretive narratives about an event; the way student-participants and I viewed or made sense of a group experience. Said another way, these secondary narratives were often a response to earlier narratives.

The assortment of narratives that were collected contained various layers of reflection and interpretation. A narrative of a class conversation or a written response to weekly readings, for instance, can be viewed as “original” data. The writing that follows these original writings, however, encompasses or demands a more sophisticated level of reflection. Take as an example a discussion in response to weekly readings about homophobia and heterosexism. This conversation, when transcribed, can be understood to be “original” data or as a primary narrative. As student-participants and I went about our inquiry work of writing responses to conversations and experiences, we produced secondary narratives—narratives that were analytic and reflective in nature. I, in turn, often wrote narratives about students’ reflective narratives; thus, a third and sometimes a fourth layer of data was produced. This ongoing, recursive *process* of recording, writing, reflecting, and writing again represents how narrative data became narrative *method*.



## Narrative as Method

Hankins (2003) used narrative as method in her practitioner research of a first grade classroom. Hankins describes the entanglement between narrative as data and narrative as method:

The line between data and method is thin and hazy, and some would suggest that there is no line at all. I write selectively about the ‘doings’ in the classroom . . .

Those doings, or events, become data. However, once selected and written about, they become method. (p. 14)

Data and method are, as Hankins points out, inseparable and fluid. Richardson (1994), too, explores the use of writing as method: “we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ . . . writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 516). Our process of collecting narrative data and then revisiting it through revision and rewriting characterized our methodological practice as an LGBTQ inquiry group. The line, then, between what “counted” as narrative data and what “counted” as narrative method is not clearly delineated. Rather, we told stories, shared writings, and revised these stories through further writing and discussion. It was this recursive process that propelled our inquiry group practices and led us to “writing as a method of discovery” (Richardson, 1994, p. 516).

Analysis was embedded in this ongoing, cyclical writing practice. That is, each of the narratives shared in this study have gone through an analytic process. Analysis occurred as we went back to previously told stories and rewrote in light of new experiences. For example, early on, we wrote about the theme of *acceptance*. As our

year together unfolded, the theme of acceptance emerged again and again as we wrote about our personal experiences with/in LGBTQ communities. Toward the end of year together, while discussing transgender issues, we problematized and wrote again about our use and understanding of the term *acceptance*. It was this process of writing narratives over time and in the context of a growing history together that enabled us to construct more sophisticated understandings of the issues. Indeed, my pedagogy and the actions our inquiry group took were shaped by our reflective writings and discussions; thus, writing, reflecting, and rewriting shaped our inquiry practice and how we made meaning.

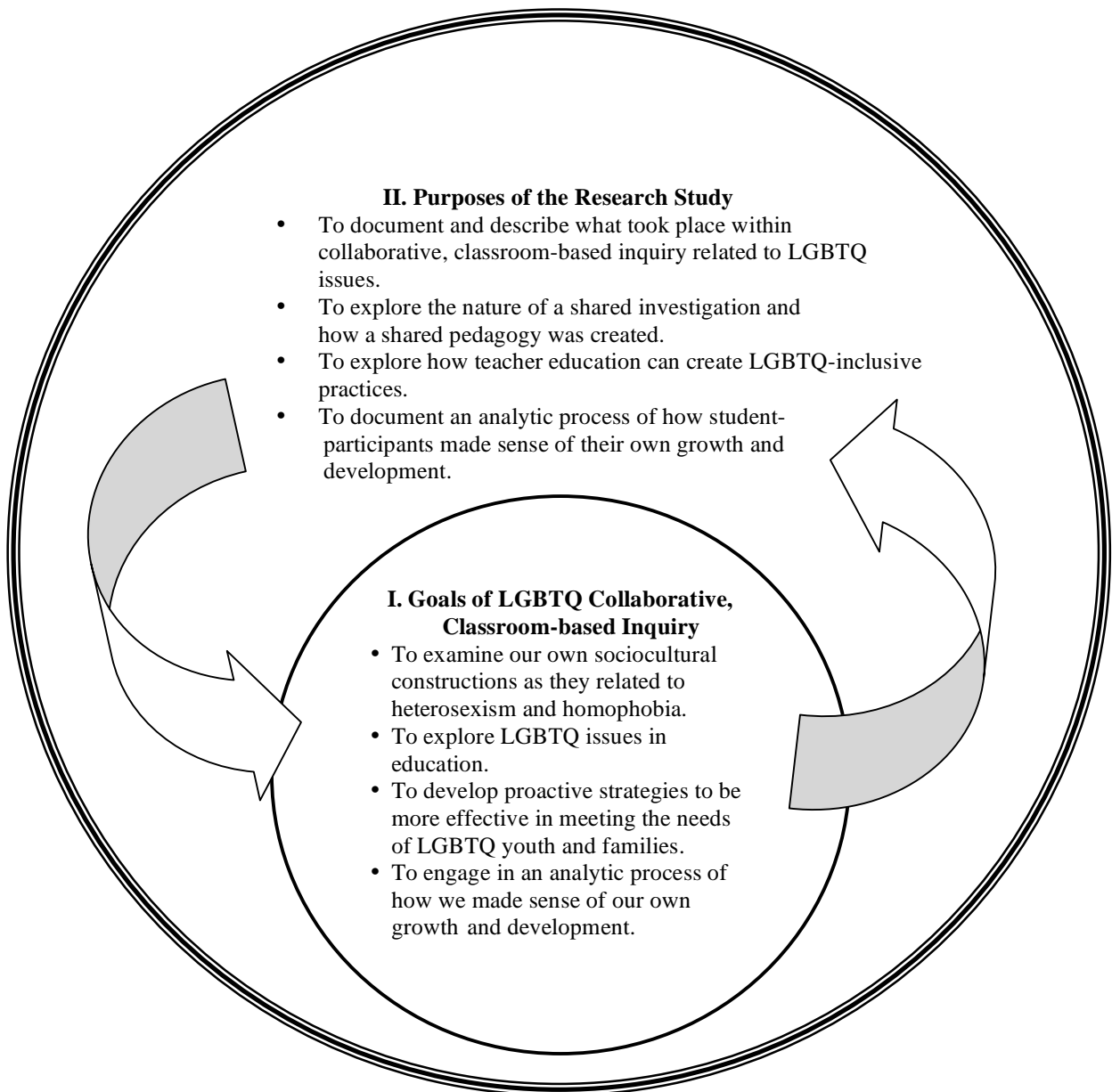
### **Conceptualizing our Emerging Collaboration**

Early on, our collaboration drew upon narrative, critical, feminist, and action research traditions. Within this project, student-participants were viewed as co-subjects, co-teachers, and co-researchers. Inviting students into this type of collaboration caused me to consider both epistemological and methodological issues. Viewed as both a social project and a qualitative investigation, I conceptualized our work as a joint-learning endeavor with aspirations of promoting social change. The overall intentions of this research were multiple and overlapping. In order to characterize these intentions, I attempted, early on, to outline the goals/purposes of our work together by delineating them into two broad but conceptually distinct categories:

- I. Goals of the LGBTQ collaborative, classroom-based inquiry
- II. Purposes of the broader research study.

I have since come to realize that it was an inaccurate (or simplistic) representation to characterize the goals/purposes of this research as occurring solely along these two

distinct parallel lines of thought. For the sake of methodological clarity, however, I made the distinction of separating the goals of our LGBTQ collaborative, classroom-based inquiry project—a project that was created with student-participants—from my broader research agenda—an agenda that was created to answer questions I had about the



**Figure 2.1: Research within Research**

preparation of teachers. Figure 2.1 represents this distinction graphically, characterizing our collaboration as *Research within Research*. In this representation, the inner circle depicts the goals of a shared inquiry with students while the outer circle represents the purposes I established for myself as a teacher educator and researcher. The outer circle, then, is aligned with a more conventional qualitative tradition of researching practice—in this case, the practice students and I created in our shared inquiry. Added as the investigation unfolded, the arrows illustrate the ways in which our collaboration was more than a mere embedment of the larger research. Instead, our shared research (inner circle) and my research on teaching (outer circle) came to influence and be influenced by one another in ways that impacted significantly the workings of both.

The major goals of our LGBTQ collaborative, classroom-based inquiry group are outlined below followed by the broader purposes I established from my position as a teacher educator. By defining and elaborating on the multiple intentions of this work, I hope the reader is able to understand better the complexity of our collaboration and my positionality as both teacher educator and researcher.

### **The Inner Circle: Characterizing the Goals of our LGBTQ Classroom-based Inquiry**

The focus of our inquiry was to explore LGBTQ issues in education. Earlier, I stated that teacher education programs have traditionally struggled to create experiences that disrupt pre-service teachers' culturally encapsulated belief systems. Educators, like others, are not immune to the internalization and replication of heterosexist and homophobic convictions. Definitions of family, notions of gendered norms, and patterns of acceptable loving behavior are all judged appropriate or inappropriate as viewed

through a heteronormative lens. When our view is obstructed by bias—even when unintentional—we fail to see how our own teaching behaviors contribute to unjust practices. Therefore, one goal of our collaborative inquiry was to explore how one such injustice, heterosexism, has been influential in shaping our thinking and actions.

Classroom-based inquiry created an academic space for us to grapple with heterosexism and homophobia in a supported environment. Toward these efforts, I anticipated we would make mistakes along the way; however, these mistakes would be in the context of a group whose mission it was to disentangle heterosexism. Additionally, working jointly to develop greater awareness of LGBTQ issues established a context for participants to learn with and from one another. Our work of unlearning heterosexism involved:

- examining our own sociocultural constructions as they related to heterosexism and homophobia,
- exploring LGBTQ issues in education,
- developing proactive strategies to be more effective in meeting the needs of LGBTQ youth and families, and
- engaging in an analytic process of how we made sense of our own growth and development over the course of our time together.

The design of this collaboration was informed by research in teacher education which suggests sustained experiences are required for pre-service teachers to engage meaningfully around topics of diversity (Gomez, 1996; Seidl & Friend, 2002b; Zeichner

& Melnick, 1996). Over the course of an academic year, we, as an inquiry group, sought out experiences both within and beyond the university to enhance our knowledge about and skills related to sexual diversity.

Indeed, the very nature of collaborative inquiry suggests that all participants are active in formulating questions and shaping experiences that are germane to their interests (Heron, 1981, 1985; Reason, 1994). Accordingly, student-participants in this investigation were called upon to contribute to the teaching of our inquiry group. Students' questions, interests, and past experiences guided our inquiry path. To a large extent, then, our curriculum was generated by student-participants. I did not lecture on pre-established subject matter. It was within this context, characterized by joint ownership, that we came to construct a shared educational agenda with likeminded commitments to an LGBTQ-inclusive definition of education.

### **The Encompassing Circle: Purposes of the Research from a Teacher Educator's Perspective**

Convening a group of prospective teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry led me to consider the broader potentials of this work—potentials that spoke more directly to the workings of collaboration from a teacher educator's perspective. Referring again to Figure 2.1, the larger encompassing circle illustrates how I, as a teacher educator, “looked back” on what took place during our collaborative experience. This design created a layering of research as I participated in both lines of inquiry. This *research within research* aimed:

- to document and describe what took place within our collaborative, classroom-based inquiry related to LGBTQ issues,

- to explore the nature of a shared investigation and how a shared pedagogy was created,
- to explore how teacher education can create LGBTQ inclusive practices, and
- to document an analytic process of how student-participants made sense of their own growth and development.

Documentation of our collaboration was beneficial on at least two levels. First, documentation allowed me to capture evidence of our journey together. Additionally, documentation served to advance the work of our collaboration by providing ongoing feedback, tracking the history of the inquiry group, and plotting a course for its future (Reason, 1994). By documenting and describing our collaborative inquiry, I was better able to determine which inquiry paths were most productive in assisting us to be more effective LGBTQ-inclusive educators. Documentation allowed student-participants and I to monitor our learning as changes in attitudes and beliefs occurred. Ultimately, documentation offered evidence to make claims about our work and our learning by substantiating the descriptions of our year together.

An early initiative of our collaboration was to create a space for all participants to contribute to a shared pedagogy. Given that all the student-participants had the desire to become teachers themselves, the benefits of fostering a pedagogy that was student-driven, not merely student-centered, served not only the advancement of our collaborative learning but offered, I hoped, a model for their (and my) future approaches to teaching. Thus, one purpose of this text is to explore how our shared pedagogy was created. Little is known about how prospective teachers approach LGBTQ inclusion. By interpreting how student-participants engaged jointly in experiences that transformed

their abilities to envision and create positive educational spaces for LGBTQ children and families, this research hopes to contribute to the advancement of critical pedagogy in teacher preparation. Key to this work, then, was exposing aspects of our pedagogy that made explicit the nature of our interactions with one another as well as with members of LGBTQ communities and LGBTQ-advocating adults. By gaining an understanding of how we came to relate to one another, I hoped to conceptualize pedagogical strategies that support LGBTQ inclusion in teacher education.

While we depended on a shared, problem-posing pedagogy to support our collaborative work, it was the analysis of this pedagogy that led us to synthesize and evaluate our growth and development. I was interested in constructing portrayals of the relevant moments and critical shifts in thinking as they occurred for student-participants and me by describing the larger thematic threads that tied our experiences together. This process demanded that we turn inward, making our selves the subject of our inquiry. By systematically recording this analytic process, I hoped to be able to share how student-participants made meaning from our experience and develop a story of how our learning contributed practically to their lives as future teachers and theoretically to the field of teacher education.

Lastly, as a teacher educator, I was interested in theorizing what took place within our collaborative inquiry in order to be more reflective regarding my own practice. We, as a profession, do not know enough about how to create environments that nurture shifts in student thinking related to the complex issues surrounding sexual diversity in the classroom. As a teacher educator, I held as an objective the development of anti-homophobic competencies among my students. By capturing my contributions to our



shared pedagogy, I hoped to refine my teaching practice and theorize new and more efficient ways to engage in this work with prospective teachers.

***“From the Start” (continued)***

*Before I could get down the hall to my office, another student, Jill, called out my name. I had Jill as a student previously. She knew me to be a gay man. I knew her to be a card-carrying Republican. Jill has conservative views. She, for example, is a proponent of the death penalty and believes English should be made the official language of the United States. “Oh no,” I thought as she called out my name. I half expected her to challenge my invitation, to say LGBTQ topics have no place in the early childhood curriculum. Instead, she approached me in her conservative, navy jacket with a certain amount of energy, scrunching her ink-stained fingers in my face. “Of all days to wear a new shirt,” I thought.*

*“I really want to join your research group.”*

*“Great,” I said.*

*“Jen wants to join too, but she’s afraid of how it would look on her transcript. Can you believe some people? I guess she thinks she’s an island and can’t be touched by this topic. I’ll work on her!”*

*“Yeah, we’ll have to talk about this when we get together.” I said.*

*“Well, you have my email. Let me know when our first meeting is . . . Oh, and another thing, some of us are grabbing a bite to eat after seminar. Want to come along?”*

*“I’d love to get out of the building,” I said. “Let me drop my bag in the office and hook up with you in a few minutes.”*

It was in those few minutes that I began this journal entry. I often find that I'm at my most productive when I'm in a crunch for time or have a deadline, in this case a lunch date. Jill was actually the reason I scurried to find a pen in the first place. The truth is I have a history of underestimating students like Jill—students with seemingly little interest or purpose for doing LGBTQ-inclusive work. My vision of a collaborative, LGBTQ inquiry consisted of students with liberal agendas driven by progressive thinking and ideologies. I had all but ruled out students like Jill. But there she was teasing me playfully with her stained fingers and offering to “work on” other members of her cohort.

As a teacher educator, I wanted to be an effective facilitator of our group. I wanted students to develop greater competency with LGBTQ issues while learning about themselves in the process. Early on, I had given very little attention to the ways student-participants would shape my thinking as a teacher educator. Yet, on a day when I had concerns that this research wouldn't even get off the ground, hope came from a student who, prior to our exchange, I would have written off.

Describing collaborative inquiry, Peter Reason (1994) writes,

all those involved in the research are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision making contribute to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience, and also co-subjects, participating in the activity being researched. (p. 326)

Jill was making Reason's point. She reminded me that in addition to being a facilitator, teacher, initiator, and all-around den mother, I was also a participant and a subject in this collaborative inquiry. Students' ideas, experiences, words, and actions would challenge my thinking and expose my limitations. As feminist scholar bell hooks asserts, “Any

classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (1994, p. 21).

As I wrote earlier, I had hoped to bring together “likeminded” individuals to work on a shared concern. Jill taught me that *likeminded* is not synonymous with *same-minded*. Even before our first official meeting, I was learning from students.

**“From the Start” (concluded)**

*As I joined Jill and several other students for lunch at Wendys, I felt optimistic about the journey I was about to begin. I was excited about getting to know Lindsay, of seeing Jill in a new light, of entering into relationships with the seven other students-participants who, in the week ahead, would join Jill, Lindsay, and me in our inquiry.*

*As I reached for the last in what had been a super-sized box of French fries (and defying any possible logic of gastroenterology), I realized something. That knot in my stomach, the brick belly . . . it was gone.*

**Analyzing Stories: Narrative Ways of Knowing in Collaborative Research**

According to Schwandt (1997), hermeneutics “refers to the art, theory, and philosophy of the interpretation of meaning of an object (a **text**, a work of art, **human action**, the utterances of another speaker, and so on)” (pg. 62). The term ‘hermeneutic’ is derived from the Greek word ‘hermeneutikos’ meaning ‘to interpret’. Historically, a hermeneut was an interpreter of Biblical or literary texts (Oxford American Dictionary, 2001). Increasingly, educational research has adapted hermeneutic traditions in the form of narrative inquiry (See for example, Clandinin & Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*:

*Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, 2000; McEwan & Kieran, *Narrative in Teaching, Learning, and Research*, 1995; Witherell & Noddings, *Stories Lives Tell: Dialogue and Narrative in Education*, 1991). Narrative inquirers interpret stories of life experience found in oral histories, journals, diaries, memoirs, and autobiographical writing in order to understand perspectives and points of view of both authors and tellers.

As interpreters of experience and story in education, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) have written, “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives” (p. 416). These authors suggest that life experiences not only give structure to the stories we tell, but stories, in turn, function reciprocally to shape our experiences. Personalizing Clandinin and Connelly’s account, Funkenstein (in Carter and Doyle, 1994) has written, “my acting-in-the-world . . . is the continuous plotting of a narrative, interpreting the past and projecting the future according to my image of myself” (p. 120). Narrative traditions examine these “self images” and “actions” through a “storied” lens. That is, story conventions, like *time*, *character*, *plot*, and *action* are used to analyze or make sense of stories we share in public realms, to understand the actions and ideas of others. Indeed, this has led Connelly and Clandinin (1990) to describe education as “the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories” (p. 2).

It is not by mistake that I began this (and the previous) chapter with my own journal writing. The point of sharing the stories found in the pages of my teaching journal serves not only to exemplify the type of data that was (re)collected over the course of our academic year together but to demonstrate how my understandings of student-participants and our collaboration was influenced by the writing, interpreting, and

rewriting of events<sup>7</sup>. From the beginning our work utilized personal experience methods of journaling, autobiographical writing, and memoir as a means to reflect on the experiences we had created for ourselves.

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<sup>7</sup> As stated at the onset of this chapter, student-participants were engaged in journal writing throughout the quarter. I, too, participated in this process. The selection from my teaching journal entitled “From the Start” was born out of my field notes. I offer these field notes below as a way to “show” the reader how my teaching journal evolved—how, in essence, the data was worked and reworked for publication in this chapter. My “rewritten” field notes often became my contribution to our shared practice of reflective journal writing. In the earliest draft of “From the Start,” (well before it even had the title) I wrote about my experience of inviting students into collaborative research.

*I spoke to the M.Ed. students today in seminar. I gave 58 students a handout regarding a tentative action plan for the year as well as a handout describing Kaleidoscope. I felt like I rushed through the things I wanted to say. I'm still not as comfortable and confident talking about LGBTQ issues in front of a large group as I would like. I was nervous and sick to my stomach.*

*I would guess that I have had 12-15 of these students in class previously. I have come out in class to some of them before. I felt like I didn't speak as eloquently as I am sometimes able. They, for the most, seemed overwhelmed by the start of the quarter, or miffed at the cramped conditions of the room we were in. Finger printing didn't help.*

*The students were given a couple of options to join cross-cultural learning communities this year. Barbara reminded students of her anti-racist work at Mt. Olivet. I spoke about my potential LGBTQ work. Pat mentioned a Chilean experience available to them later in the summer.*

*Lindsay introduced herself to me. She seemed emotional but had a big smile. I wonder why she has interest. What's her connection to this topic?*

*Jill invited me to lunch. I thought maybe she wanted to talk about my presentation. That never really happened. We ate with Jen, Katie, and a two other students whose names I can't remember. Jill is such a contradiction to me. Is she sincere about this? [FN: 9/30/02]*

Again, my field notes, like this one, were oftentimes rewritten in the form of more extensive journal entries—entries that I often shared with student-participants. This particular field note was revisited (revised and edited) several times for use in this chapter. Each time a piece of writing was revisited it went through an analytic process. “From the Start” is the end product of that analytic process. The practice of writing, rewriting, and writing again enabled me to analyze and further contextualize the data. These iterative passes of the data resulted in the “story-ing” of my field notes, and are representative of one aspect of the data analysis process.

In the above journal entry, (and in subsequent entries for that matter), attention has been given to time and chronology. Indeed, starting at the chronological beginning seemed like a logical way to introduce the reader to our work. However, the above journal is not a simple, linear account of the events took place. In the earliest draft of this entry, I recorded my surprise that Jill, of all students, would approach LGBTQ inquiry with such gusto. I recorded the reciprocity of invitations—mine to shared inquiry, hers to lunch. It was several weeks later, when revisiting this piece of writing, that I contemplated why I was surprised by Jill’s enthusiasm. It was this process of writing, reflecting, and oftentimes rewriting that helped me make connections and offer insights related to our collaboration and the learning that was taking place. I was able to make sense of my surprise by drawing on my previous understanding of Jill’s perspectives—or said another way—by recalling past stories that included my understanding of Jill. Jill and I negotiated meaning from our exchange not only in the here and now but through our ability “to retrieve our own pasts . . . [and] to delve into the pasts of each other” (Hankins, 2003, p. 8).

Moreover, I use the story of my invitation to students not just to capture our beginnings but to point out the ways in which our current stories (and lives) are in a constant state of rewrite, influenced by and understood through both our past experiences and future actions. So, try as I might, to capture for the reader a sense of time, of what we did and when, my attempts at explaining our LGBTQ collaboration “from the start” is essentially a false start. That is, in many ways it is incorrect to think of my invitation as the beginning of our inquiry. Rather, each of us entered our collaborative work in mid-story. We were all in the process of authoring our respective lives; drawing upon a rich

history, a sociocultural way of knowing, and a divergent set of motivations for entering into this work. How we as an inquiry group approached our LGBTQ collaboration was informed by the compilation of personal and social stories we brought with us to our investigation. This does not suggest that we mapped our existing stories blindly onto our inquiry experiences. Rather, I believe that through engaging in collaborative experience, writing reflectively, and offering interpretations of our writings, we came to re-story our lives. The degree to which we were able to re-story our professional lives (and widen our competencies related to LGBTQ inclusion) was a function of both the experiences our inquiry provided and quality of reflection we put forth.

I also understand that as the final author of our collaboration, here and throughout this text, I have been given the privilege of selecting and interpreting the stories that get shared among the hundreds of pages of stories written by student-participants and me. Ultimately, then, this story is my story of our story—a story that borrows from the work and words of student-participants. At times, I use their exact words from their reflective journals. Other times, I capture their words through transcribed conversations. Regardless of the ways I try to incorporate their voices in authentic ways, Jill and Lindsay, if given the opportunity, would write a different story of our time together than did I. And although I claim this text to be representative of our work together, I make no claims to be speaking for student-participants. Each participant contributed in meaningful ways to our learning. However, I make no attempt at representing each participant equally, either through the same number of words or equivalently weighted stories. To do so, given my limitations as a writer, would produce a text that is tedious

and unreadable to all! Rather, I have followed the advice of Hankins (2003) and selected, wrote, and rewrote salient stories that might be of interest to others and tried to acknowledge my personal biases along the way.

In the spirit of narrative inquiry, this text, too, can be viewed as a story, open for the reader's interpretations. As with all stories, the tellings throughout this text are incomplete, partial. The stories I share capture pieces of our group experience, pieces of the complexity, and pieces of the multiplicity of meanings we created. Accordingly, the politics of interpretation and representation are always in play (Kirsch, 1999). Shannon's story is no exception.

***“Shannon”***  
**Journal Entry (Early October)**

*Anyone who has ever taught, whether in early childhood or postsecondary education, already knows Shannon. It was late on a Friday afternoon, several days after my lunch with Jill and her friends. My typical routine placed me in the field on Fridays, supervising student teachers. On this Friday I went into the office to work on what I was calling a “guiding syllabus” for our LGBTQ collaboration. The evening before I received emails from Jonathan and Allison—two more students interested in joining my proposed collaboration.*

*I was feeling good about the document that I had just sent to the printer when I heard a knock on the door. I couldn't decide whether or not to answer it. I just wanted to go home and delight in the good work I had accomplished. “And besides,” I thought. “It's probably someone for my officemate.” I was in no mood to be her secretary this late in the day!*



*The knock returned only this time louder.*

*“Darn it.” I thought. I’ve never been good at passing up a ringing phone. (I’m a telemarketers dream!) I stood up from my chair still uncommitted. The shifting of my weight caused my well-worn chair to let out a loud squeak. “Darn these second-rate graduate student accommodations.” Certainly, whoever was on the other side of the door now knew someone was in.*

*I opened the door to a familiar face.*

*Like Jill, I was Shannon’s instructor previously. Shannon is a model student. She commits herself fully, works hard, and brings with her the most positive of dispositions. Shannon, too, is a teacher pleaser. In this sense, the smiling face that I now stood in front of reminded me of myself. Personally, I knew Shannon had an identical twin sister with whom she lived. I also knew that both her parents had died when she was in high school. She wears a small gold cross around her neck and speaks openly of her Catholic faith. Her religious convictions are central to her identity. If asked to give a description of her, I would say Shannon is timid and shy. Not a classroom leader. Never someone to rock the boat.*

*“Hey, Matt. I’m glad I caught you in,” were the first words she spoke.*

*I motioned for her to come in.*

*“I’m in the process of moving into my own place,” she said. “And, I don’t have my email set up. I wanted to know if it would be okay if I joined your diversity group.” Shannon’s declarative statement seemed more like a question than an announcement.*

*“Yes, of course. We’d love to have you,” I countered. “Can I ask you why you want to learn about LGBTQ issues?”*

*“Well, I know I would like to be part of a group that you’re leading. I’ve already had two classes with you. I thought this would round out my minor in Matt Conley,” she said with a characteristic grin. “I know a little something about being different,” she continued. “I want to help GLBT people, if I can.”*

*Then she said something that would come to characterize the members of our group throughout our year together.*

*“I hope you don’t mind,” she continued. “But ‘The Laramie Project’ is in town next week. My Uncle works for CATCO<sup>8</sup>, and he can get us tickets. I think it would be a great way to start our group.”*

*“That’s a great idea.”*

*“If you let me know in the next couple days how many tickets to reserve, I’ll take care of it.”*

*“Thank you,” I said.*

*“Oh, you’re welcome. It’s not a problem. It’s just a phone call to my uncle.”*

*“No, thank you,” I said again not really sure what I was thanking her for but knowing I was thanking her for more than ordering tickets.*

*“Ahh don’t worry,” she said, “I’ve got a slew of ideas.”*

In my invitation I had emphasized that we would be creating a shared experience. Early on, student-participants demonstrated that they were eager and capable of forging

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<sup>8</sup> CATCO is an acronym for Contemporary American Theatre Company.

their own learning opportunities. Little did I think, when I heard the knock at the door, that my provocation would be taken up by someone so quiet and introverted. Following Shannon's lead, we went to see *The Laramie Project*. Our first experience together was student generated.

### **Giving Name to Personal/Political Commitments: My Epistemological Stance**

As this heading implies, in this section I address, together, issues of the personal and the political. While, organizationally, I was tempted to write about these issues separate from each other, to do so fails to characterize the nature of our group. To write about *my* political agenda and then interpret student-participants' personal reactions/responses to this agenda, I believe, positions student-participants, like Shannon, not as co-collaborators but as objects of study. My students were not simply responding to my political agenda, but rather, we were all interacting in both personal and political ways throughout the process. I hope that by representing personal/political issues as integrated, where each influences and is influenced by the other, I am able to convey more accurately how, from the start, the personal and political impacted our group dynamic and the relationships we created with one another.

From the outset, our collaboration was framed by my understandings of critical and feminist perspectives. By employing critical theory and feminism, I invoked a set of assumptions. Here are the ways I conceptualized critical theory and feminism as they related to our collaborative inquiry and my interactions with students.

Action aimed at problematizing dominant social beliefs is the work of critical theory. Critical theorists view social interactions as inherently power-laden, characterized by unequal and oppressive structures that shape the lived experience

(Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Critical theory examines dominant ideological assumptions (i.e., the privileging of heterosexuality) that shape our vision of what is considered legitimate and natural. A primary goal of critical theory is to trouble these “legitimate” and “natural” conceptions.

In addition, critical theory “seeks to expose that which is oppressive and dominating” by offering alternative possibilities toward a more socially just world. (Schubert, 1986, p. 181). This scholarship understands social hierarchies to be maintained through a “culture of silence” (Freire, 1997) whereby the nature of reality goes unquestioned, resulting in cultural hegemony. Critical theory works against this dominant consciousness by questioning the sociopolitical structures that pervade Western thinking. Our collaboration was shaped by my understanding of critical theory. For our purposes, critical theory supported our construction of a shared curriculum that sought personal empowerment and worked against heteronormative practices.

In addition, I drew on the work of such feminists as hooks (1994), Kirsch (1999), St. Pierre and Pillow (2000), and Lather (1991) as I conceptualized our work together. Feminists have traditionally been concerned with issues of gender. However, feminist research has diversified to include a broader range of issues impacting the lives of women, including issues of class, race, and sexuality (Olesen, 2000). According to Kirsch (1999) for research to call itself ‘feminist’, it must “strive to establish interactive, respectful, and collaborative relationships with participants” (p. 6). Further, feminists are concerned with how researchers locate themselves and interpret/represent others. Importantly, feminist research honors the voice of participants (Kirsch, 1999), embraces reciprocal learning (Fonow & Cook, 1991), and seeks to change unjust social conditions.

Aligned with feminism, our work not only sought collaborative relationships but was based in the moral and ethical imperatives of mutuality and care (Noddings, 1992). By creating a research context that honored participants' interests and respected individuals' contributions, our work claimed to be representative of and beneficial to the lives of the participants. Also within a feminist frame, I believed our work to be purposeful in local contexts while seeking broader social change. While I sought to understand injustice at social and institutional levels, I came to believe change to be a function of our intentional actions in relationship with one another.

Both feminism and critical theory arose as critiques of objectivism, and each views reality as subjective and dependent on social, cultural, and historical constructions. In the broadest sense both critical theory and feminism understand the existence of heterosexism and homophobia to be a result of ideological dominance perpetuated on social and cultural levels. I have come to understand critical theory and feminism to have similar emancipatory purposes. Whereas critical theory seeks liberatory practices, feminist work speaks to how we might establish these practices, creating egalitarian and mutually beneficial relationships in the process. While much feminist scholarship aims to deconstruct societal notions of difference and gender (Olesen, 2000), critical theory examines, more generally, "systems of socio-political power" (Sipe and Constable, 1996, p. 155). And while neither of these theories makes it their primary work to address sexuality, together they offered a lens to focus and justify our collaborative efforts.

For my part, I initiated the notion of a shared curriculum. This did not emerge from a student agenda. In addition, I established the subject matter and by following the advice of other critical pedagogues, "grounded [our experience] in a clearly articulated

political agenda” (Ellsworth, 1989, pg. 297). Our inquiry would not offer up for discussion whether or not heterosexist structures and homophobic practices were in play in educational settings. Rather, our collaboration assumed the presence of heterosexism and homophobia. Embedded in this assumption was the belief that through intentional experience we might begin to disentangle the heterosexist knots that contribute to teaching behaviors that foster social inequities.

Giving name to the political agenda surrounding our collaboration was a preliminary step in moving us toward productive engagement with the topic. It soon became clear, however, that each of us had a unique set of political convictions and personal connections related to our emerging work together. None of the participants, I would soon learn, were blatant homophobes. Our collaboration would take on the work of exposing how subtle and insidious heterosexism can be even in the lives of people committed to its eradication.

Return with me now, if you will, to Shannon. Shannon, like many teacher education candidates, is not naturally drawn to the “rough-and-tumble of social change” that critical, feminist work pursues (Palmer, 1998, pg. 182). In our previous experiences together, I did not know Shannon to have critical leanings. Yet, there she was beating on the door, both figuratively and literally, not only to join our learning endeavor but establish herself as an active contributor. Given the opportunity to take on a politically-charged topic, Shannon was called to action. Knowing only the basic goals and political intentions of our proposed work together, she felt comfortable asserting her own agenda.

Yet to understand Shannon’s willingness to assert herself politically, it is important to examine the personal motivations that moved her toward political action.

Shannon relates, initially at least, to LGBTQ issues in education by stating her awareness of “being different.” And although I am always cautious of heterosexuals who want to “help GLBT people<sup>9</sup>,” her words position her as good intentioned. In addition, Shannon draws on her past, personal experiences with me. Her good-natured comment of “rounding out her minor in Matt Conley” implies a history of positive rapport and positions me as someone she trusts with personal (or at least academic) matters. Again, Shannon’s actions, I believe, exemplify how the political is always entangled with the personal.

**“Shannon” (concluded)**

*Shannon closed the door as she left my office. I sat down and read over the “guiding syllabus” which, only moments ago, I was feeling so good about. As an example of my preparation in the days that followed, I conceptualized two more guiding syllabi to assist us in our collaboration with each iteration growing incrementally more detailed and complex than the last. Each time my plans were foiled by students, like Shannon, who had ideas, resources, or plans that hadn’t occurred to me. As much as I was pleased to see early signs of interest and motivation, I felt uneasy sharing classroom power with a group of predominantly unknown students. Somehow, it seemed their presence was interfering with my inquiry!*

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<sup>9</sup> I say “cautious” because I am aware that anytime outsiders to a community (e.g. heterosexuals inquiring into LGBTQ communities) study “others” we run the risk of appropriating the voice of the less empowered. I am aware, too, that Shannon’s comment of wanting to “help GLBT people” positions LGBTQ folks as in need of her help. Part of our work together, then, would require us to look at other models for engaging in cross-cultural (or cross-sexual) work—models that are more “equal-status” in nature.

*On paper, “Investigating LGBTQ Issues in Collaboration with Pre-service Teachers” seemed like a great plan. In reality, I was finding that my students’ presence was causing me to rethink the nature of our inquiry and my pedagogy. Working jointly or in response to students’ needs and interests meant creating an agenda and a pace that was not solely my own. Shannon’s visit caused me to throw away those guiding syllabi, to rethink what it takes to work collaboratively with students, and to abandon the comforts of classroom control.*

### **Abandoning the Comforts of Classroom Control: Restructuring Power and Authority in Collaborative Spaces**

Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.

(Freire, 1970, pg. 59)

Simply put, teachers talk and students listen. This practice is as common as chalk dust in classrooms since the earliest days of formal education. I know I have participated willingly as a teacher and as student in this practice. Freire (1970) has called this practice “banking education” where students are seen as empty vessels in which teachers pour their knowledge or, using Freire’s metaphor, “deposit” their knowledge. In this scenario students have little need to talk or listen to one another because the knowledge worth knowing comes from the arbiter of knowledge—the teacher. From a teacher’s perspective there are some comforts to be had in this approach. After all, being “in charge” certainly gives those of us who teach a sense of purpose. The authority given to me as a teacher to “manage” a classroom has always been an aspect of the job to which I have been drawn.



Teachers implementing this type of unilateral authority is too often the way we approach education. This approach, I surmised, would do little to support the type of collaborative environment I had in mind for our LGBTQ inquiry. Goodlad (1994), understanding the need for alternative approaches to education, writes, “We will only begin to get evidence of the potential power of pedagogy when we dare to risk and support markedly deviant classroom procedures” (pg. 249). Deviating from traditional classroom practices supported my vision of a learning space where student-participants worked together as curriculum makers and where the syllabus was a negotiated document—not a document I had perfected prior to student-participants’ arrival—as Shannon’s visit helped me to see. These anti-status quo practices, again, bring up issues of power and authority. In his book *When Students have Power*, Ira Shor explores the ways teachers and students can work together to negotiate issues of authority in the classroom. Shor (1996) writes,

The shape of authority shapes the experience of knowledge-making; by transforming unilateral authority, teacher and students begin creating a mutual learning process as the best condition for the introduction of any formal academic subject matter. . . . As long as a struggle for authority exists in a classroom or an institution, the disciplinary learning hoped for in any curriculum will be damaged. (pg. 18)

For my part, I hoped to work against asymmetrical teacher-student power relations by restructuring the authority given to me as “the teacher” in our collaboration.

Being a teacher, of course, imbues one’s voice with a certain amount of authority. Although I would never argue that all teachers enter classrooms with the same amount of

authority—recognizing feminist literature that has established the struggles of some women and people of color whose knowledge and expertise is often dismissed—I must acknowledge that, in our collaboration, I entered having to do little to establish myself as an authority figure. I am white, read as male, relatively tall, relatively personable. My sexuality, although traditionally, perhaps, considered a marginalizing characteristic, in this case legitimized me, given the subject matter content of our collaboration. Outsiders to the community (i.e., heterosexuals), lesbians, and transgender folks would have a different set of challenges when entering into LGBTQ-inclusive work with a group of predominantly heterosexual females than did I. To begin to alleviate the *teacher-student contradiction* about which Freire writes, my challenge would not be to establish but lessen my authority.

Lessening my authority, however, did not entail abdicating all aspects of it. As a teacher educator and as a gay man, I did have knowledge worth sharing. And student-participants, after all, would expect that much from me. To enter collaboration with students with no plans or purposes in mind would send the wrong message about the importance of the work we were about to undertake. There were, however, “openings” for me to lessen my authority. We were, after all, embarking on an experience that had no name! Lindsay you may remember wanted to join “the group,” Jill referred to our emerging collaboration as a “research group,” and Shannon preferred the term “diversity group.” Other student-participants used the alliteratively-pleasing expression, “gay group” in their email correspondences to signup for our collaboration. Having not so much as a common name to start with, caused us all, I believe, to be more experimental and take more risks than we may have otherwise.

There were other reasons that lessened authority was made easier for me. Some student-participants, as mentioned earlier, knew me as their instructor of previous undergraduate courses. In our preceding experiences together, these students knew me to be a graduate student. This, I believe, diminished the power divide that traditionally separates students from teachers. Whereas student-participants currently identified as student-teachers, I identified as a teacher-student and was therefore more like them. Again, other teacher educators with other identity markers would undoubtedly need to negotiate power and authority differently than did I. Once more drawing on the words of Shor (1994), “The power that uses power to share and transform power is the power I am seeking” (pg. 20).

If we are to engage in “research with a group rather than on them; for them rather than about them,” we need to know what motivates them and what they hope to get out of the experience (Clark, 1994). There is, for example, no guarantee that students will want to engage in power sharing (Shor, 1996). For us, group size played a role in student-participants ability to disclose their motivations and to work toward the creation of a shared pedagogy. As a group of ten, we were able to interact with one another in ways that classrooms of thirty or sixty (class sizes which are not uncommon in our teacher preparation program) cannot. We were, for example, better able to listen to, talk through, and respond thoughtfully to one another’s journal writing in ways that larger groups would struggle. Given this context, we were also able to invoke affective ways of knowing, responding to each other through emotion and feeling not just cognition. This practice, I believe, was both a product of restructured authority and a process that

interrupted typical classroom relationships by transferring from teacher to student the responsibility of thinking and organizing our collaborative experience together (Shor, 1996).

### **Collaboration Underway: Preparation Meets Modification**

From the beginning, then, I had given consideration to the goals and purposes of conducting research with students, reflecting on the type of learning environment I had hoped to create. In addition, I had given thought to the broad theoretical traditions and political commitments embedded in our collaboration, sharing these convictions early on with student-participants. I began to conceptualize the role I would play in working with students related to LGBTQ issues. Dialogue journals and autobiographical writing would serve as pedagogical tools to give voice to student-participant needs and interests while lessening, I hoped, my authoritarian voice as a facilitator. These were some of the ways I prepared for students arrival. The thought and planning that went into our work together certainly assisted us in our efforts early on and throughout our collaboration.

This, however, is not to say that our collaboration was scripted. Anyone who has worked in relationship with others knows the give and take necessary to maintain rapport, inclusiveness, and intimacy. Rather, as our time together unfolded, our collaboration moved and shifted in unexpected ways as each of us shared stories and questions related to experiences and readings. Figure 2.2 below depicts the general nature of our pedagogy and how we came to develop more sophisticated understandings of the issues.

Interpreting our experiences in this ongoing, cyclical manner allowed us to synthesize group meanings; evaluate our new knowledge and skills; and begin to speculate how these knowledges and skills could be applied in professional contexts.

## Modification in Purpose and Questions

As an example of the ways student input prompted reflection on my part, take, as an example, my initial belief of what this text itself would be. Before and even during our collaboration, I anticipated this text to be a report on our learning related to LGBTQ



**Figure 2.2: Nature of Pedagogy**

issues (and to some extent, of course, it still is). However, at some point I began to see our collaboration, the stories we shared, and this study itself more holistically—choosing, instead, to foreground the collaborative processes that enabled us to work with and learn from one another. Emphasizing the process over the content did not result in diminishing

what we had accomplished. Rather, it meant looking at the data differently. By examining the process, our stories—I came to believe—could remain more embodied, less dissected, and therefore more representative of the tellers themselves. By taking this step, I hoped to honor not only the work we did together but the students whose contributions and optimism created for me a new sense of *possibilities*.

***“New Possibilities”***

**Journal Entry (October)**

*A week after my invitation nine students with several more on a waitlist had signed up. (My department chair asked that I keep enrollment to eight. Since one student thought she might have a class conflict with the meeting times I had proposed, I welcomed the first nine students who responded to my invitation either in person or through email into our collaboration). How quickly it seemed I moved from “will anyone be interested in this” to “how are we going to sustain a conversation over the course of an academic year?” Jill and Shannon were students with whom I had established relationships. Allison, Amber, Dan, Jonathan, Lindsay, Meredith, and Whitney were now names on a roster, potential new relationships to be entered into.*

*On paper they seemed to be representative of our larger cohort of students—white, mostly female, mostly middleclass, predominantly heterosexual<sup>10</sup>. I must admit that the names on this roster caused me greater pause than rosters of the past. How many times in the past had I printed off a class list, glanced at it, and took it with me to our first meeting only to butcher the*

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix C for more demographic information on the participants in this study.

*pronunciation of names during roll call? This list, however, was different. I asked, for instance, faculty members to read over the list to see if they recognized any of the names, trying to learn something about each student before our upcoming viewing of The Laramie Project. Meredith, for example, was described as “delightful.” Jonathan, I found out was married and “such a strong student.” Dan, I learned was a nontraditional student (in terms of age) and gay. I wondered why I had never thought to scrutinize my past rosters in this way. As an elementary teacher, it was common practice for me to share stories and identity markers about students with their previous or preceding year’s teacher as a way to support their learning. As a teacher of teachers, I had neglected this practice. I regretted this realization.*

*Amber had the distinction of being both the last student to email me and the student whose name was unfamiliar to everyone who read over my list. For the life of me now, I can’t understand why! Amber describes herself affectionately as both a “hick” and a “hippie.” She’s earthy with an edge (evidenced by her tattoos and piercings) and definitely not a wallflower. In her first email to me, she wrote:*

*Matt,*

*I hope it is not too late to join your group. Something just keeps pulling me to do this. A little about me: I’m Appalachian (well, I grew up in a small river town if that tells you anything) and [I’m] probably at least 25.3% lesbian (aren’t all womyn?). I just have one question. How will this affect my Christmas break? Not to sound unconcerned with these*

*issues over the holidays and all, I was just really looking forward to that long winter break. So please get back to me about this. Thanks and I am looking forward to our work together.*

*-Amber (October 3, 2002)*

*Amber's email made me smile. Her addition to our group certainly widened the possibilities of the work we were about to undertake. "How would she interact with Jill and Shannon?" I thought. How would we go about building a shared research practice with such seemingly diverse experiences and backgrounds? I couldn't imagine Jill, for instance, claiming a "25.3%" ownership of a lesbian identity! I questioned why a privileged, heterosexual, white male—like Jonathan—would be invested in our collaborative work. And then there was Dan. Why was there an openly gay man in our program that I had never been introduced to? Was it possible to establish an agenda that served the needs of this diverse group? We were, indeed . . . the most unlikely collaborators.*



**CHAPTER 3**  
**THE ART OF COMMUNITY BUILDING**  
**AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE**

***“Clay on my Mind”***  
**Journal Entry (November)**

*As a way to strike some sort of balance in my life, I enrolled in a clay class at a local community center. It was now late in the fall and our inquiry group was chugging along at a nice pace. Just last week, Jonathan proposed that we attend the Columbus Gay Men’s Chorus Winter Concert, and Dan offered to secure the tickets. Jonathan asked if we might extend an invitation to our friends and family as a way to broaden our work and give the event a more celebratory feel. Happily, our collaboration was developing a life of its own. Even with growing evidence of student investment, I was still concerned that I was talking too much and dictating the day-to-day workings of our collaboration. Letting go of my authoritative voice was proving to be an ongoing struggle. Learning to “throw” clay, I imagined, would contribute to my aesthetic well-being and place me squarely in the role of student—no authoritative voice to negotiate, no facilitating, no managing, no organizing, no weighty conversations related to social justice issues of any kind. In our collaboration student-participants were*

*taking on leadership responsibilities; embracing, if you will, their inner teacher. Clay was my opportunity to connect to my inner student.*

*My clay class was taught by a local artist who seemed out of place in the upper-middle class, suburban context in which our class met. Nicole had a Bohemian edge. I could imagine her, instead, more at home in an art gallery or a sushi bar. She was young, clearly talented, and someone who avoided eye contact when she spoke. In our first session we talked about her work. Over the next several classes, she shared techniques of working with clay. I was committed to learning from Nicole and immersing myself in the artistic process; however, I couldn't avoid seeing our class in terms of its potential as a site for ethnographic research! (Only a doctoral student would bring this lens to an eight-week, introductory-level clay class). I began observing how Nicole taught, how and which students asked questions. I noticed how classroom relationships emerged by studying how certain students gravitated toward one another.*

*I had set out to have fun, to be a student again. I had hoped to learn about myself as a creator and artist. Instead, I was scrutinizing my clay class in the evening in much the same way I was dissecting our LGBTQ collaboration during the day. Teachers never stop being teachers when the school day is done. Perhaps, the same could be said for researchers.*

*My clay class was pushing me to think about interpersonal relationships, particularly the relationships that were emerging back at the university. I found myself listening to the audiotapes of our sessions, monitoring not so much the content of our discussions but the process, who spoke and how often. I drew*

*sketches of our university classroom, documenting who sat next to whom. I noted comments which at the time seemed silly or insignificant—comments like this one from Meredith: “If we’re meeting before literacy methods, we’re going to need a breakfast sign-up sheet, right? . . . I can bring coffeecake or something next week. Anyone wanna bring some juice?”*

*Nicole, too, was a community builder. Her ability to relate to the predominantly retired, wealthy women in our class seemed couched in her ability to get her students to talk about their creations in clay, their inspirations, and, ultimately, their lives. She, like Meredith, solicited the help of others. “Why don’t you ask for feedback from your peers,” was her mantra. “Tell us what you brought to this piece.”*

*Secretly, I had hoped to “get away from” collaboration on these Monday nights. I had no strong desire to get to know Ellie who sat to my right or Roberta who occupied the space at the table to my left. Yet for Nicole, art was a form of creative expression that demanded interpersonal introspection. My feedback, she insisted, was vital to Ellie’s and Roberta’s work. My work, too, could not be fully understood in isolation. “Clay,” Nicole said, “has no voice of its own.”*

*Yes, Nicole taught me how to wedge, score, slab, and subtract clay. These techniques, however, were the minor learning outcomes from “Clay for Beginners.”*

## **Introduction**

Often when we take on new experiences, the learning that results is unexpected or surprising. My clay class reflects this phenomenon. What I anticipated being the major

learning outcomes ended up being only minor. To some extent, my research with students mirrors this reality. During analysis, what I often thought—or hoped—would emerge as significant or most salient was not the case.

As you will recall from chapter 1, community building was by no means the primary focus of this investigation. In my initial efforts at data analysis, I read and reread the stacks of stories that student-participants and I wrote over the course of the academic year. I looked for overarching themes and natural connections across narratives. My purpose was to establish some preliminary “findings.” I called this period of analysis my “big ideas” phase. I anticipated that the data corpus would lead me to very specific statements related to student-participants’ understandings about LGBTQ issues. Surprisingly, I found myself making note of personal exchanges, intimate disclosures, and acts of camaraderie. Lather (personal communication, 2002) reminds me that in qualitative research the data should dictate the stories we share. Following the lead of my data, I concluded that community formation was a product of our joint participation. Furthermore, the way community was developed and lived out in our particular context not only impacted our collaborative processes but served as a catalyst for both personal and professional transformation.

As explained in chapter 2, analysis was embedded in an ongoing writing process. Throughout the year, both student-participants and I engaged in analytic work. As we endeavored to understand LGBTQ issues, it became clear that our ability to do this “work” was inextricably tied to and dependent upon the “work” of community building. In fact, how we forged and became a community in which this LGBTQ work could be done was as important as the LGBTQ work itself. While the community we built and

relationships we developed shared characteristics that scholars and educators already believe about community, the nature of our unique community also offers new insights into how community can be built and diversity work can be accomplished in college classrooms.

Through analysis, I was able to pinpoint three particularly important dimensions of our community development that exemplify our practices and relationships. In this chapter I will share stories and consider relevant theory related to these dimensions. Each dimension speaks to how our differences—and how we experienced and explored these differences together—contributed to and shaped our community. The three dimensions of how we forged community *through* and *with* difference include:

I. Distinguishing Differences in Investment

II. Discovering Differences through Interpersonal Connections

III. Drawing on Differences through Personal Disclosure

In this chapter, I consider several theoretical notions of community and consider how our work is located within these notions. Specifically, my purpose is to theorize around how our community emerged<sup>11</sup>. My assertion is that community development was about bringing our differences into a mutually recognized and embraced whole. Explicitly, I explore named differences in investment, interpersonal connection, and disclosure. In this chapter, too, I return to the practice of sharing pages from my teaching journal. My journal entitled “Clay on my Mind” is interwoven throughout this text and serves as an ongoing “analytic memo” (Charmaz, 2000; Hubbard & Power, 1993);

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<sup>11</sup> Again, my purpose in this chapter is not to define community but to utilize existing notions of ‘community’ to theorize how our unique community emerged. I use existing definitions of community to conceptualize how the *politics of difference* contributed to our “new” community.

capturing my observations, assumptions, and actions related to community development. Student-participants' voices are integral to my argument here as well. By sharing their words through transcribed conversation and in written form, I explore the unique evolution of our specific community, naming practices that both shaped our interactions with one another and informed our thinking related to LGBTQ issues.

### **Understanding Community: Existing Theoretical Notions and New Dimensions**

The personhood of each of us is shaped by a moving inward intersection of numerous selves—family and friends and colleagues and strangers. If we are to grow as persons and expand our knowledge of the world, we must consciously participate in the emerging community of our lives, in the claims made upon us by others as well as our claims upon them. Only in community does the person appear in the first place, and only in community can the person continue to become.

- Parker Palmer (1983, p. 57)

I have come to believe, as Palmer describes, that our interactions and relationships with others impact significantly how we learn, what we know, and who we become. Our relationships and the communities of practice in which we engage shape our identities. In my clay class, the teacher always greeted us individually and offered specific and personal praise as she responded to our work. Indeed, Nicole's efforts toward community building in clay class reflect the ongoing discussion about how community is created and/or sustained in classrooms (Clark, 1996; Greene, 1995; Palmer, 1983).

Definitions and uses of the term community, however, vary. Community, for the most part, is defined in positive, desirable terms. In her work related to community building in middle schools, for example, Belenardo (2001) writes, "community is the presence of beliefs, feelings, and relationships that connect members . . . to each other; it provides a sense of belonging to something that transcends the situational relationships in

an organization” (pg. 34). In his book *Building Community in Schools*, Sergiovanni (1994), too, grapples with the ways “the personal” impacts learning. Like Palmer above, Sergiovanni recognizes that learning is always influenced by who we are and with whom we interact.

Becoming a community of learners . . . is an adventure not only in learning but an adventure in shared leadership and authentic relationships. It requires a certain equality and a certain willingness to know thyself better, to be open to new ideas, and to strive to become. It is an adventure in personal development. (pg. 155)

According to these definitions, then, community involves the establishment of trusting relationships and is characterized by interpersonal introspection.

Not surprisingly, watching Nicole teach brought back memories of my own teaching experiences and my desire to build rapport, establish relationships, and foster community as a classroom teacher. It has been years now since I have been responsible for the day-to-day teaching in an elementary school classroom. As a teacher of young children, I spent seven hours a day, five days a week with my students. Nothing in those 35 hours a week was more important to me or significant to students’ learning than classroom community. The ways in which we talked to one another, asked questions of one another, and shared with one another shaped all aspects of our learning. As a classroom teacher, I worked hard at establishing community, because I had to! I simply could not make it through the requisite 1,260 hours of a school year without it. I am speaking, of course, as if “classroom community” comes in a kit, purchased from Scholastic Publishing.

The truth is, as anyone who has tried can tell you, community building is time-intensive, unpredictable work. However, I recognize that for those of us who place significance on the relationships that emerge in classroom spaces there is a certain degree of delight to be found in a shared sense of community. Of course, community is subjective. What “counts” as community is open for interpretation. Similarly, the demands of building community are particular to individual groups. There is no formula that can be applied to consecutive classrooms of students. And certainly, doing “community work” with children is different than fostering community with adults.

Surprisingly, my clay class alerted me to the lack of deliberate planning I had done regarding community building as it related to our collaboration. My most deliberate planning had focused on supporting student-participants in “taking on” the LGBTQ curriculum. Through our work together, I believe we became a productive community of learners and, I hoped, a community of researchers. I had not set out to study community, yet community seemed a product of our work together.

The above characterizations of community help me conceptualize or define community, and they certainly reflect aspects of the learning community that emerged as a result of our LGBTQ study. These definitions do not necessarily address, however, how community comes into existence—how, in essence, community is built. Our collaboration offers an example of how the politics of difference contributed to the development of a particular “new” community. I assert that our community emerged not through what we shared or had in common but through the *differences* each of us brought to our collaboration. Below, I examine the diversity of positions and actions related to the co-collaborators’ participation in this research. Our community, I assert, emerged out



of an awareness and appreciation of our differences in terms of *investments*, *interpersonal identity markers*, and *intimate disclosures* related to the topic.

### **Community Development as *Distinguishing Differences in Investment***

Community, according to some definitions, entails engaging in common practices and establishing common investments. That is, community involves members engaging in a mutual endeavor or participating jointly to work toward or accomplish a task (Reason, 1994). Bellah (1985), as an illustration, characterizes community as “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it” (p. 333). In this sense, community consists of “doing something” together, participating in a “shared practice” or working toward a common goal. Bellah’s definition clearly articulates aspects of our community. We had all gathered to study LGBTQ issues in education with a common commitment to meet weekly to discuss readings and out-of-university experiences.

As a way to acknowledge the shared practice we were about to undertake, I asked student-participants to write about what motivated them to participate in this research project. In the first of what we came to call our dialogue journals<sup>12</sup>, student-participants and I responded to the prompt, “What motivated me to join an LGBTQ collaboration?” This, I imagined, would enable us to flesh out the points of view each of us brought to

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<sup>12</sup> Our dialogue journals were shared orally during each of our sessions together. In addition, journals were exchanged and received written feedback from me and at least one other student-participant, creating a “dialogue” between the writer and the readers.

our collaboration and establish the range of contributions each of us might be expected to make. I did not, from the outset at least, see this exercise as a means to foster community.

Students' earliest writing reflects the "shared investment" aspect of community which Reason and Bellah describe above. All of their writings, for example, illustrate what they hoped to "get out" of our collaboration. Similarly, too, their writing converges around their desire to be LGBTQ advocates. However, their responses diverge in significant ways as well. Initially at least, some students linked their participation in our collaboration to their *professional* practice as teachers. Others sighted *personal* reasons, *political* commitments, or *social justice* orientations as their motivating agenda. Upon an initial read, student-participants' diverse investments might have presented a challenge to community development.

### Professional Stance

Whitney and Jill's responses represent one category of initial investment. Their journals exemplify the *professional* investments they had early on.

When introduced to the idea of being a part of this class I had mixed feelings. First I thought, how could this relate to working with young children? Once I confronted this issue and sorted out some answers for myself, I decided that I will be confronted with people from all different backgrounds throughout my profession as a teacher and this is just one of the many possibilities. Teachers need to be informed.

- Whitney [D.J. Oct. 28]

This collaboration meets a lot of needs for me right now. . . It really doesn't have anything to do with my views on being or not being homosexual, but really the reality that in Columbus especially, same sex parenting is on the rise. It is a very real possibility that it will be an issues raised in my classroom when talking about families. I feel it is important for me to educate myself as much as possible in order to be prepared in the classroom.

- Jill [D.J. Oct. 28]

Whitney and Jill approached our collaboration initially from the position of how our work might serve them professionally. Having an awareness that LGBTQ issues exist and will need to be addressed in their classrooms represents, I believe, a positive first step for teachers to begin to de-center heterosexism in schools. Whitney and Jill were interested in learning about LGBTQ issues as they related to their professional lives as educators, citing the possibility of real world, classroom application.

### Personal Stance

Like any group, there was diversity in our understandings of how our work might contribute to our respective lives. While Whitney and Jill came with professional investments, other student-participants had personal stakes in our work. Take, as an example, excerpts from Shannon, Allison, and Lindsay's journal writing. Like Whitney and Jill above, they, too, cite professional reasons for engaging in our work. They, however, also allude to different purposes—purposes linked to their own *personal* growth.

I admire LGBTQ people because I realize that they have to face many concerns and issues that I never have to think about in my daily life as a heterosexual. I have respect for anyone who has to overcome challenges. I respect strength as a personality trait. Learning about and experiencing new and diverse situations will better help me to appreciate those who are different from myself, thus allowing me to create a safer environment for my students in schools and a more educated position for me in life. I hope our experiences together will help me to better relate to LGBTQ people, both in and out of my classroom.

- Shannon [D.J. Oct. 28]

I know I could really benefit, as a teacher and as an individual, from a class dealing with LGBTQ diversity and how it affects children. I believe as teachers we need to support our students. I wish I could say that it doesn't matter what our personal beliefs are, that we should not let them affect the way we teach our students, but of course they do. We need to let our students know that our

classroom is a safe place for them and that hate, ignorance, and harassment will not be tolerated. I am motivated to make myself knowledgeable about an area that I am not very experienced with, because I think it is important to have some ground to stand on when speaking of diversity to my mom, to my friends, or to my students.

- Allison [D.J. Oct. 28]

For the last several years, I have been looking for a way to educate myself on LGBTQ perspectives and issues. For very personal reasons, I have wanted to learn how to communicate about this subject in an informed way. I have wanted to be able to answer questions based on real knowledge and experience—not just on what I felt or thought. That is why when this opportunity came up, I was immediately interested.

- Lindsay [D.J. Oct. 28]

Initially, I read Shannon, Allison, and Lindsay's writing as more passionate and perhaps more reflective than Whitney or Jill's. Their ability to foreground, or perhaps integrate, personal aspects of their learning and lives altered significantly the classroom interactions that were available to us and thus the type of community dialogue we could construct.

### Political Stance

While Shannon, Allison, and Lindsay make mention of a relationship between professional knowledge and personal understandings, interestingly, it was the men in our group—Jonathan and Dan—who “risked” the most in terms of personally connecting to our emerging collaboration. Their writing, I believe, moves from the personal into the *political*. In declaring their motivations, they cite investments that are located primarily outside of school contexts and reflect their personal identity markers as a Christian and gay man respectively.

What motivated me to sign up for an LGBTQ diversity experience? In two words . . . the church. I spent two and a half years working in youth ministry. In that time, I always spoke frankly with kids—mostly because kids will speak frankly with you as well! The greater church is having this huge debate over the

scriptural appropriateness of homosexuality, and whether or not to welcome or marry gay people in the church. They debate. They discuss. They dance around the issue. As a church it should be cut and dry, everyone is welcome. (By the way, the Bible says that God doesn't like people who gossip too, but who's debating that one? There are also hundreds of references to not eating pork, and only three even remotely related to homosexuality, but again, who's talking about shunning the pig farmer?) But, deeper than that, it is not an *issue* that should be voted upon, debated, and discussed, either in church or in the public sector. Our churches and our schools are there to serve people, all people. Sexual diversity is a fact of life. More specifically, it is a fact of individual lives—*people*, not issues.

- Jonathan [D.J. Oct. 28]

I try to live my life as an out gay person because it's easier for me to live my life openly and because the more visible gay people are, the harder it is to openly discriminate against us. This is one of the reasons I wanted to be part of the gay diversity experience. Another reason is because I want to explore how I might "out" myself in school. At 50, I can't imagine going back into the closet. I see this class as another step on the road toward greater self-discovery. It's been many years since I have participated in a small group experience and I wanted the opportunity to interact with some of my fellow classmates in a more intimate setting.

- Dan [D.J. Oct. 28]

So often "the church" and religion are used to rationalize individual's discrimination toward LGBTQ people (Gray, 1999; Owens 1998). Jonathan's journal reflects his rather pointed desire to call this practice into question. His experiences and affiliation with the Lutheran Church undoubtedly contribute to his response and establish, at least early on, a very specific reason for pledging himself to our work—a reason unlike anyone else in our group.

Dan draws on a personal history of a different kind in his reply to the question: What motivated me to join an LGBTQ collaboration? As an insider to the population, Dan sees our collaboration as a way to increase LGBTQ visibility and as a way to acquire insight into his own sense of self. Unlike his co-collaborators, Dan did not set out to acquire knowledge about LGBTQ communities. His motivations, perhaps, were more

aligned in this regard to mine than to his fellow student-participants. For Dan particularly, the personal is inseparable from the political. Both Jonathan and Dan locate themselves personally and professionally in their writing. Accordingly, their investment in our inquiry was more overtly political in nature.

### Social Justice Stance

Like Jonathan, Meredith and Amber had an initial awareness of institutional and social structures that hinder LGBTQ equity in schools. In stating their motivations for joining our collaboration, Meredith and Amber address directly the need to disrupt the social cycle that perpetuates heterosexism. Their writing reveals a rather complex understanding of these issues and reflects their desire to explore a social justice stance. Clearly, their initial motivations expand beyond the professional, personal, and political dimensions explored by their peers.

I know that this experience will only help me better understand ways in which I can encourage my students to respect others, and themselves. A big part of this relates to gender roles, and the promotion of heterosexism. I know that both are reinforced within our schools, and society. I also know that I am probably promoting them unconsciously, because it was done so to me and as a result of this I do not even realize I am doing it. After saying that, it is easy to see how the vicious cycle continues. I want to be a part of this inquiry group because I want to be more conscious. I want to know how I can truly promote equality and respect for LGBTQ people in my classroom, school, and community.

- Meredith [D. J. Oct. 28]

The purpose and focus of the group in and of itself was the biggest reason for me to join in the first place. I have always had an interest in homosexuality, and how homosexual people live and function in a world where they are looked down upon by large groups of people. Our churches, schools, and immediate families contribute to this. . . I want to learn about gay issues and how they bear on schools. I hope to learn from others and their understandings . . . I hate discrimination in any form that it may take.

- Amber [D. J. Oct. 28]

Meredith and Amber's writing reflects a fairly sophisticated understanding of the social structures and institutions that uphold heterosexism. They recognize "society" generally and "churches," "schools," and "family structures" more specifically as institutions that support heterosexism. While they will have to be diligent if they are to learn ways to disrupt the cycle they describe, their initial position, at least, is one that will assist them in questioning the ways schools influence and are influenced by heterosexist beliefs and practices.

\* \* \* \* \*

I see now that, for us, community emerged out of a process of composing and sharing pieces of reflective writing like the excerpts above. Our abilities to work and learn in an LGBTQ collaboration were shaped by the personal, professional, political, and social-justice-minded conversations our collaboration afforded us. These conversations not only led us to new ways of interacting with one another but to new ways of thinking about LGBTQ issues in education.

As these journal entries demonstrate, student-participants came with preliminary purposes, most of which were replaced or complicated as new or different motivations were revealed to us through our experiences with one another. Clearly, their writing reveals how their motivations were influenced by the autobiographical. More importantly, their writing also reveals a range of related but *diverse* commitments to LGBTQ inquiry. That is, analysis of students' statements exposes the ways in which their initial motivations were different from one another. Tacit in these statements are their differing desires for what they might get out of our experience, ranging from Whitney's desire "to be informed," to Shannon's desire "to learn to appreciate those who

are different,” to Dan’s steps “toward greater self-discovery,” to Meredith’s desire “to be more conscious.” It is easy to see how each student’s initial motivation is connected to what she hoped to learn from our inquiry. What was less clear to me was how these individual motivations were linked together, how a shared research practice and pedagogy that acknowledged and drew upon these differences had come into existence. Our collaboration and the community that emerged were not—as previous literature implies—based on clear, common investment. Rather, I believe that through collaborative practices our investments *came* to be shared. Voicing the differences among our respective investments was a defining process for us becoming a community of learners and researchers.

**“Clay on my Mind” (continued)**

*After two sessions of viewing slides and observing Nicole model clay-building techniques, each of us was set free to begin working the ten pounds of red clay we had each purchased from a local masonry supply store. Nicole suggested we start with something small, something that would allow us to get the “feel” of the clay, and something that would allow us to explore composition, design, shape, and texture. Rather haphazardly, I rolled out a small square of clay, cutting it uniformly into a six-by-six inch square that I hoped would become a trivet—a clay canvas of sorts that would allow me to practice the skills Nicole had proposed. Arbitrarily, I used a scalpel-like tool to cut out additional, freeform shapes from a second flattened piece of clay. One of the shapes resembled a fish. Using this “fish” as an inspiration, I began to envision an ocean scene on my now barren trivet. “I could add texture to my fish to create*



scales,” I thought to myself. Perhaps, too, I could practice “scoring” and clay “building” techniques by adding additional fins or amusing, oversized lips to my still unnamed fish.

My fellow comrade-in-clay, Ellie, looked on as I considered the composition of my piece. Ellie was just staring at her now unwrapped but still untouched block of clay. “You better get going Ellie,” I said playfully, “I’ll have my first piece ready for the kiln before you even make a dent in that clay of yours.”

Ignoring the content of my comment, Ellie replied, “My friends call me ‘Miss Ellie’ you know.”

“As in ‘Miss Ellie Ewing’,” I inquired, thinking I was making a joke.

“Yes, as in ‘Ellie Ewing’, she replied. “Please, call me ‘Miss Ellie’.”

Then, acknowledging my earlier comment and the speed at which I undertook Nicole’s assignment, Miss Ellie said, “And I think I’ll call you Zippy!”

I smiled in Ellie’s direction.

For the next hour, Ellie’s block of clay remained intact. As I took the point of my pencil and made random, repeated dots on a third piece of clay, hoping to simulate sand at the bottom of my “ocean,” Ellie and I reminisced about ‘80’s TV trivia and the television serial, “Dallas.”

Our conversation was interrupted with additional comments from Ellie.

“Those dots look more like moon craters than grains of sand,” she quipped.

From this, I decided that my fish would not live at the bottom of the sea. He was definitely a sun-loving fish, gliding along the currents just beneath the

*surface. Ellie also suggested that I add a trail of bubbles coming out of his mouth. I happily obliged her request.*

*“I like the lips, but I think it makes him look more like a girl fish than a boy fish.” she commented.*

*“Well, I think she’s a tran-sy fish,” I said. Ellie seemed confused by my comment but didn’t ask me to explain.*

*As Nicole made her way to our table, she announced that any finished pieces should be placed on a shelf along the back wall of our classroom to dry. “We only have a few minutes left,” she said. “Any works in-progress should be misted with water and wrapped in plastic for next week.”*

*Nicole glanced at my fish trivet. “How fun!” she exclaimed. “It’s funny you should work with an ocean motif. When I work with children, I often encourage them to explore sea creatures and ocean habitats. It’s a good context to explore composition and texture.”*

*I was only mildly offended by her likening my work to that of a third grader. Having taught in the primary grades, I knew firsthand the artistic capacity of children.*

*Nicole moved to the other end of our table to help Roberta enclose in plastic what looked to me to be an ashtray but what she insisted was a potpourri dish. Following Nicole’s lead, Ellie helped me hermetically seal what I was now considering OUR cooperatively-created fish in a recycled bread bag of his/her own. As I placed our fish on the shelf as instructed, I smiled. I smiled at the*

*realization that two wannabe artists with so little in common had created something (however unsophisticated) that had produced (however secretly) a sense of pride and a feeling of accomplishment.*

*I realize now that Ellie and I had some things in common. We shared, for example, a novice-level understanding of art and a desire to express ourselves through clay. We couldn't have been more different, however, in terms of our social identity markers. Age, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status divided us in ways that in other settings surely would have prevented us from coming together and would have clouded the shared, artistic vision that had emerged.*

### **Community Development as *Discovering Interpersonal Difference***

How often do two unrelated individuals as different as Ellie and I come together to work and learn alongside of each other? Ellie, after all, had much more in common demographically with her fellow classmates than she had with me. Perhaps, she noticed that I was the only student under 50 and the only male in the class and therefore reached out to me. Conversely, our banter may have grown out of what we had in common. Conceivably, Ellie might have perceived that we shared a passion for the arts and therefore assumed other shared identity markers. Our relationship, however, may have emerged out something far more banal. Perhaps, the randomness of sitting at the same table on the first night created a physical space for us to interact. Sitting face-to-face with only a large, awkward table between us did require that, at minimum, we recognize each other's presence.

Scholars have conceptualized community as occurring in a common physical space among individuals with shared identities and investments. Case in point, Haberman (1992) describes community as:

a social unit which consists of persons who share a common geographic area interacting in terms of a common culture and which incorporates a range of social structures which function to meet a relatively broad array of needs of all persons who make up the social unit. (p. 28)

Community, in this regard, is characterized as a group of people interacting in a shared location and who benefit mutually from their interactions. By coming together weekly to discuss LGBTQ issues in education, our inquiry group certainly reflected Haberman's understanding of community. Our "geographic area" was the college classroom and the other community-based sites where our inquiry group met. The "array of needs" and purposes for engaging in our research community, you will recall, ranged from "being informed" and "appreciating others" to "heightened self-discovery" and "being more conscious."

However, as I read and reread student-participants' writing, listened to the audiotapes of our time together, and reviewed my own writing, I came to believe that Haberman's definition of community failed to capture completely the traits of our emerging community. Rather, our community was characterized by a type of *inclusiveness* that is uncommon in college classrooms. Our inclusive community, paradoxically, seemed to draw upon our differences in religious affiliation, economic status, familial ways of knowing, and socio-historical differences. Community building in our collaborative work was not about forcing consensus or imposing unity. Instead,

we found ourselves *coming* to consensus and *feeling* united. It was about drawing upon our differences and learning, if you will, from our unique views and voices.

Take, as an example, an inquiry group conversation from early November. My goal in initiating the conversation that follows was to establish some parameters regarding how we were responding to each other's journaling. The conversation below not only illustrates how our writing drove discussion and, ultimately curriculum, but demonstrates how student-participants and I drew on our interpersonal differences in order to communicate and learn from one another. We discovered that it was essential that we name and explore differences rather than diminish them in order to really "use" our stories.

Jonathan starts our conversation by talking about our inquiry group process of first reading and responding to a co-collaborators' writing and then talking through issues and comments made on one another's journals.

*Jonathan: Sometimes when you're reading someone else's writing, when you don't know them, it's more difficult to get the flow of what they're saying. So, I tried to think about the writer when I was reading. I tried to think about Whitney, to hear her saying the words she wrote.*

*Matt: Yeah, let's talk about responding to other people's papers. We didn't talk too much about how we were going to respond to each other. Like, I know I put on four or five people's paper "loaded word." And then this morning, I thought, oh, they could read this as "Matt's a real pain in the butt." (Laughter). . . . But any comment that I put on your papers was meant to help you think through some issue. We ran out of time [last week], and I don't think we did a very good job of talking about how we should respond to each other. But I really want this to be a space where we feel safe to question each other's ideas and thoughts. For example, I underlined on several people's papers their use of the terms 'lifestyle' and 'lifestyle choices'.*

*Lindsay: Yeah, I was one of those people. I didn't write about it being a choice, but it is a lifestyle, isn't it? I mean, I'm middle class. That's my lifestyle, right?*

*Matt: Well, what I wanted you to think about was how the term 'lifestyle' can be used politically against LGBTQ people.*

*Amber: Yeah, like Bible thumpers can say it's a lifestyle choice and like your lifestyle can be easily changed. Conservatives think that gay people are weak and have succumbed to evil ways, you know things like that.*

*Shannon: But you can't lump all Bible thumpers into one group. I've done youth leadership ministry with high school students the last three summers. I mean these retreats are focused on the Catholic Church's beliefs, but I've had Muslims and atheists in my groups. Last summer I had a fifteen-year-old out lesbian in my group. If you asked these kids, I don't think any of them would say they were ostracized by Bible thumpers.*

*Jonathan: I agree.*

*Amber: Well, I wasn't saying all Catholics are hateful homophobes. I went to Catholic school for eight years --*

*Dan: -- What you're saying is that some conservative, Christian radicals use religion to --*

*Amber: -- spread fear and hate. Right.*

*Matt: That's why I underlined the words 'lifestyle' and 'lifestyle choice'. I wanted us to get the language out on the table. . . . It's not language—and Dan you can correct me if you think I'm wrong—but it's not language that you'd hear LGBTQ people using. We don't talk about our lifestyle or our lifestyle choice.*

*Dan: Yeah, people live lives not lifestyles . . .*

My intent in starting this discussion was to flesh out our process of dialogue journaling. The example I used of drawing attention to “loaded language” was to assure student-participants that my comments on their writing was not intended to be a personal attack. Interestingly, our brief exchange surrounding ‘lifestyle’ and ‘lifestyle choices’ does not follow a typical academic path. I anticipated, as Lindsay starts out, that our conversation would lead us to grapple with or complicate the term ‘lifestyle’. For her part, Lindsay likens membership in an LGBTQ community as similar to membership in a

socioeconomic group. She understands categories and uses what she knows, in this case a class-based analogy, to reason or justify her use of the term. Amber, however, takes the conversation in a new direction. Drawing on her identity marker as an agnostic and demonstrating her distrust of religion, she irreverently suggests that “Bible thumpers” are responsible for the (mis)use of the term lifestyle. Shannon and Jonathan complicate Amber’s notion by suggesting religious organizations can be inclusive and affirming. Clearly, Shannon and Jonathan draw on their affiliation with faith-based institutions to contradict Amber’s assertion. Indeed, my inherent dislike of the terms ‘lifestyle’ and ‘lifestyle choice’ reflect identity markers I brought to our collaboration—namely, my identity as a gay man. This exchange reflects how student-participants and I drew upon and voiced our personal understandings of the terms lifestyle and lifestyle choices through our diverse identity markers. In this case, these understandings were tied to our interpersonal differences related to economic status, religious affiliations, and sexuality.

In a continuation of the above conversation, Lindsay reports on her reading of Jill’s writing. The exchange that follows reflects how our interpersonal differences were explored. Differences in conservative and liberal identities are exposed. In addition, class and community membership is disclosed.

*Matt: What else did you find interesting from reading someone else’s work that you want to draw out for the larger group?*

*Lindsay: Jill is actual more liberal than you might think! (Laughter). Well, I mean she’s open and she wants to learn. She writes about being sheltered from LGBTQ people growing up, and she writes about having her first experience with LGBTQ people because of being in theatre and choir. She writes about not wanting to contribute to a stereotype but that a lot of the guys in choir at Miami [private university that Jill attended as an undergraduate] were gay.*

*Jill: Well, it's true! (Laughter).*

*Whitney: We have to cut Jill some slack.*

*Jill: Thank you! (Laughter).*

*Whitney: Well, I wouldn't even be in this group if it weren't for Jill persuading me. And I know where she's coming from. Um, I grew up in what's probably considered a well-off suburb. I took piano lessons, soccer, swimming, ballroom dance. I did all that. I went to France in high school. I went to space camp. Where I grew up people think that gay issues don't affect us. So, Jill's right. Parents who send their kids to Miami don't think gay issues exist.*

*Jill: It's like this doesn't happen in OUR community. So that's why I wrote about all the gay guys at Miami. It's like where do you think most of them came from? – communities like mine.*

*Whitney: But there's a lot of pressure to be perfect. I mean suicide was like an epidemic in my high school. My best friend killed himself because, well, because, I think, he was gay --*

*Jill: -- It's true. –*

*Whitney: -- And he was just one of three students during high school that killed himself. I'm not saying they all killed themselves because they were gay. But pressure to be the perfect son or daughter, to be the ideal student –*

*Jill: -- to look a certain way, to act a certain way –*

*Whitney: -- it's a problem.*

*Dan: -- Yeah, but it's not just a suburban thing. It's like most people think it's a White thing or an inner city thing. I grew up on a farm in southern Illinois in the middle of nowhere. It's about as conservative [a place] as there is, and I'm gay. I mean it's not like anyone is starting a GSA [Gay/Straight Alliance] there either.*

*Lindsay: Well that's what I wanted to say [about Jill's journal]. We grew up in really different places. As most of you know, I grew up in Clintonville –*

*Dan: -- the lesbian capitol of the Midwest –*

*Lindsay: -- well, yeah, there's a lesbian couple one street over from my parent's [house]. So, exchanging journals last week with you, Jill, helped me see where you're coming from, and I hope you "get" me better too.*



*Jill: I do.*

This exchange again reflects the ways student-participants drew on identity differences to build understanding and foster relationships with one another. Similarly, these kinds of exchanges enabled us to build more sophisticated understandings of social and political issues in light of our own complex identities. The conversation captures the good-natured teasing that Jill, as an outspoken conservative, had to endure throughout the duration of our collaboration. Lindsay's proclamation that Jill is "more liberal than you might think" reflects Lindsay's awareness of our group's perceptions of Jill. This also reflects Lindsay's understanding of differences in our group. Her comment reflects her understanding that we, as inquiry participants, can be positioned along a conservative/liberal continuum, or we can be placed into two distinct and similarly named categories. Implied in Lindsay's proclamation of Jill's conservative leanings is Lindsay's claim of her more liberal leanings.

Whitney comes to Jill's defense by suggesting that she may not have participated in our collaboration had Jill not encouraged her to. Whitney suggests that her friendship with Jill influenced her participation. Jill's writing and Whitney's elaboration on it reflect the suburban, upper-middleclass understandings they brought to our work. Dan extends the conversation beyond the suburban context by again drawing on his life experiences. Dan emphasizes that LGBTQ folks grow up in rural areas, and, I believe, implies that heterosexuals in urban, suburban, and rural areas need to be more cognizant of who (in terms of race and class) and where (in terms of location) LGBTQ people are. Once more, student-participants demonstrate their awareness of their interpersonal differences.

Later in our conversation, Dan returns to the question of how to respond to his peers' writings.

*Dan: Can we go back to the first question about responding to other people's work?*

*Matt: Sure.*

*Dan: I read Amber's paper. I realized after talking to her this morning that I may have interpreted something differently than she meant it to be. Then I kinda felt troubled or concerned that I might be sending the wrong message. I thought I needed to be more careful with what I was saying. It really might impact her. She's not coming from the same space as me.*

*Amber: Yeah, I kept writing and writing and writing on yours, Dan. 'Cause there was so much I wanted to say back. And just like he was saying, I wanted to say it the "right" way. I could have had a four-hour conversation with him.*

*Dan: (Laughter)*

*Amber: Oh, and one thing that I wanted to say . . . Dan writes about not knowing you could be gay until he was nineteen when he took a college psychology course! (Laughter). No, really. He had no role models that were gay in the late '60's and early '70's.*

*Dan: Yeah, well you may think its funny, but Stonewall didn't happen until 1969. That's the time I was in college, well before any of you were even born.*

*Jonathan: Gosh, Dan, you are old! (Laughter)*

*Amber: But that's why I found his journal so interesting. Dan, you have such a different perspective. I really learned a lot from you –*

*Matt: -- And that time and place make a real difference when it comes to LGBTQ individuals being able to express openly who they are –*

*Dan: -- Yeah, I guess in some ways we HAVE made some strides since I was [first] in college . . .*

Here, Dan explicitly states that Amber is “not coming from the same space as me.” Dan, once again, is acknowledging interpersonal differences. Of course, as the only other homosexual in the group, Dan's peers perceive him to be different. However,

generational difference is also exposed. With a somewhat acerbic tone, Jonathan points out the differences in age between Dan and the rest of the student-participants in our group. Dan, too, acknowledges this difference by reminding us that he first attended college before the rest of us were born.

Amber mitigates this difference and eases the cutting nature of Jonathan's barb by saying, "I . . . learned a lot from you." Like Amber, bell hooks (1994) has written about the need for teachers and students to learn from one another. According to hooks, excitement about common interests is insufficient in sustaining an ongoing learning process. Rather, hooks maintains that community development begins by acknowledging the unique and differing contributions of each community member. hooks elaborates:

As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence. Since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor, any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated . . . There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources (1994, p. 8).

Our ability to work and learn in an LGBTQ collaboration, I believe, emerged through "recognizing one another's presence."

The conversations above are illustrative of the ways we drew on our interpersonal differences throughout our year of inquiry. I believe our knowledge and identities were complicated through the voicing of individual difference. These conversations not only

led us to new ways of interacting with one another but to new ways of thinking about LGBTQ issues in education. For us, community was created through feelings of inclusiveness—inclusiveness that brought together *diverse aspects* of our individual identities into a mutually recognized and embraced whole. This inclusiveness constituted an essential component of our community and was contingent upon the naming of interpersonal difference.

**Clay on my Mind (continued)**

*“I don’t know,” Ellie said at the end of our third session together.*

*“Maybe I shouldn’t have taken this class. I just don’t have any ideas.”*

*Ellie went over to the demonstration table to look more closely at the work Nicole had shared with us. Later, as we walked out to the parking lot, I suggested she might look around her home for inspiration. “Maybe, you have a nightstand or coffee table that’s just aching for a Miss-Ellie-Original,” I said both teasingly and with serious intent.*

*The following week, and to my surprise, Ellie had taken my advice. With her, she brought items from her home. The items she was most interested in sharing with me were a rectangular ceramic container with a broken lid and an old, black and white, wallet-sized photo.*

*“This old ceramic box . . . my Pop used to keep his pens in this box. It always sat on the far left-hand corner of his desk. When he went into the rest home, he took this box and his pens with him. He didn’t write all that much, but*

*he signed dozens of Christmas cards every year that I mailed for him. It was a game for him, I think. He knew the exact number of cards he sent out each year. If he sent out 30 cards, he expected 30 cards in return!"*

*"So, are you going to make a new lid for his box?" I asked.*

*"No, I was hoping to make a pen-box of my own."*

*"Sweet," I said.*

*Ellie passed me the photo that had been lying beside the box. "This is my Pop," she shared.*

*The photo was an old military picture that Ellie thought was taken in Germany. Corporal Poffenbaugh was an attractive young man with a square jaw. For the next handful of weeks, Ellie regaled me with stories of her pop, Corporal Poffenbaugh, and her childhood in Portsmouth, Ohio. I learned that she was an only child and that she had married and was now widowed. Like me, she did not have children of her own.*

*"He wasn't my REAL father you know," Ellie disclosed casually as we were wiping up our table at the end of class. "He adopted me. He was a good pop."*

*As a gay man in his early 30's and a woman in her early 70's, we talked about what gay men and old women talk about . . . We talked about family. We talked about "Dallas." We talked about fashion. We teased each other about our respective retirement—her actual retirement and my "pretend" retirement as a*

*graduate student. We swapped recipes<sup>13</sup>. And yes, we created in clay, helping each other and asking questions of each other to nudge along the creative process.*

*“Clay for Beginners” introduced the three of us—Miss Ellie, Zippy, and the Corporal. But, it was the stories—the personal stories—that brought us together. Apart from our shared desire to work in clay, on the surface at least, Ellie and I had very little in common. Without clay, we may have never met. Without the stories, we may have never gotten to know each other or had the opportunity to learn from one another’s perspective.*

### **Understanding Ellie: A Methodological Awakening**

At the time, I recalled wondering why Ellie had come into my life. What, if anything, were my experiences with her supposed to teach me? Ellie, for her part, was a gifted storyteller, uninhibited in her ability to disclose private, highly personal aspects of her life. I speculated that, perhaps, her “gift” was attributed to the wisdom that comes with age, remembering one conversation that ended with: “Hey, I’m old. I’m supposed to be colorful.”

Back at the university, we were getting ready to wrap up for the quarter. In our last session before winter break, each of us presented a sociocultural autobiography—an assignment that focused on self-examination by exploring the social and political factors that have come to shape our thinking as it relates to LGBTQ issues. I had suggested that we accomplish this assignment with the approach that seemed to be serving us so well—

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<sup>13</sup> Ellie’s Fruit Smoothie Recipe: 3 cups fresh or frozen strawberries, 2 ripe bananas, 1 cup apple juice, and 1 cup crushed ice. Blend in a blender for one minute or until smooth. Garnish with mint, optional. Makes four servings.

through our dialogue journals. Tired of writing papers, however, Lindsay suggested we consider alternative, more creative, artistic means to represent “who we are.” Following her lead, I sat down one evening mulling over how I might approach *her* assignment, considering what I might include in my presentation of self. Somehow that freshly fired and glazed fish trivet kept calling my name. So, while Lindsay was at home producing beautiful chalk portraits that represented different understandings throughout her life and Whitney was stringing together family photos for a personalized timeline and Jonathan was writing acrostic poetry, I was pondering the importance of creative expression in my own life—as represented by a transgender fish who I now called Lola.

Lindsay’s request to alter “the assignment” was welcomed. Clearly, her suggested approach would require greater investment in time than I had originally planned. Perhaps, I was more eager for winter break than I realized, or, perhaps, I was experiencing a creative block similar to the one Ellie had experienced in the early weeks of our clay class. Regardless of the reason, Lindsay’s proposal made me feel how many of my past students must have occasionally felt when they were on the receiving end of my sole arbitration of assignments. Disempowered. Perhaps—I contemplated—fostering an inquiry community with teacher candidates means that teacher educators themselves must, at times, “take up” a less central role, shifting more fluidly between leader and follower.

As I sat at the computer trying to “get down” some key ideologies that give conviction to my life and to incorporate the works of clay I had recently finished, I glanced over at Lola who was resting in the far left-hand corner of my desk. I could not help but think of Corporal Poffenbaugh’s ceramic pen box and the conversations with

Ellie that had now come to an end. To my knowledge, Ellie was not formally schooled in the Socratic Method. Yet, her pointed questions and our exploratory conversations were influencing my work with student-participants in ways that, at the time, I was unable to see.

In fact, “Clay on my Mind” was one of my journal entries that was never shared with student-participants. I could not perceive, even as I was writing about it, how my clay class was influencing my thinking or how it was contributing to the ways I was interacting with student-participants at the university. I could not see the obvious parallels between community development in my clay class and our LGBTQ inquiry group. “Clay on my Mind” would never, I surmised, survive the data reduction process. Then, late in the spring, I revisited this field note that I had written back in December:

Everyone invested deeply in their sociocultural autobiographies. Everyone took longer than their allotted 15 minutes. I was struck with the varied and artistic representations. I was even more struck with the ways students EXPOSED themselves emotionally—homophobic family members, alcoholism, stories of poverty and rural isolation. They asked a lot of questions of one another. Does dialogism characterize our learning process in any way? And, what constitutes vulnerability in public, classroom spaces? Do disclosures of alcohol abuse and poverty create a sense of vulnerability in heterosexual pre-service teachers that help them understand heterosexism and homophobia?

[F.N. Dec. 11]

After a season of absence, suddenly, Ellie came into focus. This field note helped me understand, at least partially, the reason for her coming into my life all those months ago, how she influenced our inquiry, and what I was supposed to learn from our relationship. Ellie’s reflections on being adopted and her inability to have children, for example, had constituted a model of disclosure and vulnerability.



As I began looking for patterns and theorizing around issues of community development, initially at least, my lens was focused only on student-participants—what they contributed, what actions they took. Revisiting “Clay on my Mind” reminded me again of bell hooks’ words, “everyone influences the classroom dynamic . . . everyone contributes” (emphasis added, 1994, p. 8). ‘Everyone’ in this case included me. Clearly, the personal relationships I was entering into outside of our inquiry group was influencing the ways I was interacting with student-participants. Clearly, too, my ability to disclose personal aspects of my life served as a model to my students. For those interested in studying community in teacher preparation, our work suggests that the contributions (actions, speaking style, intentions, and interactions) of teacher educators are just as worthy of examination as the students we prepare. Indeed, hooks (1994) reminds us that we can not encourage our students to share and take risks if we, as teacher educators, refuse to confess and be vulnerable ourselves. Surely, if Ellie’s demonstration of vulnerability was influencing tacitly my contributions to our community at the university, then surely, too, the manner and type of communication student-participants and I were engaging in with each other was shaping our community as well.

### **Community Building as *Drawing on Differences through Personal Disclosure***

I have already stated that community emergence was a result of the divergence and convergence of our investments. I stressed, too, that our community was dependent upon the naming of our interpersonal differences related to the identity markers each of us brought to our collaboration. In this section I explore a third dimension of community—*acts of personal disclosure*. Based on my experience with Ellie and subsequent reflection and analysis, I believe community, for us, was created and

sustained through intimate disclosure, characterized by highly personal engagement. Acts of disclosure can be seen, generally, in student-participants' earlier writings related to their motivations for engaging in collaborative inquiry and in the previous excerpts of conversation related to our pedagogical/collaborative processes. However, as student-participants and I continued the process of responding to readings, films, out-of-university experiences, and each other, personal disclosure became increasingly common in our work together.

Accordingly, there was growing evidence that our personal stories were moving us toward greater intimacy and vulnerability. In this section I substantiate this claim by sharing excerpts from a conversation that took place in response to the following readings:

- Raymond, D. (1994). Homophobia, Identity, and the Meanings of Desire: Reflections on the Cultural Construction of Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Sexuality,
- Sears, J. T. (1995). Black-Gay or Gay-Black? Choosing Identities and Identifying Choices, and
- Tatum, B. D. (2000). The Complexity of Identity: "Who Am I?"

As a set of weekly readings, these texts were compiled under a heading entitled, "Identity Work." As a pedagogical process, only occasionally did I ask student-participants to focus their writing on any particular topic—often only giving them a general journal prompt as a "story starter" of sorts. Student-participants and I were free, however, to reply to the facets that we needed to and to reply in the manner which best facilitated that response. Quite naturally, the above articles led us to write about our experiences with(in) LGBTQ communities as well as our relationships with LGBTQ individuals.

In the conversation below student-participants draw upon and disclose highly personal memories as a way to engage in our discussion related to the above readings. The following dialogue is characteristic of the type of conversations that our writing provoked. This particular conversation, however, is perhaps slightly more emotionally charged than was the norm. In starting our conversation, Meredith describes her relationship with her friend, Andy. This conversation took place within the first few months of our collaboration. Her story and the stories that follow demonstrate one of the mechanisms for our becoming a community, the fact that we “don’t mind hearing a kinda personal story.”

*Meredith: I’ll start. Well, I hope you don’t mind hearing a kinda personal story. Well, one of the questions [from last week] was whether or not you have a loved one who is gay or lesbian. It was such an easy question, so straightforward. The question turned out to be really hard for me, because when I was younger, through elementary school really, my best friend—Andy—he and I were joined at the hip. In junior high we kissed in his tree house. We did all the typical kid things. When we were in high school, he never came out and told me “I’m gay.” And I’m not sure when I “knew” but it was so just a part of him. I knew it, and he knew I knew it. Like what Allison was saying last time, we would talk around it. Like when things were hard for him. You know like at school dances. Who was he supposed to ask to go with him? . . . I mean, he was picked on a lot.*  
*Oh my gosh this is harder for me to talk about than I thought it would be.*

*{Meredith gets emotional.}*

*Matt: It’s ok.*

*Meredith: I’m sorry. . . [pause]. And whenever I started dating someone new, he was always on the defensive. I guess because he thought I was going to replace him or something. Something like, “Oh, she’s going to be with HIM and now I’m out.” Well, Craig [Meredith’s fiancé], Andy, and I all went to U.C. for our undergraduate. Andy and Craig lived together.*

*Dan: Oh no. I think I saw this on Young and Restless.*

*Meredith: No! Andy didn’t like Craig. (laughter)*

*Dan: Oh good. I thought your story was going someplace else. (laughter)*

*Meredith: Craig and I broke up for a few months and Andy, because they lived together, felt like I had broken up with him too. He felt bad for Craig, as his friend, and pretty much took Craig's side. So, Andy and I had a big falling out. And I haven't talked to Andy since our big falling out. And it's been over a year. So, Matt's question last week, as simple as it seemed, brought back all these memories and regrets really, for me.*

*Allison: You mentioned things were hard for Andy in high school . . .*

*Meredith: Well, you know, Andy likes to have fun. So, of course, he wanted to do social stuff at school. He wasn't really ever able to date in high school. There's no big circle of gay high schoolers in Lima, Ohio. I just remember, like when it was time for homecoming, it was such a stress. He'd always go with friends, but you know, that's not fair. I had the option of going with friends or going with a date, a guy, you know. He didn't get that chance in our Catholic high school.*

*I remember, too, how he had to keep everything secret from his family. I remember his family went on vacation, some tour of Alaska. They went on this horse trail. Well, I guess the tour guide and Andy, well there must have been vibes there. Of course, Andy's parents didn't know he was gay. So, he would lie to his parents all the time if there was someone he would want to talk to or get to know or maybe do something with. He was just denied so much growing up. So, I don't know.*

*Dan: Meredith, I think your story is more common than you might think.*

*Amber: Seems like he didn't choose to lie. He had to lie.*

*Dan: And is that really lying?*

*Meredith: Well, Andy's out now. And I probably sound really selfish now, but it was such a relief for me when he started telling our friends at U.C.*

*Matt: Why do you say 'relief'?*

*Meredith: Well, I knew the people he was telling. They were our friends. And um, it was just about being honest really. It freed him up to be himself.*

*Dan: There are a lot of Andys out there.*

*Meredith: I guess so. I just know that I don't want the children I teach to have to go through what he did . . .*

Tellings like this one from Meredith grew increasingly more common, both in writings and discussions, as our academic year unfolded. Although not directly responding to the readings, Meredith grapples with issues that impact the lives of LGBTQ youth—coming out, school harassment, dating and extracurricular activities. Clearly, sharing this story was difficult for Meredith as evidenced by the emotional “break” in its delivery. Fighting back tears, she states, “. . . this is harder for me to talk about than I thought it would be,” implying a certain degree of vulnerability.

Like Meredith, Amber maps her personal experiences onto the readings as well. By referencing her dialogue journal, Amber shares how her family approaches LGBTQ issues—issues that are “never ever, ever, ever mentioned.”

*Amber: In my journal I wrote about how my Aunt is, is lesbian and how when I was little I didn't know if she was a boy or a girl. And then, as I got older, I started to learn more about her, and she was like my favorite Aunt and I wanted to spend the night with her. And my mom, the older I got, the weirder she would act about it. And then like, my grandma has never ever, ever, ever mentioned it in my entire life, has never said anything about Aunt Sherry and Aunt Lou, even though they used to be at every family function. They always got joint Christmas presents and everything. But Grandma has never mentioned it, never put a name to it.*

*And then, Matt wrote on my journal, what does this silence say? Well, to me, it says that my Grandma is ashamed of her obviously. And see, now, Sherry doesn't come around that much. Even though my Grandma loves her, maybe just that little part of her just never acknowledging the fact that she is gay and that Lou is her lover has put some animosity in her.*

*There was one time I did bring it up inadvertently; I asked why Sherry and Lou never went to church with us. And, as a kid that's all I wanted to know really. And my Grandma got really defensive and was like, well, I raised her but I can't do anything about the choices she has made for her life. She got really mad. I knew she was talking about more than attending church. I'd never seen my Grandma that way. I think that brief exchange with my Grandma really shaped me. It got me thinking about why people think the way they do about gay and lesbian people and how religion impacts people's beliefs.*

*Whitney: Do you think it has to be brought up and talked about in your family?*

*Amber: Well, I don't think it should completely be ignored! You know, just never ever talked about or never made a normal part of the conversations. I can't think of anything more hurtful than to pretend someone doesn't even exist.*

*Shannon: So, it's like extreme avoidance?*

*Amber: Yeah, Sherry and my Grandma still live in the same small town. She's been coming around with her girlfriend of 18 or 19 years. But, Sherry and Lou, now they don't come to Christmas. They go to friends. They, of course, would rather be with people that recognize them. It's just wrong, wrong that their love isn't acknowledged. It's just not spoken about at all.*

*Whitney: Would it be talked about if she were dating a man?*

*Amber: Oh yeah. We talk about everybody in my family. Everybody's relationship is always the topic of conversation. Like mine is always up for conversation.*

*Jonathan: Amber, when you date someone named Bobby Bill you're going to get talked about! (Laughter)*

Here, Amber discloses personal aspects of her life by examining homophobic relationships that tainted her childhood. While her experiences with LGBTQ issues might seem, on the surface, to be more complicated or emotionally vexing than Meredith's, Amber's delivery is unapologetic and assertive. She, too, uncovers issues that are particular to LGBTQ communities—namely; acceptance, denial, family relations, and “chosen” family.

Both of the above dialogues portray an interesting juxtaposition between serious disclosure and lighthearted playfulness. In both examples Meredith and Amber's co-collaborators further the dialogue by asking probing questions such as: “Why do you say ‘relief’?” and “So, it's like extreme avoidance?” These questions, by contrast, are voiced alongside lighthearted references to *The Young and the Restless* and Amber's boyfriend, Bobby Bill. At the time, I speculated that these comments and the subsequent laughter

were made out of nervousness, as a way to lighten the mood. Now, however, I believe they represent the comfort that student-participants had established with one another and are characteristic of the friendships and trusting relationships that were emerging.

Jill also makes sense of the weekly readings by applying her life experiences to the texts. In what I would describe as one of the most highly personal disclosures of our time together, Jill recalls a past, loving relationship—a relationship that “hit [her] naïveté big time.”

*Jill: Well my journal was about my experience with someone who I was with for three years. We were planning on getting married. We went to Italy on vacation. I was expecting a proposal. Instead, he broke up with me and clear out of the blue came out to me the next day. And it was like the single most emotionally . . . physically . . . mentally draining experience I have ever gone through in my life. And, you know, it was really hard for me to write about, because no one in the program knows this part of my life. But, it was the only thing in my life for a good year. So, it's kinda like I made a conscious decision not to have it be the main focus of my life story when I started this [M.Ed.] program. I wanted that to be my past and this to be my future, but it can't be that way because it's me, it's who I am. It makes up who I am right now. I wouldn't be sitting here today with you. I'd be over in Campbell Hall working on my Ph.D. in hospitality management and planning a wedding to someone I wasn't supposed to be marrying.*

*But . . . I wrote about when it happened. I went through a huge shame issue. Because everyone in my life was like how could you not know this? How could you be with him for two years and not know he's gay? Everyone was blaming me. When we broke up, I didn't talk to him for five or six months, because I had so much anger. Just so much raw emotion. I couldn't talk to anyone . . . You wanna talk about identity? I literally had a breakdown. I had to move back in with my parents. I couldn't handle anything. I quit my job.*

*When I finally talked to him, I exploded so . . . so powerfully because what I realized, what I was so angry about, was that he had lied to me for almost three years. And, he was the best friend I ever had. I felt so completely deceived by him. His whole point was he felt he had to lie, he had to deceive people, and had to put up this front because it was what was expected of him.*

*Shannon: Expected of him?*

*Jill: Yeah, his family is very traditional. They have very strong cultural beliefs. They're from Sri Lanka. And, I guess I can understand, but I don't agree with the way he went about it. Because he basically told me, when we sat down and talked*

*about it, he said, “I apologize because I basically used you for two years.” And that was the hardest thing I ever had to hear in my life.*

*Meredith: Well, in some ways it’s easier for Andy now, but I know the pressures your fiancée were feeling, to hide, were real.*

*Matt: And I think it goes beyond any one person’s personal choice. It’s not “should I come out today” or not. But there are, as you said Meredith, very real cultural and familial structures in place in our society. We as a society bear some of the responsibility that puts Andy or your “almost” fiancée, Jill, in these positions.*

*Jill: Yeah and it’s just been in the last couple of months where I’ve gotten over some of the reactions from people who look at me and say, “Oh my God, what’s wrong with you.” And, all of that came from people I would never expect it to. It came from my family. It came from my closest friends. It came from my co-workers. It came from people at my church. It came from everywhere. I felt like it was my fault.*

*Jonathan: And now how do you feel?*

*Jill: Now I see it wasn’t my fault. Our work is helping me to see that it wasn’t. And, um, I told Matt that he gave me a very powerful statement when we wrote on my journal that society tells us to assume heterosexuality.*

*As you all know, I’m about as suburban as you can get. There was no such thing as homosexuality where I grew up. And I mean, Pat on Saturday Night Live was a joke. That’s as close to the topic as I got. That’s all I knew. It wasn’t a part of my life. But this hit my naiveté big time.*

*Matt: I think both your story and Meredith’s demonstrate how, how heterosexism plays itself out in two women’s lives who identify as heterosexual.*

*Dan: Yeah, people always like to say, “It’s not my concern. You take care of that yourself.” Well, it IS your concern. It’s your concern and it’s my concern. You don’t have to be gay or even the parent of a gay kid for this to connect to your life.*

*Jill: True . . . how true.*

Jill’s telling captures an intensely personal experience and offers a concrete example of how heteronormativity impacts people’s lives. Although I would argue that the



consequences of heterosexism and homophobia are most severely felt by LGBTQ youth (and those perceived as such), clearly, the effects of heteronormativity, as this story demonstrates, ripple outward impacting heterosexuals as well.

Interestingly, you may remember that in her initial journaling related to her motivations for joining our group, Jill only disclosed professional reasons for wanting to engage in our shared inquiry. Jill's personal disclosure in the example above stands in stark contrast to the professional tone with which she started our year of inquiry. This shift to the personal is supported in the literature which suggests that it takes time to build trusting environments and that sustained attention to LGBTQ issues (or any curriculum for that matter) is necessary in order for change in thinking to occur (Lipkin, 1999, Palmer, 1983). Regardless of when Jill chose to make herself vulnerable, I believe that after her telling group perceptions of Jill changed. Through her telling, Jill—who I would characterize as the most gregarious and opinionated member of our group—located herself and her biases. Her telling altered her voice, allowing her fellow student-participants and me to understand better her positions and points of view.

In fact, I believe this demonstrates how as we studied LGBTQ issues in education we invoked a process of studying *ourselves*. In the case above, we as a group came to understand better the personal reality from which Jill's disclosure emerged. We created new entry points to respond to Jill's telling. We understood better her previous tellings, and we created new ways to enter into Jill's life. The above exchange demonstrates how our learning was *embodied*—not facts to be recited or data to be memorized. Indeed, Palmer (1988) reminds us that “what we teach will never “take” unless it connects with

the inward, living core of our students' lives" (p. 31). After months of dialogue, Jill, I believe, found her "connection" to the topic and in doing so we found our "connection" to her.

Likewise, Gomez and Tabachnik (1992) have written about the importance of personal relationship-building to the teaching and learning process. They write, "all teaching [and learning] is situated within webs of relationships negotiated between people, and the meanings people assign to these relationships" (p. 137). In relationship with others we, as an inquiry group, "declared our values in a visible and viable way" and began to create a space to learn from one another's way of knowing (Palmer 1988, 175). In these moments of vulnerability, we became more nuanced in one another's eyes. For us, it was the difference between merely hearing the story of others and being engaged in transformative listening. Vulnerability and the accompanying emotional risk that it implies moved us, I believe, from hearing to listening.

Like Meredith's earlier telling about her friend Andy, Lindsay initiates a personal story that is difficult for her to share. Her story, again, captures the emotional risks that student-participants found themselves taking. In this exchange, Lindsay begins a story about her brother—a personal disclosure that she feels "comfortable in this setting talking about."

*Lindsay: Ok, well, I wanna talk about my brother being gay. I remember a person on The Real World who didn't come out right away, because he didn't want people to judge him on that until they knew him. So, I don't tell people about my brother until they meet him, because I don't want them to judge him. But, I feel comfortable in this setting talking about it.*

*I'm the only one in my family that knows. And my family, well my dad, would basically disown my brother if he found out. My whole family just really looks down upon, um, gay people. Matt asked if I felt burdened by this*

*information. I feel privileged that my brother wanted and did share that with me. I'm glad he could share it with me.*

*Well, anyway, last year I went to Thanksgiving dinner at my aunt's house. My uncle was there. My uncle has a little bit of a drinking problem, and he was drunk. And he starts talking about gay people. . . He just flat out asked me about my brother and firing questions at me. It's not my place to tell other people about my brother, especially my family. . . I'm sorry. This is going to make me cry.*

*Shannon: It's ok.*

*Matt: You don't have to go on.*

*Lindsay: Someone else can share. I'm sorry.*

*{Lindsay leaves the room and Meredith follows her.}*

*Dan: Yeah, I was just going to say, isn't it amazing how society sets these standards that we are supposed to follow? Like finding someone, falling in love, getting married, having kids. If you don't kinda fit that . . . I call it the Ozzie and Harriet mold --*

*Amber: -- Yeah, you're nobody then. If you don't fit that then everything you do is wrong. You're sick --*

*Jill: -- Or you're just not recognized.*

*Dan: Or you become critical of yourself. You know, why can't I fit that mold? Why is it hard for me? Why is it easier for other people? You start questioning yourself.*

*Jill: That's what's hard to realize I think. Everyone looks superficially at everyone around them and think they have it going on. No one really knows what's going on in other people's lives. I think about that with my friends. My very close group of friends, after graduation, everyone got married. I look at them and think, boy, they have it together. They are married, buying houses. But really, when I talk to my best friend, she's like, my life is going down the tubes. I'm 24 years old. I have a kid. Why can't I be single like you! And, I'm like, why can't I be married like you! (laughter)*

*Jonathan: I think we spend all our lives thinking when we get to 'X', 'Y', or 'Z' point we'll have it all figured out. But if we stopped judging ourselves by other people's standards we'd get a lot more life out of life.*

*Jill: That's true.*

*Amber: Absolutely.*

*Whitney: I just wanted to say that today has been a real light-bulb-going-off kinda day for me. I learned more today, by listening to all of you, than I ever had reading about this [topic].*

*{Lindsay and Meredith come back into the room.}*

*Amber: Hey, Lindsay. Are you ok?*

*Lindsay: Yeah, are you ready to hear about me and my brother? This time for real? . . .*

On the day that I met Lindsay you may remember her saying, “this topic is so important to me.” Additionally, you may recall in her first dialogue journal she wrote, “*For very personal reasons*, I have wanted to learn how to communicate about this subject in an informed way.” Not until we examined more closely our own identities and personal connections to LGBTQ issues did Lindsay disclose why our work was important to her or what exactly her personal connection was. This dialogue represents how we constructed ways to make ourselves vulnerable to one another and learned ways to engage deeply with the content. In fact, Lindsay’s story, as well as those contributed by Meredith, Amber, and Jill, represents the ways heterosexual teachers can come to make themselves vulnerable to issues related to LGBTQ concerns.

However, ‘vulnerability’ spiraled throughout our work together, well beyond this exemplar conversation. As further evidence of the way themes—like vulnerability—were reintroduced and reexamined, I conclude with an excerpt from Meredith’s dialogue journal, written in response to weekly readings compiled under the heading “Ally Work.”

Several months after the above discussion, Meredith returns to issues of relationship-building and vulnerability. Leaning on the work of Anzaldúa (2000), Meredith concludes:

As we all know, no two people are alike. Anzaldúa writes, “if you and I were to do good alliance work together, be good allies to each other, I would have to expose my wounds to you and you would have to expose your wounds to me and then we could start from a place of openness” (p. 475). We all come with our own story, and when entering into a relationship with someone who is “different” than you, it is important to recognize this. I believe that to be an ally you do have to expose yourself and make yourself vulnerable. A perfect example of this was when we presented our autobiographies at the end of fall quarter. I am not saying that by exposing your wounds you are suddenly creating a level playing field. What you are doing is recognizing what really matters; which is that we all have something to give to each other and that we deserve to be heard and respected for who we are, whether we initially appear to be “different” or not.

[D.J. 2-10-03, underlined emphasis added]

### **Notions of Community Revisited**

Earlier, I described some common conceptions of ‘community’. Haberman (1992) characterized community as a “common culture” which occurs in a “common geographic area.” Community, according to Haberman, functions “to meet a relatively broad array of needs of all persons who make up the social unit” (p. 28). Belenardo’s contribution encompassed a more relational definition of community--conceptualized as people who share common “beliefs,” and “feelings,” and who ultimately create a “sense of belonging” (2001, p. 34). Bellah (1985) focused more on what communities *do*. Bellah described community as a group of people who “participate together,” “share certain practices,” and who are “socially interdependent” (p. 333). Sergiovanni (1994), speaking specifically about communities of learners, characterized community as an adventure “in shared leadership and authentic relationships” (p. 155). While such

characterizations help us conceptualize or define community, they do not address fully how a community comes into existence—how, in essence, community is built.

Our work offers an example of how the politics of difference contributed to the development of community. Throughout this chapter, I have suggested that our inquiry community emerged, or was created, principally through three dimensions of *difference*:

- Distinguishing differences in investment
- Discovering differences through interpersonal connections, and
- Drawing on differences through personal disclosure.

These dimensions are not exclusive of the qualities described by the scholars above.

Rather, I believe, they complement and extend Haberman's, Belenardo's, Bellah's, and Sergiovanni's notions while speaking directly to *our* unique community development.

First, I have argued that, for us, community was a result of shared investment. Shared investment, however, is not as simple or as straightforward as the term may initially imply. Surely, in our work together, shared investment entailed a common set of commitments to increased LGBTQ equity. However, shared investment does not equate to simple group conformity nor does it mean that each member's contribution is exactly alike. As a group of ten individuals, we may have been willing to devote time and effort to our particular undertaking; however, our expectations of why this work was worthwhile or how it might contribute to our lives or the lives of others were never identical. Rather, our investments converged and diverged in unique ways through our year of collaboration. Accordingly, each of us came to contribute to our newly forming relationships, and our budding community, in unique and impactful ways. That is, we

each contributed our portion, or our “share,” to the larger group activities. We did not enter our collaboration with shared investment in as much as our investments *came* to be shared.

Another way our community came to be shared was through drawing on, not diminishing, our differences. Difference, in our collaborative work, was spoken not avoided. ‘Difference’ is a topic often addressed in courses related to diversity and equity education (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997, Martin, 1995, Wise & Fine, 1993). Indeed, my previous experiences related to diversity education—as both a teacher and a graduate student—at times, have left me more troubled than calmed. I have wondered if sometimes the lessons learned tempted us to overlook rather than address identity. Oftentimes, in our attempts, we merely find new ways to be judgmental of one another’s shortcomings. In our collaboration, I was consistently amazed at student-participants’ ability to position their stories alongside—not above or more important than—their peers. That is, their responses to one another never seemed to be condemnatory. As stated before, we developed an inclusive community which enabled us to avoid hierarchical ways of listening and speaking. Because participants had access to varied discourses through the close, aligned relationships that had developed, we found ourselves “owning” each other’s narratives rather than privileging our own.

I conjecture that this phenomenon was a result of entering into small-group *collaboration* as compared to “taking” a traditional *class*. Perhaps, *inviting* pre-service teachers to participate in a freely chosen collaborative learning experience creates an overriding feeling of cooperation rather than competition. In cooperative spaces, we are better able to be sensitive in our interactions with one another and to understand the

diverse positions we each occupy. It was this type of environment that allowed us to alter the way we “did” school with one another, creating a context for a more fluid exchange of leadership and authority (Shor, 1996). It moved us in small steps toward Delpit’s (1995) calling of, “learning to see the world as others see it” (p. 151).

Our community, then, developed out of an awareness that, although our similarities outweighed our differences, our differences did matter. By examining the ways our differences connected to, departed from, and intersected with one another; we began to develop bonds with one another—bonds that transcended the typical teacher-student or student-student relationship. Said another way, as we inquired together, we created the ties—the web of relationships—that enabled us to learn from one another (Grumet, 1991).

Exposing our interpersonal differences led us to participate in acts of disclosure and vulnerability. Indeed, making ourselves vulnerable to one another not only allowed us to interact with the curriculum but fostered new relationships. By “risking” vulnerability, we promoted authentic dialogue, opened ourselves to one another, and freed ourselves to make mistakes. This type of disclosure is rarely found in academic settings. I have come to believe that student-participants were not asserting an agenda but asserting themselves. Exposing themselves. They were trying to understand themselves and their histories better by giving others access to those selves and histories. This practice was central to our community development.

Finally, our work contributes to the conversation about how communities are created by suggesting that communities are not static or preexisting entities into which we simply insert ourselves. Rather, each of us brought aspects of our respective identities



to our inquiry; named and explored those identity differences; and through personal disclosure learned how and where our lives intersected. In these intersections we created a space for thinking, growing, and inquiring. Community in this sense was not a result of a pedagogical process as much as it was a way of living that shaped our pedagogy and sustained our work together. In this dialectic exchange, we learned the ways to participate in the emerging communities of our lives. In essence, our group practices impacted individuals' ways of knowing and individuals' ways of knowing impacted our group practices.

**“Clay on my Mind” (concluded)**

*My foray into a field of study that I know very little about took twists and turns that were unexpected. For example, when I enrolled in this class I imagined working on a potter's wheel, spinning out beautiful vases, bowls, and cylindrical vessels shaped by my hands. I imagined having conversations after class with Nicole over coffee—she emoting passionate pearls of wisdom while I sipped on coffee and soaked in her artist's perspective. None of this happened. Instead, we spent our class time building by hand, no potter's wheels in our art studio. I wasn't so much disappointed as I was surprised at the direction our class had taken. I began to wonder if my students at the university were experiencing our LGBTQ collaboration similarly.*

*As a way to further develop our abilities, Nicole encouraged us to take our unmolded clay home with us to practice techniques between class meetings. I spent no fewer than ten hours working with clay this weekend. When I went to bed around 1:00 AM this Saturday night, I looked at my kitchen counter . . . clay,*

*sponges, books (for inspiration), cutting tools, puddles of water everywhere. I looked at my t-shirt, stained with red clay. I looked at my hands, caked with mud. There would be no finished product worthy of display in the Guggenheim, I realized. There would be no great life “epiphany” as a result of this eight-week class. As I let these exasperations go, the clay, which Nicole had said, “has no voice of its own,” spoke to me.*

*Clay comes from the earth. It is found near water, around lakes, riverbanks, and creeks. Clay dries when it is exposed to air, but returns to a muddy state when it is placed in water. Clay can be used again and again. This evening I built and remolded the same ball of clay—the same piece of earth—many times. A pinch pot was re-wedged and now exists as a coaster on which a candle or glass may rest in the future. A small rectangular box is drying on my window ledge, paying homage to the Corporal. A day before that same ball of clay might have been “renegotiated” into a coil pot, vase, or primitive mug. Community functions in much the same way—through a process of ongoing (re)negotiation.*

*A ball of clay requires a human hand to nudge and guide it if it is to be transformed in shape. Before the hand can work on the physical, vision must come forth from the mind’s eye. As an artist, my vision was informed by Nicole, Miss Ellie, and the artists whose photographed work lay before me in the pages of books—people who bestowed upon me the gift of inspiration. Our community at the university evolved in much the same way, drawing upon individual strengths and exposing weaknesses in order to learn new ways of communicating, new ways*

*of being. Community, it would seem, is not always waiting for those who desire it; rather, it is built—in our case, built through voiced differences in investment, identity, and disclosure. In as much as fostering community may be a science, I've also come to believe it to be an art as well. Clay taught me that.*

## CHAPTER 4

### THE LIVES BEYOND OUR OWN

#### Introduction

Critical theory, and thus critical pedagogy, hinges on the concepts of self-reflection and consciousness-raising. In chapter three I described how our inquiry group forged a community in which we felt comfortable making ourselves vulnerable enough to do this work of self-reflection and consciousness-raising. In this chapter, I describe the pedagogical path that work led us down. As we endeavored to break down “false consciousness” and deconstruct the “dominant reality” (Apple, 1996), we discovered that we would have to inquire beyond the boundaries of traditional classroom spaces and practices. If we were to develop critical consciousness and begin to imagine the possibility of “interven[ing] in the world as transformers of that world,” we would have to delve into the LGBTQ community *beyond campus*, discover and examine our histories and beliefs by moving *beyond reflection*, and confront the challenges of trying to advocate for LGBTQ people through *beyond inquiry* experiences (Freire, p. 54, 1970).

This chapter sets out to describe the pedagogy that student-participants and I developed over the course of our inquiry. The pedagogy that will be described and analyzed in this chapter leans on critical teachers and scholars such as Freire (1970), hooks (1994), and Shor (1996). Indeed, Freire reminds us that teachers must not

delineate programs of study to present to students or set “itineraries” for students to follow. Rather, he suggests a pedagogy “forged *with*, not *for*” students (p. 30). While I was the originator and facilitator of our yearlong LGBTQ inquiry group, I was not the sole leader and did not design the curriculum. Instead, our pedagogy was shared among the ten co-collaborators. The pedagogical path we forged together was guided by questions and interests that emerged among student-participants and me.

Our questions emerged out of our lived experiences and our reflections on and dialogue about those experiences. In the spirit of critical pedagogy, our inquiry involved the investigation of “people’s thinking—thinking which occurs only in and among people together seeking reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 89). The reality we were seeking together drew us out of the university classroom and into new contexts. These new contexts enabled us to learn in varied spaces about varied LGBTQ content. We were drawn out of the university classroom both literally and figuratively. Our questions took us beyond the university classroom literally as we found ourselves participating in off-campus events in the LGBTQ community. This *beyond campus* aspects of our pedagogy involved attendance at LGBTQ events that engaged us in varying kinds of confrontations and celebrations. Our questions also took us beyond the university classroom metaphorically as we engaged in a reflective practice that pushed personal boundaries and further directed our investigation. The *beyond reflection* aspects of our pedagogy involved deliberate (re)collection and critical co-interrogation of our stories as we attempted to understand and scrutinize them within the context of our inquiry group. Lastly, our questions ultimately took us beyond our inquiry group as we stepped outside of the small, intimate community we built together in order to try to bring our work to life. That is, we

left the safety and familiarity of talking and inquiring together and made attempts at putting our learning to work. The *beyond inquiry* aspects of our pedagogy involved taking risks and enabled us to experience both homophobia and LGBTQ advocacy firsthand.

Our pedagogy, then, was a product of our joint participation. It was forged out of our investments and interests and was located in a specific socio-historical context. Accordingly, the description and analysis that follow are unique to our collaborative group. Other collaborators in diverse contexts and with different motivations would have undoubtedly constructed alternative opportunities for their growth and development. As such, the pedagogical descriptions that follow are not intended to serve as “directions” for how to “do” this work. Rather, I will present three primary practices—not chronological events—that contributed to the pedagogy we constructed. In the first of these practices, I describe our beyond campus learning. In later sections, I explore the reflective practices and beyond inquiry experiences that were central to our shared pedagogy. As in previous chapters, my own reflective journal writing is woven throughout this chapter as well. The journal entries presented here were shared with and received feedback from student-participants during our year of collaboration. I share these entries now as further evidence our pedagogy. These entries, I contend, reveal themes that were important to me as a teacher educator. They also demonstrate the “tone” of our written exchanges and the type of reflective practices that took place during our work together.

***“On Wholeness”***  
**Journal Entry (March)**

*Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. What we do with the web, we do to ourselves.*

– Chief Seattle

*Like all of you, I have handed in my journal entries with regularity each week, and as I drive home after our time together, I begin to think about what I might like to write about for the following week. As you’ve probably noticed, several of my journals have been extensions or rewrites of my earlier writings. (Why, oh why, does it take so many attempts to get it ‘right’?!) Other entries have been written with intentions to sort out issues that have been brought up in our discussions or challenges particular to my personal life. (And what a gift this has been). I think it was Parker Palmer who said, “The personal is the professional.” I have felt his words this quarter.*

*Meredith, as you may remember, spoke casually about ‘wholeness’ last week. Her use of the term got me thinking. It’s amazing what you see when you open your eyes. I opened my eyes this week in hopes of seeing ‘wholeness’. That is, I hoped to write about the many facets and tiny connections that have come together to shape who I am as a whole being. So, this week I threw out to the universe a less than well-formulated question regarding ‘wholeness’. And as I have found in the past, if you watch closely with eyes wide open, the universe answers in subtle ways. For example, in a moment of cruising the internet, I stumbled upon the above quotation from Chief Seattle. I wasn’t looking for it. I*

*skimmed it quickly and then paused and reread it with greater care. Chief Seattle is certainly speaking of interconnections. With very few words he expresses the complexities regarding the ties and relationships that exist among and between people and nature, as well as between people and people. On a Sunday evening at 10:30 the universe began providing me answers to my question through the words of a great man whose physical presence has long been absent from our Earth. (There's a certain irony here). Our work this year really seems to fit nicely with this notion. I know I have gained a greater sense of personal wholeness over the last two quarters working and learning with all of you—through writing, through reflecting, through out-of-university outings, and through the new and ever-growing relationships we have constructed with each other.*

*There is a completion in wholeness. There is an absence of fractionality. There is a unity in wholeness. Yet, according to Chief Seattle, to understand unity, close attention must be paid to all the elements or parts that come together to make a person or a family or a country or a world complete.*

*Our work together (whether it be through attending The Gay Men's Winter concert or The Ellen Degeneres concert, viewing The Laramie Project, or working with youth at Brookhaven) speaks to the totality of the human experience and my desire for wholeness. The out-of-university experiences we have engaged in have helped me to become more sensitive to my physical environment and have pushed me to think of communication/expression in alternative, even nonverbal, ways. I see greater purpose in our work. I see natural connections and*



*interconnections. As I reflect on our work outside the university, I, too, have a greater appreciation of each of you and what you have contributed to our collaborative work. Traditionally, as you know, it's my job to teach you. Creating a space for me to learn from each of you and to learn from people in our community has been a meaningful and inspirational experience for me. (I hope you are finding our learning outside the university to be sustaining as well). Moving outside the university has heightened my awareness—including awareness of the physical, cognitive, social, and aesthetic. It seems I didn't have to look very far to find wholeness. This week, I was reminded that it was there all along.*

In this piece of writing, I reflected on our collaboration in “wholistic” terms. As this above entry suggests, our collaboration cannot be fully understood in its “parts.” Rather, the “whole” of our collaborative pedagogy relied on many inter-working components. With this limitation in mind, I describe one of these components in greater detail—beyond campus learning. This aspect of our pedagogy moved us outside the university setting. In new, diverse contexts, student-participants and I learned ways to engage more deeply with the issues. Below, I describe several beyond campus contexts that advanced our growth and development.

### **Beyond Campus**

Teacher educators with commitments to multiculturalism and social justice often make intense emotional and intellectual demands on students. We ask them to interrogate their identities, examine their personal histories, and develop compassion and understanding for the perspectives and points of view of the marginalized. These

expectations differ greatly from the kinds of academic work that usually takes place in college courses, even education courses. How to nurture pre-service teachers' dispositions toward teaching for diversity continues to present a challenge for teacher educators (Clark & Medina, 2000; King, Hollings, & Hayman, 1997; Sleeter, 1995). In our collaborative inquiry related to sexual diversity, we interrogated ourselves by examining our pasts and developed compassion and understanding for the needs and interests of others. For us, these experiences of interrogating, examining, and developing compassion and understanding occurred mainly through our efforts of reading, writing, and reflecting on experiences at the university. These efforts, I believe, resulted in shifts in our perspectives and moved us, and our inquiry, forward in significant ways. For instance, we were able to identify how religious affiliation, social class status, and gender pervaded our understandings of LGBTQ issues. However, our experiences beyond the university classroom also moved us forward in significant, yet dramatically different, ways. Shifts in thinking occurred through participation in these events—extending, enriching, and authenticating the conversations that were taking place at the university.

Off-campus activities often demanded something more of us. We, for example, experienced the burden of time, travel, expense, and effort that these out-of-university experiences required. Because our group was collaborative, worked mainly by consensus, and involved emerging friendships, many of these burdens were mitigated for us. However, beyond campus experiences also *felt* different and led us to unexpected places. It is important to note that many of these events were initiated and organized by student-participants rather than by me. For example, Shannon initiated and reserved tickets for our viewing of *The Laramie Project*, and Jonathan proposed and Dan secured

the tickets for our attendance of the Columbus Gay Men's Chorus Winter Concert.

Similarly, Lindsay read about the Columbus AIDSWalk and signed us up online. The mere fact that student-participants led these events dramatically affected how they were experienced by our group.

Yet, any learning experience that takes place beyond the boundaries of the university demands something more of students. When we draw students off-campus, we ask them to move out of their comfort zones. The role of student is clearly defined in our society and students know the expectations—arrive on time with readings and assignments in hand, take your seat, raise your hand, talk when directed to or during breaks. Off-campus events disrupt the student role and allow students to engage with each other on a more personal and social level. In the light of new surroundings, we often “see” one another differently. For example, in our out-of-university experiences, student-participants and I often dressed different than we would have for “school.” Additionally, we talked sometimes more and sometimes less but always differently than we did at the university. Allison, for example, seemed to “come out of her shell” during our beyond campus experiences. In the classroom, Allison was reserved and rarely the first to talk. In out-of-university contexts, she was often gregarious and funny—a side of her personality I did not encounter at the university. In addition, student-participants were often more curious and/or nervous when placed in community contexts than they were in the university setting.

As a teacher educator, beyond campus experiences demanded something more of me as well. The campus setting, in all reality, represented my comfort zone. Whereas Allison, as an example, seemed more comfortable and natural in out-of-university

settings, I was often more ill at ease. Amber, for instance, demanded that she pick me up on route to one of our off-campus events, insisting that my home was “on her way.” Earlier in the year, Amber had hosted one of our off campus experiences at her home. Surprisingly, I did not feel a great deal of reciprocity having her come to my home. Rather, opening up my home to her made me somewhat nervous. It was a boundary I had not previously crossed as a teacher or a teacher of teachers. Similarly, after another of our off campus experiences, several student-participants suggested we go to a local gay bar. Although all of the student-participants were of legal age, my maternal/paternal instinct asserted itself. I remember thinking, “Should I endorse such an activity? What are the university’s guidelines? How do I handle group inclusivity if some student-participants feel uncomfortable in a bar setting and choose not to go?” Beyond campus learning, then, posed new dilemmas and pushed personal boundaries for me as well.

Below, I describe our beyond campus experiences in more detail. In addition, I describe more fully what these experiences demanded of us and what was accomplished through them. Perhaps, these demands and accomplishments can be thought of as occurring on a spectrum. Certainly, not all our beyond campus experiences resulted in the same kind of learning. I argue that the kind of demands and expectations placed on student-participants and me at various events resulted in different kinds of interactions and growth. Student-participants’ level of engagement fluctuated across our out-of-university experiences and were characterized by varying levels of comfort, vulnerability, and productivity. Additionally, each kind of off-campus event offered access to different kinds of “spaces” and different LGBTQ content.

## **Invoking Affective Ways of Knowing: What Matthew Taught Us**

Beyond-campus experiences created opportunities for us to acquire knowledge with/in LGBTQ communities. These experiences placed us alongside other LGBTQ-advocating or -interested adults. Several of these events invoked passionate reactions from student-participants. Beyond campus experiences, then, often had an emotional impact on student-participants and me. As stated earlier, attending a performance of *The Laramie Project* was our first inquiry group event. *The Laramie Project* experience illustrates how student-participants and I often engaged emotionally in beyond-campus contexts.

While *The Laramie Project* is among the most widely performed plays in America over the last decade, it has not been performed in every city in the nation. The play, which chronicles the life and murder of Wyoming gay teen, Matthew Shepard, was noted as one of the 10 best plays in America in the year 2000 (Time, 2000). The fact that the Columbus premiere coincided with the launching of our inquiry project speaks to the local commitment our city has to LGBTQ concerns. *The Laramie Project* presented a unique, local opportunity to our group. We were officially introduced to the “topic” for our study through the drama of live theatre, in a local context, and with the luxury of time to talk after the experience. Student-participants found themselves confronted with a tragic story of life (and death) for a gay youth. They also found themselves confronted by what the reality of this story might mean for them as teachers trying to figure out how to serve LGBTQ youth.

We started our work together, then, outside the university setting. As stated before, by escaping the walls of the university we were able to begin our work and forge

relationships with one another without the constraints of our university-based roles. We spent this first evening together confronting a difficult story of hatred, violence, and homophobia. During the performance, I sat next to Lindsay and Amber. Both women responded emotionally to the play, crying and wiping tears from their eyes. Allison, too, had an emotional reaction to the play. She describes her reaction in her dialogue journal:

I was not expecting “The Laramie Project” to be so gut wrenching. I was really moved by the play. It’s one thing to read about situations like this in the paper or to hear Matthew Shepherd’s story reported on in the news. It was an entirely different experience to experience the story in this way. It used to be just a fact to me. It was a sterile story. I understand the story better now and relate to it I think on a more personal basis. I mean who wouldn’t after seeing it.

- Allison [D.J. 10-28-02]

Like Allison, I reflected on this experience. I wondered if this was the “right” event to launch our investigation into LGBTQ study. Matthew Shepard’s story is one that alerts us to the worst kind of homophobia. It focuses on the dangers that can come with being LGBTQ in a homophobic world. While the play honors Matthew’s life and presents multiple points of view, it does not leave viewers with a great deal of hope or with a sense of pride and celebration of LGBTQ contributions or experiences. This initial event could have set our group up to focus only on the pain, trauma, and oppression that exist for LGBTQ people. This initial event could have led us down a path of studying facts and statistics related to suicide rates, depression, or maladjustment among LGBTQ youth. In my field notes, I questioned the impact *The Laramie Project* might have on our budding work together:

I’m worried that *The Laramie Project* might have left student-participants overwhelmed or feeling helpless. How does the story shape their thinking about

LGBTQ youth? Does it reinscribe the notion that all queer youth are victims and in need of our help? What kinds of experiences can our work provide to broaden this notion?

[FN 10-29-02]

My field note describes my uneasiness at the start of our collaboration. Implied in my field note is my desire to “control” student-participants’ interpretation of the play. Also inherent in this field note is my awareness of the play’s portrayal of LGBTQ youth and my desire for student-participants to experience a balanced or more complex representation of the issues affecting the lives of LGBTQ youth.

Indeed, this initial event could have resulted in us feeling overwhelmed or helpless. Instead, through mediation after the play and further dialogue at the university, we began to make sense of Matthew’s story in a way that pushed us forward in productive ways. Below, Shannon begins our follow-up discussion that took place several days later at the university.

*Shannon: Well I think it was the best play I ever saw. The actors were amazing and the story had a real emotional impact. I mean it’s like it really takes you to that fencepost. I felt like I was there, like I was a powerless witness.*

*Jill: Yeah, that’s what I thought too. But it wasn’t like I just felt powerless. I felt like totally all-knowing, you know what I mean? Each time a new character was introduced each one of them had their own position on his murder. The point, for me, was that you could take on, or see, all these different positions. And isn’t that what we could experience as teachers? I thought, yeah, parents and administrators are coming from all these different positions when it comes to gay issues.*

*Meredith: Yeah, but the point for me wasn’t that I had to take into consideration all the positions but that I could or should be informed about what positions I do take. You know what I’m saying?*

*Matt: So, it helped you better formulate your own personal position. That’s what I hear you saying.*

*Meredith: Yeah, pretty much. I mean it represented extreme points of view. And I know there's the possibility of running into bigots or gay bashers but . . . but you know, I was interested in thinking about, or putting myself in the place of, the characters who had thoughtful stances, characters who--*

*Jonathan: --But what Jill was saying, it's like it's helpful to think about each town person's response. Did anyone else think it was interesting that it was the clergy who kept saying, "Tell it right." I think people think that preachers only condemn homosexuality, and there he was encouraging an honest telling [of the events that took place in Laramie, Wyoming]. It was a stance that was unexpected.*

*Jill: But that's what I'm trying to say. There were like two dozen positions. And if you kept a score card, it's like we could chart all their responses—*

*Dan: --Like obvious hater to gay advocate.—*

*Jill: --right, but well I thought the women had more educated positions, sorry guys. It's like too much testosterone kills your ability to use your brain.  
(laughter)*

*Dan: Well, I'd agree with that. Men are more homophobic than women. But, it's more about how men are raised I think.*

*Matt: And I'd add that there are very few things worse, worse for a boy than . . . when growing up than to behave in a feminine manner or to be sensitive. Boys are taught, I think, to assert their masculinity at all costs, and that includes distancing themselves as much as they can from homosexuality.*

*Jonathan: It's like you can't be a real guy's guy if you're not an asshole towards gays.*

[11-2-02]

The experience of the play brought us closer together as a group because of the emotional impact it had on all of us. Shannon clearly begins our conversation by addressing the play's emotional impact and its ability to transport her to the fencepost where Matthew was murdered.

However, Jill's interpretation complicates Shannon's analysis of being a "powerless witness." Jill places herself in the text by contemplating multiple points of view and relating these diverse points of view to future parents and administrators she



may encounter. Meredith takes the conversation a step farther and suggests that these multiple perspectives helped her clarify her own personal position. Additionally, Jill and Dan together propose that these positions can be categorized or “charted” on a continuum. Their response suggests the play, in conjunction with their accompanying life experiences, depicts men as more likely to be on the negative (or homophobic) end of this continuum. Lastly, Jonathan and I offer our interpretations as to why Jill and Dan’s understanding of “men [being] more homophobic than women” might be the reality.

Conversations at the university, like the one above, mediated our understanding of our beyond campus experiences. They allowed us to begin to fill in the gaps in our individual knowledge by relying on the understandings and perspectives of one another. The tears we saw in each other’s eyes on the night of the performance helped us see each other more clearly and perhaps trust one another more fully. However, the post-experience dialogue complicated and extended our understandings of LGBTQ issues—issues that would have been neglected, or perhaps overlooked, without these discussions.

Using a play-fitting analogy, these discussions also “set the stage” early on for the type of discussions student-participants and I would engage in throughout the duration of our work together. Student-participants entered our inquiry project knowing it would be more than a class. This event, I believe, helped clarify and solidify the type of work and type of conversations we would be constructing together. From this first experience, then, student-participants knew they would have to be willing to be moved both emotionally and intellectually.

Overall, this event brought us closer together and helped us begin to delineate our goals. It also set the tone of our work by immediately immersing us in the community

into which we were inquiring. *The Laramie Project* was certainly not attended exclusively by LGBTQ people; however, the focus of the event implied that the attendees would be advocates of LGBTQ people or interested in LGBTQ issues. Since the majority of the student-participants were heterosexual, this event provided them with a chance to engage with LGBTQ issues alongside both other advocating heterosexuals and LGBTQ people. In this way, our beyond-campus work created a space for us to “learn what it means to cross the schisms that divide us; to construct new ways of being together; and to learn about, with, and from one another” (Seidl & Friend, 2002b, p. 144).

Lastly, it is somewhat difficult to characterize summatively the effect this experience had on our inquiry. Due to the nature of the content, *The Laramie Project* cannot be considered a “positive” experience, nor did it leave us with clear directives for how to progress. Yet, we gained important knowledge and developed an intense compassion related to Matthew Shepard’s story. We did this together in a space and place that I believe felt comfortable for us all. The content did not make us feel comfortable or safe, but the way we experienced it together did. The play confronted us with the destructiveness of hatred and homophobia. It caused us to ask tough questions about how we are implicated in Matthew’s death. The play forced us to realize that our inquiry would have to take on both the pain and the pride that characterizes LGBTQ communities if we were to learn how to serve this population in our classrooms.

This beyond campus event prompted emotional engagement, required interactive mediation, and involved (dis)comfort and confrontation. Other out-of-university experiences were more or less comfortable and confrontational and offered opportunities for different kinds of learning and growth.

## **De-Centering Cultural Authority: What Ellen Taught Us**

Beyond campus experiences also created contexts in which student-participants were de-centered as the cultural majority. The value of these events, as I have come to see them now, was the chance to experience and develop an appreciation of LGBTQ culture. In addition to attending a performance of *The Laramie Project*, student-participants suggested other beyond campus activities during our year of collaboration. We, for example, attended concerts by the Columbus Gay Men's Chorus and by stand-up comedian, Ellen Degeneres. These events, too, involved the acquisition of content knowledge and the development of compassion as *The Laramie Project* did. Certainly, these events demanded emotional engagement, required intentional mediation, and involved varying degrees of (dis)comfort and confrontation. However, these events also had a celebratory feel. Through these experiences, I contend, LGBTQ culture became more tangible to student-participants.

There has been debate as to whether or not LGBTQ communities are “deserving” of cultural legitimation (Carlson, 1994; Pohan & Bailey, 1998; Pope, 1995). Indeed, there is no monolithic LGBTQ community that is easy to locate. That is, LGBTQ communities are diverse and are characterized by individuals with multiple affiliations in various communities of investment. For example, LGBTQ youth are simultaneously children of color, children living with affluence and in poverty, and children of exceptional ability. Accordingly, LGBTQ individuals have cultural commitments and identities that both overlap with and inform their ways of knowing and being in the world. In light of these multiple investments and intersecting identities, Carlson (1994) urges us to conceptualize what counts as “culture” more broadly, embracing instead a

more inclusive definition—one that he describes as reflecting a “democratic multicultural community” (p. 7). According to Jagose (1996), LGBTQ culture is tangible or can be “seen” in the economic enterprises in which LGBTQ people invest as represented in gay-owned businesses, publications, and community centers. Despite the lack of a cohesive definition, LGBTQ communities and culture do exist. One obvious manifestation of that culture in our community is the Columbus Gay Men’s chorus.

By attending the winter concert of the Columbus Gay Men’s Chorus, we immersed ourselves and made more tangible LGBTQ culture. Founded in 1990, the chorus has a rich tradition in our local community and has a national profile. Attending the winter concert offered us opportunity to not only engage in LGBTQ culture but to participate in a celebratory event. And while the concert placed us in the midst of a large LGBTQ population, our focus was on entertainment and celebration rather than education or awareness. We were able to immerse ourselves in the aesthetic and the celebration of community rather than the intellectual. Rather than thinking about how to “serve” LGBTQ students, we were simply partaking in an LGBTQ event. This event certainly only represents a small slice of LGBTQ life and culture but one worthy of the energy and consideration of our inquiry group.

Similarly, when we attended comedian Ellen Degeneres’ concert, we found ourselves focusing on laughter and feeling immersed in the LGBTQ community. Degeneres’ humor reached each of us, despite our respective identities as straight or gay, male or female. Her jokes did not diminish sexuality, but allowed for shared recognition of ourselves and others. Again, student-participants and I were in the midst of a large

population of LGBTQ people (predominantly lesbian), but we were not focusing on learning “about them.” Rather, “learning about” took a backseat to “laughing with” members of LGBTQ communities.

By being *in* the LGBTQ community in this way, we avoided becoming “voyeurs for a day” (Kissen, p. 129). We were more invested than that because the motivation to participate emerged from our group members, and because there were “insiders” (e.g. Dan, Matt, and the performers) to the community present. We temporarily let go of our “academic” lens to participate more fully. Our agenda shifted from academic to participatory. We participated with LGBTQ people in their spaces and places. Active participation was the key to the effectiveness and success of these LGBTQ community-immersed, beyond campus activities. The very act of participating in these LGBTQ events was powerful, because it enabled us to engage with LGBTQ people. Accordingly, our interactions, I assert, were not voyeuristic. We participated rather than merely observed. These celebratory ventures into the LGBTQ community emphasized exposure and participation over content knowledge. In fact, the content knowledge gained from these experiences is difficult to pinpoint. Clearly, the content was not particularly disturbing or confrontational as with the outing to *The Laramie Project*. However, the very experience of being immersed in LGBTQ settings was not entirely comfortable for all of the participants. During these events the “space” was somewhat confrontational and educational in that heterosexual student-participants were displaced or *de-centered* as the majority.

A week after Ellen Degeneres' standup act, we discussed the experience back at the university. This exchange, I believe, represents one way heterosexual student-participants came to trouble their position as a centered majority.

*Whitney: Oh my gosh. It was crazy, the funniest standup I think I've seen.*

*Matt: What did you think about the audience?*

*Shannon: You mean, you mean how do I think they responded? Like because she's a lesbian?*

*Lindsay: I don't think it really made a difference, that anyone cared. Everyone laughed and—*

*Matt: --No, I mean what did you notice about the audience?*

*Shannon: Like, you mean in terms of what?*

*Matt: None of you felt a little out of place? I have a lesbian sister. My best friend is lesbian, and I felt, I felt a little uncomfortable or out of sorts. I was, and maybe you didn't feel this, I was really conscious of the number of lesbians [or people I perceived to be lesbian, in the audience].*

*Shannon: Yeah, there was a lot of diversity—older people too. That surprised me. I know what—*

*Lindsay: --Well, I thought it was great. It was a predominantly, mainly female crowd.*

*Jill: But let's be honest. It was a little weird. Ellen doesn't draw the same crowd as Dave Matthews.*

*Matt: And Jonathan what did you say to me?*

*Jonathan: Well, I said, "Some of those women were hot."*

*Lindsay: Oh God.*

*Jonathan: How could you not notice? The two [women] in front of Matt and me . . . they were wearing see-through tops.*

*Jill: Jonathan . . . so like you think all lesbians are auto-mechanics, right?*

*Jonathan: Not the two [women] in the white tops—I'm not saying, you know, that all—*

*Dan: --They were lipstick lesbians.*

*Matt: Explain that.*

*Dan: What you're saying is . . . well there's butch lesbians and femme lesbians—*

*Matt: --and lots of lesbians in between—*

*Dan: --those two women, I noticed them to. They wanted to be noticed, I think. (Laughter). They might have been car mechanics, but they were wearing makeup and high heels and no bras I might add. (Laughter).*

*Matt: So, lipstick lesbians . . . feminine in appearance.*

*Jill: [With some disgust and directed to Jonathan] The point Dan's making is that lesbians are women who have kids and come in all shapes and look different and have see-through blouses and, and not see-through blouses.*

In this exchange I prompted discussion at the university by asking the question: What did you think about the audience? My intent was to get student-participants to reflect on their status as heterosexual minorities within a homosexual-majority event. Initially, Shannon is confused by my question, and Lindsay avoids the issue, stating “well, I thought it was great. It was a predominantly, mainly female crowd.” Here, Lindsay names gender but evades issues of sexuality. Following my lead, Jill is the first student-participant to name her uneasiness by suggesting that Ellen, as a lesbian, draws a predominantly lesbian fan base. She describes the event as a “little weird” for her and implies that she was conscious of her *de-centering*. Speaking from his position as a heterosexual man, Jonathan both complicates the issue and angers his co-collaborators by sexualizing two of the concert attendees. His comment, among other things, expresses his uneasiness. Instead of addressing my question directly, he clings tightly to learned

heterosexual masculine ideals—namely, his right as a man to objectify women. Dan provides insight and complicates Jonathan’s observation. Through sharing his understandings, Dan takes up the position of “teacher” within our collaboration, offering some of his insider knowledge. Finally, Jill asserts herself by scolding Jonathan for his belittling comment. This exchange provides evidence that, as a group, our conversations were not always neat, politically correct, or without conflict (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997). Rather, reflecting on beyond campus experiences often prompted heated discussions and confrontations with each other.

Events such as the Ellen Degeneres performance and the Gay Men’s Chorus concert helped move our group toward understanding the social and cultural world of LGBTQ communities that many educators never seek out. Student-participants’ interest in and access to this world was a direct result of our inquiry. Through conversations and mediation at the university, student-participants and I developed greater awareness and appreciation of the issues. As the above exchange illustrates, for student-participants, awareness and appreciation were achieved through dialogue, interrogation, and confrontation—confrontation, in this case, related to how they dealt with being de-centered as the majority. Despite differences in our familiarity with the context, participating in these events created new opportunities for dialogue, interaction, and even action.

### **Personal Entanglement: What Family and Friends Taught Us**

Beyond-university experiences, then, often required a different kind of engagement than on-campus, traditional “school” activities. Another way these



experiences were different from “school” was that student-participants often invited family members or friends to these events. Inviting friends and family to these events changed the dynamic of our group as well as the type and quality of engagement we were able to put forth. Take, as an example, Jonathan’s comments on the Columbus Gay Men’s Chorus event.

*Jonathan: I just wanted to thank you all for attending the concert. Alyssa [Jonathan’s wife] and I had a really good time. Oh, and she wants you to know that she felt really bummed about us not, about us not being able to go to dinner afterwards, ‘cause she had to be at work early in the morning. And Dragonfly is one of her favorite restaurants.*

*Meredith: Alyssa is really sweet.*

*Jonathan: Sometimes. She wrote you guys a thank-you card. Someone else can read it.*

*Allison: I will. Ok . . . “Thank you all for inviting me to the concert last week. As Jonathan has probably told you, I went to high school in the Middle East. Living there had such an impact on my life today. I know from my experiences the richnesses that new experiences can provide. I applaud your efforts to learn about the gay community. You won’t regret the experience. Please know that I’m your biggest cheerleader, and I appreciated being a part of your group. Many thanks, Alyssa.” Aw, she is sweet, Jonathan.*

*Jonathan: Well, the whole way home all she could talk about was how the choir put her in a Christmas spirit and how guilty she felt for ditching all of you for dinner--*

*Lindsay: --Tell her we missed her too.--*

*Jonathan: --And it also got her thinking about why she has gay [male] friends, mainly at work, but no lesbians [in her life]. She felt guilty about that too.*

[Jan. 14]

Here, Jonathan demonstrates his sense of responsibility for the workings of our collaboration. He demonstrates ownership in the off-campus event by “checking in” with

the group related to their experiencing of the event. That is, he thanks us for attending an event that he proposed. In this exchange, too, Jonathan integrates his wife, Alyssa, into our conversation. In doing so, he implies that the workings of our collaboration are carried into his home life, fostering further conversation and thinking on his part. Exchanges like this expose one way that our beyond university experiences nurtured a different kind of engagement with the topic. Inviting friends and family to several of our out-of-university experiences created an additional layer of engagement. In doing so, our beyond campus experiences demanded more of us—both as a group and as individuals—than any strictly university-based pedagogy could have provided alone.

### **Confronting Romanticism: What Dr. Fass Taught Us**

In addition to the events that immersed us in the cultural and social worlds of LGBTQ people, we also participated in events that immersed us in their political worlds. While we did not think of these particular beyond-campus outings as activist events, we did find ourselves participating in politically-charged activities that positioned us as advocates and forced us to confront previous romanticisms. Through these activities, we were continuing in the spirit of our more celebratory events (often with family and friends) while trying to address some of the issues that arose from *The Laramie Project* and our ongoing reading and discussion at the university.

One example of the way we moved toward activism and confronted idealism was through our participation in the Dr. Robert J. Fass Memorial AIDSWalk. The AIDSWalk takes place each May and is the largest HIV/AIDS awareness walk in our state. We participated in a joint effort with thousands of other walkers in raising over \$140,000 to benefit several local community agencies including the Columbus AIDS

Task Force, Family AIDS Clinic and Educational Services (FACES), and Project Open Hands—a hospice service that provides meals to people in the onset of advanced HIV. We found ourselves learning about the impact of this devastating disease in the LGBTQ community and beyond. We felt relevant in this setting while contributing both tangibly and purposefully to a cause. As a group and as individuals, we felt allied with the other walkers. We were, as Lindsay points out in her dialogue journal, learning ways to “take a stand.”

The AIDS walk was a moving experience. It was a beautiful day and a nice way to get exercise, take a stand for something, and contribute to an important cause. [. . .] I was very disturbed [however] by the handful of narrow-minded people on the corner holding up posters about AIDS being created by God to get back at gays. They apparently didn’t read any of the literature at the booths. If they had they would know that HIV/AIDS is not a gay disease. They would know that HIV/AIDS is a terrible disease that can inflict all people including those the most today in poor and underdeveloped countries. Where is the compassion of spirit? [. . .] I am thankful to all the other walkers. I am particularly thankful to all the LGBTQ walkers who have had to bear the weight and social stigma of this disease. We [as heterosexuals] should thank them for all their work. Through continued effort, I know we can make a difference together.

[D.J. June 1]

By proposing that we participate in this event, Lindsay clearly had significant investment. Lindsay’s journal reflects her sense of agency. However, she writes that she was “disturbed” by a small group of protesters which complicates, I believe, her understanding of the political realities of being an LGBTQ advocate. She also moves from a common heterosexual position of merely wanting to *help* LGBTQ people by suggesting that she, as a heterosexual, is indebted to the work LGBTQ individuals have done in HIV/AIDS education and fundraising. This beyond university experience complicated Lindsay’s understanding of HIV/AIDS, the political realities of being an advocate for/with others, and what it means to “make a difference together.”

The AIDSWalk event is distinct from several of our other beyond campus events because we were not simply audience members for this event. This event forced student-participants and me to confront the romanticized notions of what advocacy work entails. Additionally, the AIDSWalk required that we raise money and physically extend ourselves. Both of these things—money and physical exertion—constituted more of a burden and substantial commitment than we had experienced. While I had participated in the walk before, few of my co-collaborators had had the awareness or motivation to participate before our year together. The AIDSWalk helped us further examine issues in the lives of LGBTQ people through active engagement with/in the community.

Through “outings” like these, student-participants revealed their commitment to the community they had gotten to know through the wide range of out-of-university experiences our inquiry had provided. They revealed their willingness to engage in thoughtful discussion, interrogate their past experiences, and learn ways to confront heterosexism and homophobia. In the next section I offer further descriptions of how our reflective practices at the university mediated these experiences and moved us toward more thoughtful understandings.

### **Beyond Reflection**

#### ***“On Trust”***

#### **Journal Entry (January)**

*I want to write this week about ‘trust’. In regard to her sociocultural autobiography, Whitney spoke directly about trust. The community that is being built through our inquiry has been profoundly affected by the trust we have placed in one another. All of us have reflected on our life experiences and shared*

*highly personal stories. How often do students in college classrooms have the opportunity to share even the smallest part of their identity. . .who they are. . .who they wish to become? This is sadly rare.*

*I've been reading "A Course in Miracles." The authors suggest that there are only two real emotions: Love and Fear. I wonder how many misunderstandings arise in the course of a day or a lifetime because we fear one another. That is, we don't understand the perspective of others or misread their intentions, beliefs, and actions. Creating trusting relationships, I believe, moves us from fear to love. I know that I am less fearful to share my personal stories because I have come to trust each of you. I can only assume that 'trust' has facilitated your reflective practices as you have come to share intimate aspects of your life with us. Personal narrative is indeed a powerful thing. Through sharing your personal experiences with homophobia with me, for instance, I have learned ways to "hold" what you say with more care and with greater concern. I have developed a greater sense of responsibility or obligation to each of you. (Does this make any sense?. . .maybe I'm rambling?) I know that I feel a greater sense of custodial care where each of you is concerned. I feel I understand your perspectives better and know the context from which you make assertions during our discussions.*

*There is a certain firmness in trust—a dependability. Trust in any relationship (whether it be between classmates, or between students and teacher, or between mother and daughter, or between lovers) brings a level of care that I find comforting. It puts my heart and being in a safer space. It makes me want to*

*take more risks. It makes me want to invest with greater time and energy. It makes me more inquisitive about the lives of others and how their experiences differ from my own. How can anyone build a meaningful relationship with another without trust? As Madeline Grumet writes, “Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can.” I am very grateful for the opportunity to offer a glimpse of my self to each of you and, ultimately, more grateful for the opportunity to catch a glimpse of you.*

Another aspect of the pedagogy we forged together, as the above journal entry highlights, can be characterized by trust. The relationships we fostered with one another were central to the work we accomplished.<sup>14</sup> Trust was created and sustained in the personal stories we shared and held up for interrogation. They offered us the illusive “glimpse” into each other’s lives and perspectives that Grumet (1991) expresses above. In this section, I describe how personal story was “used” in our collaborative work—how, our writings and discussions moved us beyond typical, college-classroom reflection.

Teacher educators have been consistent in their beliefs that reflection is an essential component of becoming an effective teacher (Bainer & Cantrell, 1992; Zeichner & Liston, 1985). Reflective writing practices, for instance, have been used to assist pre-service teachers in: bridging the theory/practice divide; developing more complex understandings related to field placement experiences; and acquiring new perspectives related their own values, histories, and beliefs (Korthagen & Wubbles, 1995; Risko, Vukelich, & Roskos 2002). And whereas the practice of engaging teacher candidates in

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<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed description of the nature of our relationships, see chapter 3.

reflective activities is widely valued, how to focus students' reflections on the sociocultural and sociopolitical realities of teaching remains a primary question for teacher educators. In their review of reflective practices in literacy courses, for example, Risko et al (2002) concluded that students' reflections are often "shallow and egocentric" and "largely at the factual and technical levels" (p. 135). Additionally, they go on to remind teacher educators that students' reflections are often superficial and rarely move beyond the "official knowledge" presented in course readings (p. 135). This body of research suggests that reflective practices that complicate and extend notions of equity are difficult for teacher educators and their students to achieve.

At our university, it is common practice for students to engage in reflective writing throughout the duration of their time in our program. I, too, have required students to reflect in the courses I teach. Accordingly, in our LGBTQ collaboration reflection seemed an obvious and essential pedagogical practice. I was intentional in my efforts to provide opportunities for meaningful reflection related to the topic. Specifically, student-participants and I wrote weekly in dialogue journals and engaged in reflective, university-based discussions.

One strategy that I employed to facilitate reflection was to model the practice myself. Following the advice of other teacher educators (Bullough, 1994; Dillard, 1997, Fletcher, 1997), I often used my life experiences as starting points for our time together. Throughout our interactions, I intentionally made the personal central. For example, early on I shared personal information related to my significant identity markers, life experiences, and personality quirks (all of which are represented in the journal entries I have shared throughout this text). By sharing my own autobiographical writing, I

encouraged reflective practice on the part of my students. That is, as I forefronted personal reflection and made visible the ways I struggled with the issues, student-participants were inclined to do the same. This emphasis on reflection created a context for us to generate pertinent stories and key images related to our understandings of ourselves and LGBTQ issues.

In this section, I offer further description and analysis of our reflective practices—practices that I believe moved us away from “shallow and egocentric” understandings and toward more complicated notions of sexual diversity. Through a pedagogy that demanded personal reflection, we found ourselves bringing stories to the table that helped us delineate the identity markers that mattered most to us and unearth our own biases and misconceptions about LGBTQ issues. Bringing stories to the table, however, was only a first step. These stories served as entry points to a more collaborative reflective practice—one that was characterized by critical exchanges, interactive conversations, and personal interrogations. Below, I describe further the two significant kinds of reflective practice we engaged in. I frame these practices as:

- I. Reflection as deliberate (re)collecting, and
- II. Reflection as critical co-interrogation.

These practices, I assert, moved us toward meaningful engagement with the topic and one another. These practices were central to our abilities to not only scrutinize our vision of ourselves but to scrutinize our abilities to serve LGBTQ youth.

### **Reflection as Deliberate (Re)collection of Stories**

Learning about LGBTQ issues has essentially been finding out what makes me me and what makes you you...we established a sense of self . . . it's a sense of heightened awareness.

Jonathan [D.J. 3-17-03]



LGBTQ topics are rarely addressed directly in education. Accordingly, as student-participants and I began inquiring together, we had little understanding of the personal and professional experiences that we each had brought to our collaboration. Part of our work, as I saw it, was to get our LGBTQ-related stories out in the open. That is, we had to physically gather our personal stories. This “gathering” required that student-participants engage in deliberate remembering, or recollecting. Gathering our personal stories through recollection created a reflective space to intentionally (re)collect our past experiences.

As a teacher educator, creating opportunities for my students to write about their (mis)conceptions and share publicly these (mis)conceptions was central to the pedagogy I had envisioned and the reflective practices I had hoped to instill. Autobiographical- and biographical-centered approaches in teacher education have been used to give voice to teachers’ experiences and to establish patterns in teachers’ thinking and socialization (Carter and Doyle, 1996). Autobiographical approaches in teacher education ask students to write about their own personal experiences as a means to understand educational contexts. In this way, “teachers’ personal knowledge not only guides interpretations of ongoing experience, but also motivates them to seek out experiences for their own development” (Carter and Doyle, p. 125).

Again, establishing deliberate, reflective routines was intentional on my part. Writing weekly was the way we “got at” prior knowledge and exposed how we had been socialized to the issues. Through a process of remembering and articulating, we collected

the stories that were central to each of us. These stories became the building blocks for our learning related to LGBTQ issues. Accordingly, deliberate (re)collection is characterized by deepened awareness and purposeful discovery.

Part of this process, too, involved, writing in response to inquiry-related readings and experiences. For my part, I developed thematic reading lists as a means to focus our reflections. Additionally, I offered journal writing prompts to serve as inspiration or “story starters.” Reflection as deliberate (re)collection shaped significantly our pedagogy. That is, through reflective practices, our group pedagogy became grounded in the life experiences of the co-collaborators—addressing directly their needs, interests, and understandings—and resulted in an inquiry-oriented practice that was student-centered and shared. Student-participants, then, contributed to our collaboration by not only proposing out-of-university experiences but by sharing publicly their reflective thoughts. Students-participants’ reflections both supported and extended the readings and beyond campus experiences, and ultimately shaped the content of our collaboration.

Below, I offer excerpts from student-participants’ writing that, I believe, demonstrate how reflection became deliberate (re)collection, which resulted in a *web of stories*—stories that drove inquiry, shaped content, and impacted learning. While I was never certain how these stories would eventually shape our learning, I knew that student-participants’ willingness to “mine” their own lives for LGBTQ stories was key to our work. Below, I share excerpts from Shannon and Whitney’s dialogue journals. Both of these entries revealed how student-participants recalled past, familial experiences, offering them as objects for our inquiry.

Growing up my parents had a number of gay friends, most whose lifestyle choices were not made apparent to me at the time. I enjoyed spending time with these family friends. Don and Mike were just two more adult friends that came over for dinner. Later when I became aware of their lifestyles, it did not have an impact on me because I knew that they were wonderful people with kind hearts and compassionate souls. I remember playing with them. (They were like human jungle gyms to me). Playing with, eating with, and doing things that friends do together were my first experiences with LGBT people, and it became the basis for my beliefs. Any ridicule that came to these friends of my parents would have been uncalled for in my mind because I knew they did not deserve such treatment.

Shannon [D.J. 10-28-02]

One person that I knew of growing up that was a part of the LGBTQ community, was my aunt. She has never stated that she identifies herself as being a part of the LGBTQ community to any family members; however she has to other people. Don't get me wrong, I do not think that she has any reason as to why she needs to tell anyone in the family. She has brought her partner to family events for the past eight or ten years and everyone in the family has welcomed her partner with open arms. This makes me happy that my family can be so accepting [. . .] Just because my family does not openly discuss different things with different people does not mean we are not accepting of them. This is the type of attitude my family feels in regards to talking about LGBTQ issues.

Whitney [D.J. 11-4-02]

Shannon and Whitney's recollection of their family relationships expose their prior experiences and is representative of the type of stories student-participants brought to the table. Often the stories featured subtle forms of homophobia as in the examples above. Often, too, the stories were not central or defining stories from the tellers' lives. As with racism and classism, they were ones that had been quietly integrated into their perspectives on LGBTQ issues (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Sleeter, 1995, 1997). Shannon's disclosure, for example, is good intentioned but idealistic. Her overgeneralization of LGBTQ people as having "kind hearts and compassionate souls," however positive, is limited. Like several of her co-collaborators, Shannon's early understanding of LGBTQ people and issues was one that attempted to forefront

commonalities all groups of diverse people share but one that denied or failed to complicate difference. Her position is similar to what multicultural and anti-racist scholars have termed a “colorblind” perspective—a perspective that fails to recognize privilege and oppression (Rosenberg, 1997). However, the result of sharing this story was that Shannon made available to herself and others what she knew. That is, Shannon’s writing represents purposeful discovery and the building of greater awareness for her individually and for our group as whole.

Whitney, too, recollects experiences from her childhood in a journal entry she entitles, “My Interactions with the LGBTQ Community.” Whitney asserts that she is *accepting* of LGBTQ people; however, her writing also exposes an apparent struggle related to how *accepting* “looks” in her family. She is pleased that her family “can be so accepting” but openly admits that the corresponding language of acceptance—language of affirmation or approval—is absent in her family relationships. Her writing begs the question: How accepting are we if we fail to recognize, name, and integrate difference? Like Shannon, Whitney shares a family story that may initially seem inconsequential. However, when heard in the echo of Shannon’s telling, I believe, Whitney and her fellow co-collaborators began to see the ways their respective stories were entangled. The web of stories that became available to us through deliberate (re)collection helped us to become more aware of ourselves and discover the understandings and perspectives we brought to LGBTQ issues.

In another example of the ways student-participants (re)collected stories of personal experiences, Allison describes her earliest memories and knowledge of LGBTQ

people. In this journal excerpt, she describes how the media has influenced her understanding of LGBTQ issues.

I think it's interesting how TV plays a role in understanding LGBTQ issues and sadly now I see how stereotypes are always involved. I know my first understanding of "gay life" was through Jack Tripper on *Three's Company*. If you don't remember he was a character that pretended to be gay so he could live cheaply with two women. It was a comedy so he was often acting stupid or girly in front of his landlord. Then last night I was talking to my roommate about this and she remembered him too. She asked me what I thought about it since she knows I'm in a gay study group. I told her if I was gay I would probably be offended, because even as a straight person I'm pretty much offended. I honestly would have never thought about how TV pretty much introduced me to the topic and how so wrong that introduction was. My parents watched that show and I'm sure some of my teachers watched that show, but no one ever talked about Jack Tripper's sexuality with me.

Allison [D.J. 10-28-02]

Here, Allison (re)collects the time when she was first aware of a sexuality other than heterosexuality. Reflecting as an adult, she understands that stereotypes are embedded in media portrayals of LGBTQ people. She, like Whitney before, also demonstrates a reflective awareness of the silences around LGBTQ issues in both her home and school.

My purpose in sharing these excerpts is to demonstrate the way we recollected stories through a process of remembering or "inventorying" our lives. For all student-participants, in fact, our collaboration was one of the first times they had ever had the opportunity to discuss LGBTQ issues in an educational setting, aside from conversations about sexually transmitted diseases in high school health courses. Our reflective writing, then, resulted in the compilation of many stories—stories that for the first time were voiced in an educational context. If we believe, like Palmer (1998) and Grumet (1988), that learning to teach is a deeply personal endeavor, we must unpack the embodied stories which penetrate teachers' lives.

## Reflection as Critical Co-Interrogation

Engaging student-participants in reflection promoted not only remembering but re-examining. And while often written in isolation, these reflective stories, I believe, engaged student-participants in an initial process of recasting their understandings and perspectives related to LGBTQ issues and people. Their stories, when shared, often exposed the interconnectedness between co-collaborators' experiences and created a context where student-participants felt both affirmed in their attempts and more aware of their socialization related to LGBTQ issues. However, getting the stories on the table was just the first step in our reflective process. As stories were shared, student-participants and I questioned one another's stories and perspectives. This more dialogic layer of reflection resulted in critical conversations and personal interrogations that moved our thinking and understanding forward in more substantial ways.

As student-participants and I had made personal stories available to each other, a reflective practice emerged that subjected those stories to *group interrogation* and analysis. Interpreting personal narratives is an established means to understand one's experience (Carter and Doyle, 1996). Indeed, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) state:

when persons note something of their experience, either to themselves or to others, they do so not by the mere recording of experience over time, but in storied form. . . stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history. (p. 415)

For their part, student-participants offered up stories for examination in multiple ways throughout our time together. For instance, sometimes student-participants initiated

conversations about their own writing related to personal experiences, out-of-university experiences, or academic readings. They, too, initiated conversations related to their reading of fellow collaborators' writing. At other times, I was more deliberate in selecting stories for us to revisit in conversation.

As difficult as it may have been to gather these stories, the more important aspect of our reflective work involved deconstructing and analyzing these stories. Our group analysis not only involved personal interrogation of our past and current actions but located these actions in a sociohistorical context. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) have characterized this type of analysis as an “inward and outward” and a “backward and forward” approach to studying narrative and personal experience. Clandinin and Connelly explain:

By *inward* we mean the internal conditions of feeling, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions, and so on. By *outward* we mean existential conditions, that is, the environment. . . By *backward* and *forward* we are referring to temporality, past, present, and future. (p. 417)

Through dialogue with and questioning of one another, we engaged an “inward and outward” and a “backward and forward” analysis of our stories. Ultimately, this dialogic analysis allowed us to begin to assign meanings to our life experiences.

Indeed, reflective practices evolved into critical co-interrogation as dialogue pushed us to consider and reconsider our personal stories as well as the implications of those stories. We moved from exposing ourselves through our stories to exposing how those stories have shaped us. Through critical co-interrogation, we found ourselves questioning power and privilege, perceiving contradictions, and expanding our grasp of

the impact of heterosexism and homophobia in society and in our lives. Pedagogically speaking, critical co-interrogation depended on guided reflection and careful mediation.

In the previous section, I shared an excerpt from Allison's dialogue journal where she recalled how television and the media had shaped her understanding of LGBTQ people and issues. Below, I offer excerpts of a conversation that took place at the university related to this journal entry. While Allison begins our conversation by deliberately (re)collecting her experience, her story is interrogated through our dialogue and is characteristic of the shared reflective practices we, as a group, engaged in.

*Allison: I wrote about TV and its use of stereotypes. That was my first experience that I can remember really. And I wrote about Three's Company.*

*Matt: Three's Company, huh? (Laughter)*

*Amber: Was someone gay on Three's Company?*

*Allison: Jack. He had to pose as gay.*

*Amber: Ohhhhhh--*

*Matt: --to live with Janet and Chrissy.*

*Jonathan: That's right. But the real question is, did you like the Roper's or the Furley's better? Matt, you better turn off the tape! (Laughter)*

*Dan: The Roper's for sure. (Laughter)*

*Matt: But Allison does bring up something important. A lot of kids, gay and straight, get their information about LGBTQ folks from TV characters. I mean, Jack was a stereotype or an exaggeration, Jack Tripper, right, wasn't he?*

*Lindsay: And how about Jack from Will and Grace? There's another "Jack" that's kinda over the top.*

*Allison: Yeah, he's like another stereotype, but like 15 years later.*

*Shannon: But I remember the show, My So-Called Life. One of the main character's best friends was gay.*



*Amber: Oh, that was such a good show.*

*Shannon: And I was so disappointed after they cut it off after eight episodes.*

*Amber: Claire Dane's, right? She rocks.*

*Shannon: But I think they brought up a lot of issues, um, to the forefront, as far as I had never really thought about a lot of those aspects.*

*Amber: Yeah but that's funny. That really wasn't all that long ago, but like they took that off because it was too close to real life. I mean, didn't it have a parental warning? Now you look at the shows that have come in its wake. Will and Grace and Queer as Folk. It was pretty mild compared to these.*

*Dan: Yes, but My So-Called Life was a realistic portrayal and on network television. You have to pay to get Queer as Folk, and Will and Grace is a comedy. And it's a comedy that is made for straight people. I don't know any gay people that watch it. At least not anymore. I don't ever watch it.*

*Amber: So, you're saying that on Will and Grace, Jack on there, that's ok, but like a more real portrayal is not ok? Or like it's harder for people to accept?*

*Shannon: So, we can make fun of people --*

*Dan: -- as comic relief --*

*Shannon: -- that's ok, but actually thinking seriously about the issues people face, like that's too much for some people.*

*Amber: Well, it's a problem if gays are reduced to stereotypes and like those are the only images some kids see. Like, I didn't grow up with Jack Tripper, but I heard stereotypes like when my mom would talk about her friends in the town closest to us where there were more bars, gay bars, and like more stuff to do for gay people. But she always talked about the excess and the drugs and drinking. She always talked about "the lifestyle that most of them lived." And how, they're all going to end up killing themselves with drugs and alcohol. But that's the stereotype that I always got at home . . . excess.*

*Matt: And I think that [stereotype] still exists.*

*Dan: Yeah, I'd say.*

*Amber: But now I wonder if my mom wasn't just wishing their life was her life. My mom, she was tied down in a bad marriage with two kids. She had a good-paying job and had to pay all the bills, because my dad, basically my dad never kept a job.*

*Jonathan: So, you think she was jealous?*

*Amber: Maybe, probably not exactly that way, but kind of.*

*Matt: So, Allison started with Three's Company and now we're speculating that Amber's mom wishes she were gay! (Laughter) But seriously, what does all this talk, our talk about stereotypes, have to do with our job as teachers? Like what do Jack Tripper and your mom's barfly friends, Amber, have to do with teaching? I mean, does it say anything about how we might integrate LGBTQ issues? Or the challenges of integrating LGBTQ issues?*

*Amber: Well, I say it gets touchy when you want to integrate LGBTQ education into elementary [school], because I think a lot of people think it can only be talked about in sexual terms. And I think the gay community has to own some of that. I mean a lot of the magazines or newspapers have erotic looking pictures. That's what they seem to gear it towards and that's what parents or, you know, people who hold these stereotypes think, they just think, life of sin, life of drugs, and you know, sex, sex, sex, and all this. It has to change on all these levels for us to be able for us to teach it successfully and make it an accepted thing in the school. It has to be not looked at as such a sexual thing. We need to see gay people as being more than the sex that they have.*

*Jill: And really how many kindergartner and first graders would even understand that aspect of it anyway?*

*Allison: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, you can talk about love and that is really easy to understand. You know, LGBTQ people love each other. That's wonderful. That's appropriate. But like then to back it up with artifacts, good pictures, and good literature, that's the hard part for us [as teachers], especially at this age.*

*Meredith: When you were saying that, Allison, I just thought of something related to my field placement. My second graders, well my teacher really, just did a unit on our community. She did a really good job. She brought in all this information, like information about churches, and populations, and about the different suburbs of Columbus. And I don't want to add to the stereotypes, but like she, she talked about the Short North being the arts district. I mean, I don't want to add to stereotypes, but she could have said something like a lot of artists work and live in the Short North and like college-age people, and gay people. Would that have been wrong?*

*Amber: Like she could have brought in a gallery owner or an artist and used their art or that person to talk about the area, right?*

Here, Allison begins our conversation by sharing her earliest memories of LGBTQ people by describing the source of her initial information. In response to her disclosure, I ask student-participants to ponder how television portrayals impact our understanding of LGBTQ people and issues, and how those portrayals might be more problematic if they are the only sources of information children and youth receive. Lindsay and Shannon respond to my question by drawing on additional, more contemporary images and representations, arguing that some present-day representations are more realistic and multifaceted and therefore less stereotypical. Together, Amber and Dan complicate Allison's initial recollection. While Amber seems to assert that television portrayals have improved since *Three's Company*, Dan complicates who has access to these portrayals as well as for whom these programs are intended. This leads Shannon to contemplate comedic versus dramatic representations.

Interestingly, Amber takes our conversation in a new direction by moving our discussion from stereotypes in television to stereotypes she was exposed to at home growing up. That is, Amber maps her life experiences onto our conversation by suggesting a rationale for why her mom perpetuated stereotypes. In a compelling turn, she suggests that her mother both condemned and was envious of LGBTQ people/lifestyles. Later she problematizes yet another stereotype—namely, that of LGBTQ people as being complicit in the perpetuation of a hypersexualized culture. She states, “the gay community has to own some of that,” and she suggests images will have to “change . . . for us to teach it successfully and make it an accepted thing in the school.”

Through this dialogue, we moved from a “surface” critique of stereotypes to a more critical analysis of homophobia. Amber directs our thinking to a highly complicated and political concern related to LGBTQ culture. She takes a strong and informed stand as a result of our inquiry and pedagogy.

Finally, Allison bridges our conversation from media images and stereotypes to “appropriate” representation and integration in school. Following Allison’s lead, Meredith makes a strong link from our conversation to the curriculum implemented in her student-teaching site. In this case, Meredith begins to construct understanding of how LGBTQ issues can be integrated into a unit of study about ‘community’.

In addition to stereotypes and media images, our critical co-interrogation led us to consider other prominent concerns related to LGBTQ advocacy. After reading several academic pieces on heterosexual privilege, for example, we came back together to discuss our thinking on this issue. As was the case with many of our discussion, however, we found ourselves revisiting previous topics. In other words, prior discussions were always “in play” or embedded in discussions at hand. In this sense, our reflective conversations were never linear, concise, or logically map-able. Rather, they became cyclical as we pulled threads from past conversations to weave together increasingly complicated exchanges.

Our understandings of heterosexual privilege, for instance, were shaped by this dialogic process. Earlier in my discussion of deliberate (re)collection, I shared a story from Whitney’s journal in which she presented her familial experience, with her lesbian aunt, which was the basis for her early understanding of *acceptance* of LGBTQ people. The following excerpt from a university-based discussion about heterosexual privilege,

which occurred three weeks after Whitney's initial disclosure, demonstrates not only how we drew on previous discussion but how we engaged in the practices of critical co-interrogation.

*Lindsay: Well, heterosexual privilege, for me, is really about awareness, awareness of what I have that other people don't have. It's about not taking, not accepting what others aren't allowed to have.*

*Matt: 'Acceptance', that's an interesting word to use. What does accepting privileges that are denied to others, what does that mean to you? Like Meredith is sporting that new rock. [Meredith got married during our year of inquiry.] Like, you're wearing a ring on your finger. And that's something Dan and I aren't allowed to do [legally].*

*Meredith: Yeah, I've thought about that actually.*

*Matt: That's part of your "knapsack," right? [Reference to an article we read.]*

*Whitney: But Lindsay, Shannon, and me are engaged too. So you're saying we shouldn't? We shouldn't accept that or what?*

*Matt: I don't know. What do you think?*

*Whitney: Well, there's not really a right or wrong. I mean all of us here think any two people who want to marry, they should. It's just different right now.*

*Lindsay: But it's more than just different. Like, I have a mechanical question, I guess. Like, what defines a common law marriage? Can my brother and his boyfriend, if he had one, can they live together for 11 years and have a common law marriage? Because we can say that we that we accept something, that we want everyone to have the same rights, but it really doesn't matter too much if it's not backed up by - -*

*Matt: - - equitable laws - -*

*Lindsay: -- Are same-sex couples, do they have those rights?*

*Amber: Isn't it like seven years?*

*Matt: I honestly don't know how the law looks at that issue, at property laws. Maybe it's something we could Google.*

*Jill: See, I don't think common law marriage would be recognized, considering it's same sex.*

*Jonathan: Well, it's about heterosexual privilege. I mean that's what's the articles were about, right? . . . And a lot of laws were written around moral issues. It's all tied together at the state or government level, what they recognize. Like the church has a problem with people who are gay, but at the same time if the state said it was ok for them to get married, the church might be like, is it really that big of deal?*

*Dan: Or maybe it's the other way, maybe if churches weren't so - -*

*Lindsay: - - punitive - -*

*Dan: - - if they didn't have such a, a strong say, maybe the state would change the laws.*

*Jonathan: And we could get some real action.*

*Lindsay: But these are exactly the things we need to be doing, I think. We need to talk to people who can change the laws. We need to speak up. That's our job, right?*

*Whitney: But all of a sudden I realize why my Aunt has never come out to anybody, except for . . . she works for the government, and she'd lose her job. And she's been in the military her whole life. And it just, like all of a sudden hit me, I just realized it. I didn't realize it until probably just now.*

*Amber: So, like she's afraid someone in her own family is going to turn her in?*

*Whitney: No, but I think that's like another reason [my family] doesn't talk about it, because we can't.*

*Lindsay: I thought gay people were allowed in the military now - -*

*Dan: - - "Don't ask. Don't tell."*

*Whitney: Well, I wouldn't want to put her in that position, and I don't think anyone in my family, no one in my family does either.*

Here Lindsay offers her understanding of heterosexual privilege. She uses language of "not accepting what others are not allowed to have." My response to

Lindsay moves our conversation to the heterosexual right to marry. Whitney's contribution to our conversation represents, I believe, her struggle to name her privilege as a heterosexual woman. Clinging to the rights given to her and perhaps failing to acknowledge rights denied to others, she states, "Well, there's not really a right or wrong . . . It's just different right now."

As our conversation continues, Lindsay contemplates the potential of common law marriage to rectify, or perhaps rationalize, this inequality. Interestingly, and perhaps a result of Lindsay's use of the term 'acceptance', Whitney draws on a story she shared earlier in the year. She suggests that our current discussion has caused her to reconsider the ways her aunt's lesbianism was "accepted" in her family, why her aunt has not married, and why her aunt's sexuality is not discussed. During this discussion, Whitney's co-collaborators offer their thoughts and opinions on marriage and acceptance. Specifically, Amber indirectly, but quite critically, questions Whitney's suggestion that her aunt's military background is the reason for employing the "brand" of acceptance Whitney describes. Amber's tone is not confrontational but it is obvious that she disagrees with the argument Whitney is presenting. Because our conversations were ongoing and deeply contextualized in a community marked by closeness and intimacy, Amber is able to push Whitney in this way. And while she critically questions Whitney, the discussion does not diminish into polarized or antagonistic debate. Instead, both Amber and Dan engage with Whitney in an earnest way that reveals their respect for and knowledge of each other.

I contend that none of Whitney's co-collaborators wanted to cause her embarrassment. Yet, student-participants did work together, through dialogue, to move

beyond Whitney's explanation for how her aunt was "accepted." As the teacher/facilitator of this group, perhaps, I was obligated to stop and point out the inherent homophobia in the silence around Whitney's aunt sexuality. However, critical co-interrogation meant that Whitney's fellow student-participants were engaged enough with her story—with the whole collection of stories we came to share, really—to offer their critique and analysis. The above dialogue is characteristic of the kind of shared reflective work we did together. It was the method that enabled us to use our stories to interrogate ourselves and society.

While this process was always engaging and educational, as this dialogue points out, we were not always "successful." Rather, as this example highlights, Whitney's struggles were not easily resolved. While she reconsiders the issues, she does not directly name inequality nor does she abdicate the privileges given to her. (Indeed, Whitney married her fiancée five months after this conversation). However, dialogue did complicate the issues and helped student-participants and me to examine this issue more closely. As a reflective practice, critical co-interrogation moved us beyond the mere sharing of stories and toward a more thorough understanding of the meanings those stories held. It moved us, as Lindsay writes, to ". . . look at society more critically and find the hidden privilege that so many of us have and do not realize or recognize" (D. J. 3-17-02).

Such recognitions do not arise naturally or with ease. Developing better understandings of ourselves and coming to terms with homophobia and heterosexism required a purposeful, reflective pedagogy. Deliberate (re)collection enabled to us to



begin to identify our beliefs, misconceptions, and biases around LGBTQ issues. Then, through critical co-interrogation we grappled with issues related to power and privilege. Our reflective practices moved us from “this happened to me” to broader, more wide-reaching understandings. As our stories were compared and contrasted with the other stories in our *web* and in light of ongoing readings, discussions, and interactions; we elevated the personal and the specific to the social and the political.

While our personal reflective practices moved us to the political, other actions we took moved us toward greater political understanding as well. Below, I describe a third aspect of our pedagogy—beyond inquiry. Beyond inquiry experiences forced us, I believe, to confront homophobia and heterosexism in new ways. It exposed the “conflicts” involved in LGBTQ advocacy.

### **Beyond Inquiry**

#### ***“On Conflict and Ethical Resolution”*** **Journal Entry (November)**

*I got in the car this morning to drive to Stauff’s to have a cup of coffee and to sit down to gather my thoughts regarding this reflection for our inquiry group. I turned on the radio as I was driving up Grandview Avenue and heard some depressing news about the state of world—the ideas of war, the debates over gay marriage. Stauff’s is busy this morning yet still seems cozy to me. I, perhaps foolishly, feel comfortable and safe from the world here. It’s a nice place to journal, to be lost in thought. However, I’m finding it difficult to stay focused this morning. CONFLICT makes me an emotional wreck. Like those ping-pong balls in the lotto machine—conflicting ideas ricochet inside my head, never settling*

*down or finding a protected home in which to reside. Whether it is large conflicts like those initiated by our government or smaller, personal conflicts (that seem just as big) like conflicts with my boyfriend, I'm paralyzed by a sense of my inability to resolve conflict. The sudden impact of the balls reverberates on.*

*I'm conflicted with the nature of our inquiry. Don't get me wrong! I couldn't be happier that each of you has worked hard in acquiring knowledge and building relationships with LGBTQ adults and youth. Like you, I feel it is my work to advocate for those who do not have adequate voice and representation—namely, LGBTQ youth. And I am heartened that each of you feels called to participate in a similar vocation. There is no conflict here for me.*

*Conflict, however, arises for me when I think about all those other 'isms' our work has failed to sufficiently address. Shouldn't we have a research group specifically devoted to poverty? . . . a class devoted to racism and ableism? I want to be clear that it was never my desire to rank oppressions. I don't want any of you to disregard other social injustices that are bestowed (through no choice of their own) on the lives of the children you teach. Even though our inquiry has focused on heterosexism, I want to be clear that all forms of oppression are interconnected. It is impossible to separate one form of oppression from the rest. Yet, questions remain: Does the very nature of our work contribute to a sense that LGBTQ individuals are victims rather than well-adjusted and autonomous? By studying LGBTQ issues in isolation, are we constructing LGBTQ individuals as exceptional?*

*In attempts to settle my own personal conflict I take solace in the knowledge that confronting any oppression (even in small ways) benefits everyone (Collins, 2000). Our work towards confronting homophobia has the potential to serve each of us in our future work around other ‘isms.’ Taking responsibility for one form of social injustice can’t help but move us toward the eradication of others.*

*I have other conflicts as well—conflicts, I’m sure, similar to the ones you are facing as fellow teachers. Through our learning process, each of us has shared personal stories and in some cases confidential information. As your “teacher,” I’ve worried about how to handle such intimate disclosures. I’ve worried about putting you in emotionally vulnerable situations. As a teacher, our collaborative endeavor has caused me to struggle in ways that are new and unfamiliar to me. I worry that as we go our separate ways in the future and as I begin writing about our time together I will do you and your stories a disservice.*

*Finally, I ask myself: What would it look like if I let go of my conflict—thereby, stopping the trajectory of those ping-pong balls—and used my energies to further support each of you? In what ways can I continue to assist your learning and you mine? Perhaps, this is where conflict subsides and where I find my ethical resolution?*

In this journal entry I expose some of my own misgivings related to our work together. Inherent in my reflection is my own conflicts related to the ethical implications of the pedagogy we had enacted together. For their part, student-participants became

engaged in ethical dilemmas as well. Next, I describe one particular experience that not only complicated student-participants' notions of homophobia but expanded student-participants' understandings related to the conflicting realities of being an advocate.

Thus far, I have asserted that the pedagogy we forged together took us *beyond campus* and *beyond reflection*. We went to the beyond campus events together. Our reflective stories, too, unfolded together through conversation and the web of narratives that emerged. Additionally, we found ourselves engaged in activities that took us beyond our collaborative inquiry. Whereas our prior experiences can be characterized as “supported” experiences, our beyond inquiry experiences can be distinguished as “semi-supported.” Beyond inquiry experiences moved us from inquiring collaboratively to taking action individually. The actions we took certainly arose out of our collaborative history. Yet, these actions moved us beyond the confines of our small group of ten and gave us the opportunity, as individuals, to further demonstrate our commitments in a more “authentic” context. By acting rather than simply inquiring, we positioned ourselves as advocates. While our acts of advocacy were rather small scale and individual, they were significant, I contend, in fostering greater awareness and knowledge through firsthand experience with the issues. These beyond inquiry experiences pushed the boundaries of our learning in ways that a strictly university-based, teacher-led pedagogy/curriculum could not. Finally, these actions, I believe, speak to the potential of student-participants to “carry on” the work into their respective classrooms in the future.

In the final section of this chapter, I describe a beyond inquiry experience in which student-participants and I wore LGBTQ-advocating buttons. Wearing buttons forced us to consider the realities of homophobia and the challenges of advocacy in a

public, beyond inquiry context. Whereas student-participants engaged in several beyond inquiry group experiences<sup>15</sup>, our button-wearing experience is elaborated on here because of the impact it had on our learning and the conflict it produced.

### **Learning about Homophobia: Button Wearing Part One**

As I am handed the two different buttons to wear in our diversity meeting last week I am suddenly confronted with a feeling I have not felt before. Questions begin to run through my mind. What are people going to say to me when they see the buttons that I have on? How am I going to respond to their reactions? There are so many questions that I feel like I must confront before I step out of the room, for here I am in a safe place to discuss my opinion, once I step outside of this context I am opening myself up to many uncertainties. I must reaffirm my commitment and desire to be an advocate, and then I am off ready to talk about issues concerning the LGBTQ community and why I am wearing these pins.

[Whitney, D. J. 2-11-03]

As described in Adams and Griffin (1997), we donned ally buttons for one week and logged our reactions. In the above excerpt from her dialogue journal, Whitney captures her initial response to this beyond inquiry endeavor. In addition to our personal reactions, we recorded the reactions we received from others as well as reflected on the conversations and interactions that button wearing provoked. Student-participants wore these buttons to their courses at the university, field placements sites, part-time jobs, and social events in the evening and over the weekend. Specifically, student-participants were instructed to:

Choose a button to wear wherever you go until our next meeting. Be aware of your initial thoughts and feelings regarding this assignment. You can choose

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<sup>15</sup> In addition to button wearing, student-participants partook in other experiences that can be considered to be *beyond inquiry*. For example, during spring quarter, student-participants attended three meetings of a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) at a local high school. Student-participants scheduled these meetings around their student-teaching schedules. In addition to this experience, student-participants developed individual “action plans.” These drafted (and in some cases carried out) plans were intended to promote further learning related to heterosexism and homophobia. These plans included such things as researching school policies related to LGBTQ issues and interviewing LGBTQ teachers in their field placement sites.

NOT to wear your button at all, or to take it on and off throughout the week. But again, be aware of what influences your choice. Be conscious of where you feel like you need to do this . . . that is, where it feels comfortable to wear the button . . . where you feel uncomfortable wearing the button. (Please be smart! Do not wear your button in situations where you could be a target of anti-gay harassment or violence). Keep a log documenting when and where you wore your button; how you felt; the conversations you had; and the reactions you received.

While our previous reading and writing related to homophobia had impacted our understandings, wearing buttons in public spaces forced us to confront homophobia in ways that reading and reflecting only could not. Below, I share excerpts of the discussion that took place after our week of button wearing. I begin with the ways, I believe, button wearing made homophobia more transparent to student-participants. Later, I describe what this experience taught us about advocacy.

#### Overt Homophobia in Personal and Professional Spaces

*Jill: I wore [my button] on my backpack. I got a lot of comments, at least outside of my elementary placement. At my elementary placement my teacher didn't say anything about it until mid-week. I was printing off articles for another class on the gifted and talented teacher's printer. He and I have a good relationship, and he's gay. I talked to him about our class and he was psyched, and wants to read about it when we're done. Anyway, I go back and start telling my mentor teacher about it. And she says, "Don't expect any support from me in that area." She says, "Don't expect to do work on that in this class. Don't expect me to help you do anything with it." She's like, "I will not help or support you in any way with that work."*

*Matt: And this is your mentor teacher at "X" school, right? But, she's soooo laid back.*

*Jill: Yeah, I'm surprised she had an opinion on it. I swear, you could light a fire under her and get no reaction. But, she's like I think it's wrong and it doesn't have a place in the school. So, that was the first reaction that I wanted to report. The second thing that happened, I was at the Schottenstein Center for Friday Night Fights. Allison was working [at the concession stand], and I was with this friend of mine. He was like, is your friend a dyke?*

*Allison: He was asking that about me?*

*Jill: Yeah, can you believe? He was like, why is she wearing a rainbow pin? I was like, for the same reason I have the rainbow pin on my bag. And he's like so, you're in the same class? So, she's not a dyke? I was like, what is this Paul? And he's like, well I think if I were her I wouldn't be walking around with the pin advertising it. It's just like telling people you're gay. And I was like oh my gosh. I got so mad at him. I chalk it up to ignorance, because he's an ignorant person. But what's so ironic is that he has friends that are gay and his employer is gay. He spends so much time with gay people. And to hear such a homophobic comment come out of his mouth. Like he was afraid that Allison was going to spread it or something.*

In this excerpt from our conversation after a week of wearing buttons, Jill describes how she experienced homophobia in both a professional and a social space. In the professional setting, wearing the button created tension between Jill and her mentor teacher. Clearly, their perspectives differ. Jill's tone indicates frustration and indignation. Jill had become accustomed to her mentor teacher being fairly apathetic towards her vocation. However, when Jill takes a stand by wearing the button in her kindergarten placement, her mentor teacher takes a stand against even discussing LGBTQ issues with Jill. While Jill has not proposed introducing LGBTQ issues in the curriculum, her mentor teacher establishes a clear roadblock to even considering thoughtfully the potential or implications for such integration. She overtly explains that she is not willing to either think through the issues with Jill or support Jill in her efforts; thus, standing in the way of Jill's learning. Jill, in this instance, has to face the reality of homophobia as demonstrated by a teacher who was to serve as a role model and mentor for the duration of the academic year.

Similarly, in the social setting, Jill has to face the reality of her friend's homophobia. Her friend, Paul, assumes Allison is a lesbian because she is wearing an LGBTQ-affirming button. He unapologetically uses the word "dyke" in reference to

Allison. Jill again experiences a certain degree of frustration and even anger in this situation. Jill, in this instance, is able to offer a critique of his homophobic response. This response, I believe, is a result of her developing more sophisticated knowledge related to how the lack of information and reliance on stereotypes fosters homophobia (Lipkin, 1999). Ultimately, both of these encounters, I believe, made homophobia more visible to Jill. They forced her to locate homophobia in multiple settings as voiced by significant, and perhaps unexpected, people in her life.

Jill's experiences, regrettably, were not unique. Lindsay, too, shared an experience in which homophobia was unmistakably articulated. During the period of our button wearing, student-participants attended a regional children's literature conference as a requirement for their literacy methods course. Lindsay describes another conference attendee's response to her button.

*Lindsay: Meredith and I were registering at the children's literature conference and Julie [another student in our teacher education program] was working at registration, and she asked us about our buttons; how long we were wearing the pins, stuff like that. I told her we were to wear them for a week, and we were keeping track of our reactions. And then this guy comes over and says, you want a reaction, I'll give you a reaction. He's like, my tax money supports that school, and they're pushing their opinions on you and I'm pissed. I know my senate commissioner and things are going to change. He was ranting!*

*Meredith: And saying things like, I'm getting your teacher fired.*

*Lindsay: Yeah.*

*Matt: Well if I were actually employed . . . (Laughter).*

*Lindsay: We said, it's our choice to be part of this group, and we want to wear these buttons, we want to. He's like this is wrong. And I had a name tag on, and I wanted to cover it up. I didn't want him to know who I was.*



*Meredith: Then I was like, Lindsay, we need to get some coffee, because I just wanted to get out of the room with him.*

During this part of our conversation, Lindsay and Meredith describe wearing their buttons to a professional conference attended by teachers, librarians, and academics. They elected to wear the buttons in a context that was “unknown<sup>16</sup>.” They tell a story of feeling threatened. Lindsay’s tone indicates that she struggled in this exchange with a man who responded negatively to her ally button. Lindsay and Meredith reveal that despite our work together they were unprepared for this man’s demonstration of anger. While they do explain that wearing the buttons was their prerogative, they were not prepared to counter the “attack” or to engage with him more substantively on the issues. Rather than responding to this man’s attack in a way that might have been productive, they find themselves wanting to escape the situation. Fear is detectable in this telling as evidenced by Lindsay’s desire to be anonymous. In her dialogue journal, Meredith elaborates on the fear she experienced in this situation. “He wasn’t just loud and in your face, he was a big linebacker-like guy. [. . .] I don’t know what it’s like to be harassed due to sexual orientation, but based on this experience I now have an inkling.” As heterosexual women, this experience of being reprimanded provided a rare glimpse into the threats LGBTQ people encounter. Like Jill above, Lindsay and Meredith have gained insight into the realities of homophobia and the kinds of challenges we face.

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<sup>16</sup> Here, I use the term ‘unknown’ to describe the type of environment or context student-participants wore their buttons. In this case, an unknown context is a context in which student-participants had never been before and therefore could not be sure as to how LGBTQ friendly the context would be.

## Covert Homophobia in Personal and Professional Spaces

Homophobia that was voiced in clear ways demanded student-participants' attention, was easily recalled, and provoked emotional engagement. However, homophobia also became apparent to student-participants in the ways the issues were avoided and conversations were silenced. As our discussion continued, I asked students to consider this omission.

*Matt: Can you think back to where there was no discussion? Silence in the cohort, with faculty members. . . where was it odd not to talk about it?*

*Dan: I don't think a lot of people said something.*

*Shannon: I had a few discussions with cohort members, mainly explaining the project. But my [mentor] teacher spent the entire day glaring at the button, but she never said anything. It was awkward. And as soon as she would see me looking at her looking at me, she would look away. Yeah, no comment about it whatsoever.*

*Amber: Yeah, I think a lot people were scared to initiate a conversation. That's why I think I didn't have a lot of conversation, because they were afraid to bring it up.*

*Whitney: The problem is when they don't say something, you don't know what people think.*

*Jill: There was definitely audible silence among people in my cohort, people in the gray cohort, people who I will talk to for hours on end, but all of a sudden they're silent.*

*Amber: Yeah red [cohort members] too. Like we were wearing these two-inch round buttons, like neon signs, plain as day, and to not mention it, come on.*

Here, Amber suggests that wearing buttons demands attention and/or response from others. Shannon states that the lack of acknowledgement is awkward, and Jill implies that silence, in this context, can become "audible." Through this exchange, student-participants, I contend, came to see how homophobia is sometimes manifested in

the hush of silence rather than in the expression of voiced aggression. This subtler, more covert form of homophobia is perhaps more worrisome than the overt type experienced/expressed earlier by Jill, Lindsay, and Meredith. Indeed, it is possible for Lindsay and Meredith to generate promising, more considerate responses to “linebacker-like” homophobes they may meet in the future. Yet, learning ways to offset silence, arguably, presents a greater challenge. This “gentler” form of homophobia is harder to detect, is more insidious, and thus more difficult to counter. Through button wearing, student-participants, I believe, began to see “silence” as a foundational structure that upholds homophobia, creating a distinction of understanding that too few heterosexuals ever acquire (Lorde, 1984).

As our conversation unfolded, we were able to make an interesting connection between Jill’s overt homophobic experience and what Allison, I believe, came to see as a covert homophobic act.

*Matt: I think your experience, Allison, is really interesting, because you started by saying how you were working at the Schott[enstein Center], wearing your button [while serving drinks], and how no one asked about or mentioned it, right? --*

*Jill: -- Yeah, that’s what you think. --*

*Matt: -- But we know, we know that people were talking about it. We know from what Jill said that folks were talking about it. At least your friend [Paul] was, right Jill?*

*Jill: That’s so intense.*

*Allison: Well, maybe I didn’t notice because I was running around.*

*Matt: I would venture to say that all of us last week . . . when there were spaces where you thought no one mentioned it, where there was silence, somebody was asking about it, someone was mentioning it. Allison thought no one noticed it, but Jill confirms that people were talking about it, Allison.*

My intention in exposing the way Jill and Allison's button-wearing experience intersected was to highlight Whitney's earlier comment of "when they don't say something, you don't know what people think." For my part, I was trying to get student-participants to explicitly name that silence does not mark approval. While Jill's teacher was vocal in her disapproval, other mentor teachers, cohort members, and friends were silent which, I believed, was mostly likely indicative of a lack of knowledge and experience related to LGBTQ issues or a sign of blatant disapproval.

In the example above, Allison and her co-collaborators learn that at least one person—a person who, for all intents and purposes, Allison perceived to be silent on the issues—had responded publicly and negatively to her wearing of the button. Silence in this case clearly did not equate with approval. In the crossroad of our stories, we learned that the buttons were being responded to in some way and on some level regardless of conversation or confrontation.

I believe, too, that we were naïve to think that people, members of our own families even, would not assign certain traits or political alliances to us because of the buttons. Often, it is with people who we love the most that we encounter the greatest struggle, where silent divides seem the most unbridgeable. Silence, as Lindsay points out, is rarely meaningless or innocent. Silence can shout at you in a deafening pitch.

*Lindsay: I wore [my button] home, and my parents didn't say a thing about it. It was so obvious and mean. They didn't say a thing. Sometimes they ignore me, but this was intentional. I know they know what a rainbow symbol represents.*

## Homophobia and the Perception of Being Gay

*Jill: Did anyone else think that people didn't say anything around this issue because they perceived you to be gay? Like with Allison.*

*Shannon: My mentor teacher . . . when I explained to her after school what the button meant, she's was like oh, be glad you're engaged! I'm like OK. . .*

*Meredith: Oh, my gosh.*

*Shannon: Another teacher kinda made a joke, saying oh, well, I guess I don't really know that much about her fiancée. I'm like OK . . . (laughter)....Well, she's tall and has dark brown hair. I wanted to say something to her.*

*Jonathan: Up until this conversation, I never really stopped to think that someone would think I was gay.*

*Matt: Oh naïve Jonathan. (Laughter).*

*Jonathan: Well, everyone knows I'm married. They know I'm not gay.*

*Matt: But what if you weren't married. What if you didn't have the "protection" of having Alyssa in your life and wearing a wedding ring? Do you think that would complicate the button wearing?*

*Jonathan: I guess I was just so set on letting people know where I stand. I never really thought about where I wore it or what that meant that people thought of me.*

Here, Jill directly re-introduces a topic we had casually evaded before. She poses the question of how wearing the button might result in being interpreted as gay. Clearly, she is drawing on her friend's assumption of Allison being gay as the result of donning a button. In response to Jill's question, Shannon expresses being somewhat dismayed when her colleague commented on being "glad" she was engaged. This comment awakened Shannon, and in turn our group, to the reality of the assumptions people might make about them if they continue to work as LGBTQ advocates. It also did not occur to

Jonathan that his sexuality could be called into question as a result of putting on an LGBTQ-advocating button. His understanding of what it would mean to be an advocate for LGBTQ people did not include that it would involve risking being perceived as gay himself. In the earliest excerpt of this section, Whitney, too, demonstrated some hesitation about wearing the button. She wrote, “What are people going to say to me when they see the buttons I have on?” She worried, then, about how people might respond. While she described some anxiety early on, she did not indicate that it was because she was afraid of being mistaken for a lesbian. Unspoken, I believe, is Whitney’s worry that she might be perceived as a lesbian because of her button wearing. Regardless, Whitney was definitely nervous about taking a stand in this more individual, public, and pronounced way.

While Jonathan didn’t approach the button wearing with much trepidation, his comments are representative of a political denial. He understands this activity as “letting people know where [he] stand[s].” However, he has not given consideration to how that “stand” implicates him both personally and politically. Indeed, both Shannon and Jonathan are marked as heterosexual because they wear a ring that indicates that they are married or will be married. Their status as visible heterosexuals enables them to approach the button wearing differently. Like Allison at the Schottenstein Center, they are surprised and experience a perception shift when they realize the ways they indeed were “interpreted” because of their button wearing. For her part, Shannon tries to infuse humor as she tells the story of the teacher reminding her that she was “safe” as an ally because of her heterosexual status. By doing this, Shannon evades addressing heterosexual privilege directly; however, by jokingly positioning her fiancé as female,

she comes to imagine a possible reaction that could interrupt assumptions of heterosexuality.

For many of the co-collaborators, this activity alerted them to the difference between “being gay” and “the perception of being gay” in how they were treated or interpreted by others. That is, student-participants learned that being an LGBTQ ally meant, at times, that they themselves would be mistaken as LGBTQ. Given Jonathan and Shannon’s experiences, our work together suggests that promoting LGBTQ equity presents a certain set of risks even for heterosexuals. However, regardless of these risks, we know that LGBTQ advocacy is more easily entered into by heterosexual—particularly married heterosexuals—than non-heterosexuals. While Jonathan as a married man was “protected” from many of the risks associated with being an advocate, Dan as a homosexual man was not. For Dan, it was not the perception; it was the reality.

### Homophobia and the Reality of Being Gay

*Matt: Jonathan doesn’t have gay germs and Allison doesn’t either. But Dan does. So, I’m curious to hear how your experience went, Dan. And not as much about the reactions you received but the personal, what this was like for you personally.*

*Dan: Putting a button on was no big deal to me. Okay, it was and it wasn’t. I’ve wore buttons before. The issue for me was wearing it to school. I just wasn’t sure I wanted to come out at school. I still have to do my student teaching and be with these kids. I didn’t really make my decision [to wear the button] until that morning. But I put it on and had no problems.*

*Jill: Did you see the button wearing as coming out to them? Because Jonathan wearing the button at school --*

*Dan: -- it opens the door for discussion. And I’m not willing to lie. So, you never know where that’s going to go and how accepting some people are going to be or not. And just ‘cause you wear, obviously, doesn’t mean you’re gay, but it means . . . it sends a message. There’s that risk factor there for me.*

*Jill: Yeah, got it.*

*Dan: I felt there was a risk for me in terms of coming out and how is that going to impact me as a teacher.*

*Matt: Certainly, Dan is in a much more vulnerable position by wearing this button. I want us all to recognize that. And whereas we all did the “work” this week, Dan did brave work this week.*

*Lindsay: I applaud you Dan. You see, I thought this was a great experience, but it was really humbling too. Because I’m thinking of that guy at the conference, it was confrontational, but I knew at all times that I could take off my button and people would stop saying things. That’s really different I think, the difference between Dan and me. But if you have a certain quality or look, even if you’re not gay or lesbian, you can’t.*

*Matt: It’s the assumption.*

*Lindsay: It’s kinda like being Black. You can’t get away from racism. You can’t hide it, you can’t take it off.*

In our previous exchanges, we began to consider the risks involved in being an ally. Heterosexual co-collaborators came to realize these risks through personal attacks and silences that revealed homophobia. They also came to realize the specific risk of being *assumed* to be LGBTQ. In the above excerpt of conversation, we move from considering the risks involved in being perceived to be LGBTQ to the risks of actually being LGBTQ in educational contexts.

Above, Dan describes the trepidation he experienced in regard to wearing the button to his school placement. Button wearing forced him to consider coming out to his students and to contemplate the ramifications of that potential action. By exposing that there is a “risk factor there” for him that is not present for his fellow student-participants, Dan’s reality both expands and complicates the issues for his co-collaborators. Through Dan’s description of how this experience was qualitatively different for him, Lindsay



comes to realize a privilege that she has as an ally—namely, the privilege to “take off” difference. That is, she realizes that she can always opt out of this work. Indeed, the threat she experienced at the children’s literature conference could have been avoided altogether if she had simply not worn the button. In addition, Lindsay, I believe, has come to see how acts of advocacy position insiders and outsiders differently. That is, she understands the “difference between Dan and [herself],” suggesting that this work is different for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ advocates. She recognizes that, for Dan, sexuality cannot be “taken off” any more than skin color can.

### **Learning about Advocacy: Button Wearing Part Two**

What I’ve learned is that as advocates for change, we have to be proactive. We cannot wait around for others to ask us about diversity. We need to stand up and make it be known that we are working for change, for diversity, for equality, and for the education of all children.

Allison [D.J. 2-11-03]

Advocacy involves the demonstration of “public support for a cause,” working *for* and *with* others (The Oxford Dictionary, 2001). It signifies one’s position on social issues. Indeed, advocates make their positions known while seeking social change through their actions. By creating spaces to reach out to others, participating in significant conversations with others, and learning ways to listen more intently to the perspectives and points of views of others, advocates seek new ways to be in the world in communion with others. This work requires that advocates are not only willing/able to communicate their positions to others in a variety of ways but to make themselves more fully “available” to those *others* in ways that do not appropriate the voice of those for whom they advocate.

Not only did we want to find ways to be available to others, but we wanted to make ourselves visible as advocates of LGBTQ people. Accordingly, we sought out ways to position ourselves as supporters of LGBTQ people across various settings. For student-participants, these settings included their field placements, university classes, and even their places of worship. However, as Adams and Griffin (1997) point out, advocacy is not a straightforward or risk-free task. Even in situations where homophobia did not pronouncedly mark our exchanges, student-participants still found themselves struggling to understand how to best make their positions known. At church and in their university classes, student-participants' efforts at being an ally felt fruitful. They were encouraged and felt affirmed in their work. Similarly, in their stories of field-placement experiences, student-participants felt that they were taking productive steps toward influencing children and teachers in substantial ways.

#### Advocacy in University- and Church-based Settings

*Meredith: Well, Shannon, Amber, Lindsay, and I were sitting at a table in Dr. X's class, and she came up and asked what our pins meant. And she said, what does the triangle mean? So, I explained. And she wanted to know who our teacher was. She wasn't really intrigued or negative. She was reserved about it.*

*Amber: Well, I kinda felt she was kinda. . . I know she is really Christian. I know she's definitely Christian. I had a feeling about it. She could have said something more, I think.*

*Meredith: Well, I would say she was more positive than negative.*

*Amber: Yeah, maybe. I guess I wanted her to announce the fact, the fact we were wearing buttons –*

*Shannon: -- to the whole class, you mean. –*

*Amber: Exactly. Like, I don't know . . . make a spectacle.*

*Jill: I got reaction from Dr. “Y”, right after this class last week. I told him I had to leave class early. As I’m talking to him, he’s like looking at my button, looking at me. Looking at my button, looking at me. And then, he kinda like smiled and told me it was ok to leave early.*

*Meredith: Well, he told me he liked my button.*

*Jill: See, I thought so.*

*Jonathan: You won’t believe who liked my button. I walked in to church, and my pastor he looked at my pin, and he’s like, “alleg?” I’m like it’s “ally.”*

*Shannon: Yeah, a lot of people can’t read the word.*

*Jonathan: But I told him, and he’s like what’s it for. And this is where I have to say that I had this canned answer about diversity that I had ready. I just said, “I’m supporting the gay and lesbian community.” And he’s like where can I get one? I thought that was really cool. I actually helped with communion this week. I helped distribute communion.*

*Matt: While button wearing?*

*Jonathan: Yeah, so, I thought that was kinda cool. So, I’m standing in front saying, “Blood of Christ” . . . (Laughter). It was really cool. My pastor, his brother’s gay, and he’s really supportive and instrumental for change in the church.*

In this exchange student-participants begin by describing experiences at the university where button-wearing created varying degrees of affirmation. Demonstrations of support by two faculty members created, I believe, a feeling of pride for student-participants. These interactions with faculty—people who student-participants wanted to impress—gave student-participants an opportunity to “show off” as advocates and to contribute to the unofficial curriculum, in this case, in their methods courses.

Although I made no requirements as to when or where student-participants were to demonstrate their advocacy, the university context proved to be a good place to start. Of course, there was no guarantee that student-participants would be affirmed in this

initial button wearing context. However, a university setting is arguably less politically divided on LGBTQ issues and rights than other professional and personal contexts in which student-participants could have begun this experience. Additionally, these initial face-to-face encounters at the university were with people student-participants had an established relationship. And while these relationships could most likely be characterized as typical teacher/student relationships, they were not particularly emotionally-charged relationships like those forged in families or with close personal friends. As such, the personal risks involved, although not without complications, were lower.

The above exchange also demonstrates how the issue of religion was often in play in our collaborative work together. Here, Amber asserts that one of her teachers at the university “could have said something more” about the buttons. She attributes this faculty member’s reservation to her presumed Christian identity, implying again Amber’s belief that strongly held religious convictions are at odds with LGBTQ advocacy. Jonathan again counters this claim with his experience of wearing the button to his church. (Indeed, on his own Jonathan purchased dozens of ally buttons to distribute to his fellow parishioners in the weeks following our button wearing). Clear in his telling is his sense of pride. Jonathan feels he is making a difference in this beyond inquiry experience. His acts of advocacy seem intrinsically motivated rather than motivated by a desire to please me as his teacher. He experiences, I believe, the pleasures of advocacy which increases the likelihood that he will continue these efforts in the future. In this affirming context, he seems pleased with himself and begins to envision the potential of forging stronger, larger alliances.

## Advocacy in School Settings

There were, then, beyond-inquiry experiences (at the university and in personal settings) where students felt affirmed in their efforts at advocacy. In addition, our beyond inquiry work took us to public school settings. Student-participants reflected on their attempts at advocacy in these setting as well. As an example, you may recall, Jill's negative experiences with her mentor teacher. Her mentor made comments like, "I will not help or support you in any way with that work." However as discouraging as Jill's experiences may sound, hidden in the context of her telling is the potential for her to cultivate new community. Upon seeing her ally button, one of her colleagues engaged her in conversation about our inquiry group. In her dialogue journal she described this teacher as being "psyched" and "really into it." He, according to Jill, "was the reason I got up the nerve to confront [my mentor teacher] on the topic." And while this aspect of her telling was unexplored in our discussion, there were other instances where student-participants felt pockets of hopefulness. Below, I offer two excerpts of conversation that demonstrate this hopefulness. In the first Lindsay recalls a kindergartner's response to her button. In the second Allison describes the actions her mentor teacher took in reaction to her button.

### Dialogue #1

*Lindsay: . . .But on a nicer note, one of my kindergarteners said, I like your button. I said you do? Thanks. He said he liked all the pretty colors. And I said, you know why I'm wearing it? I told him I want everybody to know that I wanted everyone to be treated equally no matter what your race or gender or orientation is.*

*Jonathan: You think he knew what that meant?*

*Lindsay: Probably not. I related it to Martin Luther King and the lesson we had done. He was like, you're nice and he gave me a big hug.*

*Jonathan: Kids are good.*

*Meredith: But that's good, like to say "orientation" instead of "sexual orientation."*

*Jill: To take the "sexual" part out.*

*Matt: You may be on to something there. That might make it more palatable, make people less squeamish. I don't know.*

## Dialogue #2

*Dan: Me and Jonathan, we were at our preschool [placement] last Friday and one of the teachers said, what's that pin for? She started talking about her sister and her [sister's] partner. Anyway, she was just talking to me about it. She was happy to talk about.*

*Whitney: See, I had my mentor teacher, mentor preschool teacher, talk to me a long time about it this past week and how excited she is that we're doing this work, however, she's one of the people, you know, I won't be working with for student teaching. She's excited about it in her own way, but she wants to know how we're going to put it in the curriculum in the elementary school and dealing with the administration. She's really interested in our work. She'd like to see what we come up with.*

*Matt: Maybe there's a site there, Whitney, maybe to read a story or do something in the curriculum. You should talk to her about it. See what she thinks you could do. . . . It reminds me of what Allison wrote about in her journal last week, about taking the initiative.*

*Amber: Allison you're like the star of the morning! . . .(laughter)*

*Allison: I was on a creative tangent at the time.*

*Matt: Read the last couple of lines from your journal. Do you mind?*

*Allison: Okay. I said, "What I've learned is that as advocates for change, we have to be proactive. We cannot wait around for others to ask us about diversity. We need to stand up and make it be known that we are working for change, for diversity, for equality, and for the education of all children."*

*Matt: And what did you tell me this morning about what your teacher did?*

*Allison: You mean in my elementary placement?*

*Matt: Yeah.*

*Allison: Well, I'm sure I came across people who didn't even know what the button meant, because my teacher didn't say anything about it. So, I just started telling her about what we were doing and why I think gay issues are important and then she asked me where I got it. Like, she wanted it. I think she's supportive of the work that I'm doing. So, I gave her the button and she pinned it to the bulletin board.*

*Matt: Allison, you're rocking my world!*

In these exchanges student-participants explore the realities of what it will mean to do this work as professionals. Clearly, as before, they are asserting their position. However, in the context of school, their voices take on different meaning. They are, I believe, talking not as students or inquirers but as teachers. This shift in forefronted identity is significant and speaks to their potential to carry on our work in their respective classrooms in the future.

For her part, Lindsay shares how she integrated sexual orientation into her conversations with children. In this case, she likens sexual diversity to gender and racial difference. Together, student-participants explore how the term 'orientation'—as compared to 'sexual orientation'—might make the topic more bridgeable in early childhood.

In the second exchange, Whitney begins by sharing a conversation she had with her preschool teacher. Interestingly, most student-participants, like Whitney above, found their preschool placements more receptive to LGBTQ inclusion than in their elementary school placements. Upon reflection, I speculated that this might be due to the type of educational philosophies that influence current preschool practices. Position

statements from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), for example, broadly embrace “whole child” development (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In addition, Reggio-inspired approaches, too, are grounded in children’s experiences with their world. While the NAEYC endorses curriculum that is representative of and easily generalized to the lives of children, Reggio-inspired approaches embrace diversity by recognizing the multiple, or “1,000 languages,” that children bring to the classroom (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Our experiences suggest—and perhaps as a result of these inclusive philosophies—that preschools may view issues of sexual diversity as an inseparable component of the “whole” child’s way of knowing and as one “language” among the 1,000 languages children naturally possess.

While Whitney speaks generally about cultivating support from other potential allies, Allison describes more specifically a new awareness and a lasting result of her actions related to advocacy. In her attempts, Allison has learned that she has “to be proactive” in engaging others in discussion related to LGBTQ issues. Implied in this sentiment is her awareness that through our inquiry she has gained the requisite knowledge to begin such discussions. Indeed, simple actions, like wearing a button, provide Allison with an opportunity to express why she “think[s] gay issues are important to address” in schools. Her ability to articulate her position provokes action that leads to her mentor teacher displaying a symbol of LGBTQ advocacy in her classroom.

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For us, then, button wearing created opportunities to assert ourselves in public spaces, to make our positions known, and to create dialogue that pushed our thinking and abilities related to LGBTQ issues. While button wearing in a beyond inquiry



environment left us with a more complex understanding of the many faces of homophobia, button wearing, too, showed us how small, grassroots acts of advocacy can make a difference. Difference, I contend, can be seen in the legacy of what's left behind. Simple things—like a button left on a classroom bulletin board or the fond, lingering memories of a child who likes “all the pretty colors” of a pin his teacher wears—can contribute to a history whose impact is only known in the passage of time. Indeed, evidence of successful advocacy can sometimes only be seen in the future actions others take as a result of coming in contact with these legacies—legacies created by advocates who may never fully know the consequences of their contributions.

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Our group pedagogy, then, took us *beyond campus* to seek out experiences with/in LGBTQ communities. We constructed meaning from these experiences by engaging in reflective writing and analyzing the personal life stories we brought to these experiences. This *beyond reflection* aspect of our pedagogy exposed our personal histories and allowed us to examine our understandings and beliefs in the context of collaboration. Through supported experience and reflection, student-participants were eventually able to step outside of our collaboration to “test” their advocacy skills in a semi-supported, *beyond inquiry* environment. Collectively, these practices nurtured our growth and development. They served as catalysts for our learning. In the next chapter, I speculate more holistically on what a jointly constructed pedagogy means to teacher education. I focus on student-participants’ conceptions of how our work was beneficial to their lives as educators, and I describe, from my teacher educator’s perspective, what I have learned about engaging pre-service teachers in collaborative, LGBTQ-focused inquiry.

**CHAPTER 5**

**THE BUILDING OF AN EXPOSED PEDAGOGY:  
IMPLICATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES IN COLLABORATIVE WORK**

***A Journey's End***  
**Journal Entry (May)**

*I can't believe this is our last dialogue journal entry. It's hard to believe our year of reading, writing, thinking, writing, talking, writing, reflecting, writing, writing, writing . . . has come to an end. I want you to know that each of us has done good work this year. I'm grateful to each of you—for sharing your stories, for asking thoughtful questions, and for responding so diligently to my writing. (And yes, I'm aware that I'm in need of a good editor. Thanks for correcting my grammar so tactfully)!*

*Our journey together has provided me with new insights and produced some powerful memories. I hope it has done the same for you. I know I will carry "snapshots" of our time together in my mind and in my heart for years to come. I will not soon forget:*

*Lindsay, the times you were brought to tears. Your passion was a constant source of inspiration for me.*

*Amber, the way you shared your life. Your stories—no matter how prideful or painful—were always eloquent and edifying.*

*Meredith, the way you brought us together. You saw connections and commonalities in our stories even when I did not.*

*Dan, all the ways you taught us through example. Thanks for being our teacher.*

*Jonathan, the ways you led us. Whether it was getting directions to events or taking the lead on developing our website, you were a pleasure to follow.*

*Whitney, your ability to infuse humor. You reminded me that even within serious work laughter reenergizes the spirit.*

*Jill, how you found ways to see practicality in our work. And, thanks for knowing when to “cut me off” and for doing it so graciously.*

*Shannon, the ways you modeled patient listening. You reminded me time and again that learning from others requires that we listen more and talk less.*

*Allison, the way you learned the “language” of equity education. How did such a quiet woman become such an articulate radical in such a short time? You amaze me.*

*These are some of the snapshots I have in my mental scrapbook. What are yours?*

*Our journey took us to new places and unpredictable destinations, provoking thoughtful conversations and new learnings. I know our conversations related to heterosexism and homophobia have deepened by understanding of the issues we face. I know our collaboration far exceeded my initial expectations. The ways each of you found ways to assert yourself (through your questions, interests, concerns, ideas) demonstrated your commitments and your abilities to engage fully in our collaborative inquiry. Your contributions not only changed the path of our “journey” but created a space for me to learn from you. Thank you for being my teachers.*

## **Introduction**

As I reflect on our collaborative inquiry project, I am reminded of the above metaphor—namely, the notion of embarking on a shared “journey.” In small ways, this text, I believe, illustrates this metaphor. Each chapter characterizes significant aspects of our journey. Before I close the book on our year of collaboration, I would like to take a final “glance back” on our time together and reflect on “what it all meant.” At this time, too, there is the opportunity to look ahead and speculate on how our learning might serve future teaching and research in teacher education.

As I reflect upon student-participants’ and my growth over the course of our inquiry, several significant themes have emerged. For example, I have come to believe that long-term, collaborative inquiry can support students in developing greater commitments to LGBTQ equity. As chapter three describes, I understand community development and the forging of caring relationships as central to any endeavor related to diversity education. Indeed, given the nature of our society, it is unlikely that the majority of prospective teachers will acquire an anti-heterosexist identity on their own (Kissen, 2002; Lipkin, 1999). Rather, I have come to believe that anti-heterosexist identities must be intentionally nurtured through supported experiences. As chapter four describes, forging beyond campus learning opportunities and reflecting on such opportunities can be beneficial to prospective teachers in developing more sophisticated understandings regarding heterosexism and homophobia.

Short-term, “textbook” approaches to learning about heterosexism do little to promote the kind of engagement necessary to complicate students’ understandings. Within sustained experiences and relational contexts, however, students—particularly

heterosexual students—have the opportunity to begin to disentangle the knots of heterosexism. Within sustained experiences, students are provided the time to read more widely and reflect more deeply. Within relational contexts, students are given the opportunity to forge trusting relationships necessary to dislodge ingrained patterns of thinking and to learn from the stories of others. Through the voicing of stories, heterosexism is given a concrete, tangible form. Stories that were once hidden are made visible. Beliefs that were once held can be revealed and scrutinized.

Cumulatively, then, the nature of our collaboration, the dimensions of our community building, and the pedagogical processes we employed can be thought of as the mechanisms that “exposed” student-participants’ stories and beliefs. They, in essence, were the mechanisms that fostered growth and development. Sharing and interpreting our experiences and our stories as a joint venture informed and extended our overall pedagogy—pedagogy created and shared by participants. Creating a pedagogical process that was shared resulted in what student-participants and I came to call an *exposed pedagogy*.

In this chapter, I further unpack the central characteristics of our work and describe the most salient elements of *exposed pedagogy*. By drawing together my learnings from across the previous chapters, I consider the implications of conducting LGBTQ-inclusive work with pre-service teachers. My intention as a teacher educator is to highlight the overarching themes and essential components of our work. In considering the implications of this project, I have come to believe what is most important is capturing for interested readers the nature of our inquiry and characterizing, more holistically, the pedagogy that was created. However, before I describe my final

understandings, I share student-participants' final consensus writings. These final consensus documents constitute the summative results and implications of our investigation from students' perspective. In this way I hope to honor their contributions, remembering again to whom this work belongs. Later, I explore a *theory of exposed pedagogy* in more detail, drawing upon ideas in previous chapters and upon students' consensus writing. Finally, I share, in concrete ways, the potentials I see for engaging in similar practices in the future from my position as a teacher of teachers. These efforts address explicitly the research questions which began our year of inquiry:

- What beliefs do pre-service teachers in this particular setting embrace related to LGBTQ inclusion?
- And what significance does long-term, collaborative inquiry hold for both the students and the teacher engaged in this work?

### **Implications from Student-Participants' Perspectives**

Throughout our inquiry, as previous chapters demonstrate, student-participants contributed in unique ways to all aspects of our collaboration. They posed questions. They supplied narratives. They recommended beyond campus experiences, and they offered their interpretations. Accordingly, student-participants, I contend, engaged in true collaboration. They shaped, in significant ways, the path our inquiry took. In the spirit of collaboration, their research implications are as important and noteworthy as mine. "Investigating LGBTQ issues *in collaboration with* pre-service teachers" means sharing their summative understandings—their glances back on what it all meant.

As the end of our time together approached, we turned our efforts toward seeking summative understanding. We engaged in a shared analytic process which resulted in

collaboratively written position papers addressing the major understandings that our inquiry produced. This work culminated in the construction of final consensus documents. These final, summative writings were a direct outcome of the collaborative research process, community building, and pedagogical practices we engaged in throughout our year together. We decided to construct portrayals of the relevant moments and critical shifts in thinking that had occurred for us, directing our energies to synthesizing and consolidating our new knowledge. We engaged in a shared analytic process that involved brainstorming, dialoguing, debating, and consensus building.

For their part in this process, student-participants read and reread the reflective writing captured in their respective dialogue journals. They identified readings and experiences that were most prominent to them. As a group, we developed lists of inquiry-related terms (See Appendix D for a list of these terms). From these terms, we developed thematic categories that encapsulated our work together (See Appendix E for an overview of these thematic categories). Student-participants subsequently selected one mutually agreed upon category to examine more closely. They expanded, for example, on themes that emerged early on like “Peer Support” and “Identity Work.” In this shared analytic process, we exposed the major issues we had considered throughout our time together. By systematically and collaboratively engaging in this analytic process, we were able to flesh out how we made meaning from our experiences and how this in turn contributed to our views and positions as educators.

The implications of engaging in LGBTQ-focused inquiry, from student-participants’ perspective, are shared below. Each of these four final consensus documents, it is important to note, was shared with and critiqued by all members of our

group. And although each entry has lead authors, all of the co-collaborators contributed to the editing and revising of each piece. The following writings reveal what student-participants have learned or have come to believe about LGBTQ diversity and about working in collaboration with others. These final consensus documents are their attempts to make generalizations about what was most important to them related to our work.

### ***Peer Supported Learning***

*Our LGBTQ diversity group has been characterized by peer support for one another. Through reading, discussing, and reflecting, we as a group have become more aware of who we are as sociocultural beings. One way we've learned about ourselves is by telling and listening to personal stories, both our stories and stories told by LGBTQ people and their advocates. Our small-group inquiry environment allowed us to become vulnerable as we listened to others' stories and trusted each other with our own personal stories. We could not have done this without looking to others in a supportive environment. Peer support lent itself to further exploration of ideas and beliefs by creating a risk-taking environment. This environment fostered new friendships and honest discussions.*

*Even in the beginning of our group meetings, there were signs that we were part of a unique collection of individuals and that we could share our personal motivations for wanting to learn about LGBTQ diversity. This was evident when Lindsay wrote in response to Allison's very first dialogue journal back in the fall: "Allison, I'm inspired by your desires to join [this LGBTQ collaboration]. I too want to become more knowledgeable of LGBTQ issues. I'm glad we have each other to lean on and learn from." Having open discussions*



*with each other and committing ourselves to working together and learning from each other to achieve anti-heterosexist goals has helped create a supported learning environment.*

*We as a group of learners have developed ways to support each other. Allison, as an example, wrote about this in her dialogue journal, “As an ally who identifies outside the group I am supporting, I can show that LGBTQ advocacy is important to people other than those who identify as LGBTQ. One interesting realization for me has been that like me the majority of our group identifies as heterosexual. I draw strength from this actually. It makes me think there is hope for putting an end to homophobia.” By engaging in experiences with others, writing about our experiences in our dialogue journals, and then discussing our reactions and thoughts, we as a group have helped each other become more aware and knowledgeable. Our support for one another has led us to question the actions we can take to end homophobia in schools and beyond.*

*In addition, peer support has created a sense of “safety in numbers.” As a group of ten, we attended events such as the Gay Men’s Chorus concert and The Laramie Project. Doing this together contributed to our growing sense of confidence. This sense of safety has allowed us to move into new areas or situations that we may have previously found to be intimidating such as participating in a Gay/Straight Alliance or wearing gay-affirming buttons to our field placements. Shannon wrote about “safety in numbers” in her dialogue journal: “As a result of our group, I can now be more candid and forthright when*

*speaking about LGBTQ issues in school. The awareness that there are others in our group who are just as committed to teaching for diversity as I am, goes a long way.”*

*Through our support of each other, we have been able to find our place as advocates for LGBTQ diversity and equity. We recognize that our work has only begun, but by collaborating with one another, we have continued to increase our knowledge and awareness, which we hope will foster further action on our part. We realize that we are still only in the early stages of activism; however, through the peer support we have developed over this year, we leave with the determination to continue our work beyond the confines of The Ohio State University and into our classrooms next year. We know we can seek out others in our community, if not in our schools, to help us continue this work.*

[F.C.D.-P.S. 5-20-03]

In this final consensus document, Allison and Shannon describe what they consider to be a key implication of our work. In their analysis, supportive peer relationships were vital to their ability to engage in LGBTQ inclusive work. Relationships, characterized by friendship, created opportunities for them to learn from one another. In relationship with one another, they were able to create the bonds of trust which allowed them to make themselves vulnerable to the issues. As they describe, the “safety in numbers” aspect of our collaboration promoted a supportive, risk-taking

environment. In this context, they learned ways to scrutinize their own stories and to examine the stories of others<sup>17</sup>. Peer support, then, fostered a social learning context for each of us to gain vital information related to LGBTQ issues.

While Allison and Shannon explain the importance of “looking to others,” Amber, Lindsay, and Meredith’s final consensus document focuses on how our work created “greater awareness of self” and moved them to more sophisticated understandings of LGBTQ issues.

### ***Identity Work: Working from Within***

*It is a difficult task to take a step back, look within oneself, and objectively recognize one’s role and contributions in and to society. Through our year-long experience of grappling with issues related to Equity and Diversity education, the aforementioned has been the cornerstone of our endeavor and discourse. In whole, we came to this group with hopes of becoming advocates for social justice related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning individuals. It seemed, as future educators, that we all came into the group knowing where we stood and with what we thought was adequate knowledge of the issues to direct us in this work. However, as we progressed through our experiences together, we quickly realized that we had much more knowledge to gain, in order to be informed educators and advocates. We realized we had much to learn about ourselves.*

*It is now apparent that knowing oneself opens the windows to alternatives to others’ life experiences—we are not so much on the outside looking in at*

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<sup>17</sup> For more on how we “used” our stories and engaged in reflective practice, see chapter four.

*someone who is oppressed or marginalized, but looking at aspects of humanity that lie within us all. Reflection such as this allows us to advance our awareness of issues by examining our perspectives and experiences more closely. We have come to believe that self-awareness is the foundation for true social advocacy.*

*By simply “joining” this group, we thought we “were” being advocates. However, through our experiences thus far we have come to realize that there are many facets that we have yet to discover. Through this surface uncovering, we have plunged into an abyss of issues, ideas, and perspectives. In doing so, we have denied ourselves “the privilege of staying dumb”<sup>18</sup> to social injustice.*

*It was not our goal to walk away from this experience knowing what it is like to be of any sexual orientation other than our own. Rather, it has been our hope that through this experience we would learn how to better serve and support those who are underrepresented and to learn how our identities shape our understandings and actions in schools and society. Additionally, we have learned that we all benefit when any oppression is confronted (Collins, 2000). Through our sustained self-discovery we have added understanding and compassion to our own spirits. Furthermore, as Meredith wrote in her dialogue journal, “if one is willing to talk about issues surrounding race and ethnicity, for example, but not gender and sexuality, then despite all of one’s efforts in certain areas, he/she is still contributing to the problem.” By investigating ourselves, we have come to understand more completely the abundance of isms that compete in our lives.*

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<sup>18</sup> We use this expression to mean that we no longer turn a blind eye to the privileges we have been afforded.

*Along our journey, we have not only expanded our understanding of who we are in relation to issues of LGBTQ education, but we have also evolved in our ability to effectively convey our message. Not only does one have to learn “how” to convey the message, but also to confront the fear that comes along with speaking out against social injustice issues. Although blindly accepted by many of us in society, we have learned that “dominant ideologies serve the interests of those in power” (Matt’s response to Amber’s journal). Our experiences have taught us that not talking about LGBTQ issues is a political statement; it serves to perpetuate dominant, heterosexist interests. Thus, by partaking in an experience such as ours, we are no longer exploiting “others” but recognizing that “their issues” are “our issues.” By examining our experiences, we begin to locate ourselves within society and are better prepared to define our positions (both strengths and weaknesses) as anti-homophobic educators.*

*There is now a group of ten future educators with diverse backgrounds who have recognized their own identity in order to be true advocates for LGBTQ youth and families, who have denied the privilege of being dumb, and who have taken on the challenge to initiate non-exploitive relationships, creating small societal ripples that will hopefully become a tidal wave of social change, washing away the hegemonic cultural thinking that limits us all. The consciousness that has been raised and developed amongst our group is far greater than that with which any of us initially or independently began this experience. Our identity work has moved us along a continuum to greater awareness of self. By engaging*

*in self-consciousness raising, we have gained a better understanding of who we are and who we might become as teachers working toward greater social justice.*

[F.C.D.-I.W. 5-20-03]

In this final consensus document, Amber, Lindsay, and Meredith write about the importance of identity exploration and personal reflection. They suggest that “working from within” exposed the personal experiences and perspectives they brought to our inquiry. Identity work, as they describe, served as a foundation for learning about others. That is, knowing about oneself was an antecedent to engaging in LGBTQ advocacy. Heightened self knowledge helped them to understand their past actions and to envision alternative, future actions related to LGBTQ equity and social justice. The student-participants argue that self-discovery is an essential component for the development of greater cross-sexual competency.

While Amber, Lindsay, and Meredith’s piece explores the importance of personal biography in our work, Jill and Whitney’s analysis examined how one’s personal biography is shaped by hegemonic norms. Their analysis moves from what-we-learned-about-the-process to what-we-learned-about-the-content. Together, Jill and Whitney address what our work has taught them about heteronormativity.

### ***Confronting Dominant Cultural Influences: Heteronormativity***

*“How can awareness of your personal identities help you bridge the divide between your life experiences and the varied life experiences of your future students?” (Question Matt asked on Whitney’s dialogue journal)*

*After reviewing many papers that we have written over the last nine months, one thing that sticks out is how each of us responded to topics and issues discussed in class based on our cultural upbringing. Each of us brings an*

*individual, though sometimes similar, set of cultural norms, stereotypes, and pre-dispositions. Whitney speaks to this in a reflection paper from last quarter saying, “I have always known that I was a white middle class heterosexual female, what I did not always know was how that led me to be the person that I am today.” What is interesting to see in our reflections and stories is how our knowledge of who and what we are has hidden the knowledge of who and what those around us may be. The older we get, the more we experience in life, the more we see people around us for who they really are. The exposure we have received from our LGBTQ inquiry group alone has allowed us to rethink and reorganize our ideas about the world around us and the roles we play.*

*For instance, one of the major dominant cultural influences seen today is heteronormativity. This is when heterosexuality is implied, expected, or seen as the only legitimate way of being in the world. As a dominant ideology, heteronormativity assumes that everyone is heterosexual. This cultural influence affects all of us. For example, take a story shared by one of our group members. For a long time this group member was in a relationship with someone who she assumed was heterosexual because she had no reason to believe otherwise. However, her boyfriend in this relationship was conforming to the dominant cultural norm by performing heterosexuality, while in fact he was homosexual. This cultural influence affected both people in painful and negative ways. Heteronormativity presents a hurdle for all people by putting in place confining social restrictions that force people to hide their identities and their lives with others.*

*Another dominant cultural influence can be seen in the many power differentials that occur in society. As Dan wrote on my (Jill's) journal, "I can only hope for a day when being a minority will be a non-issue." Being a white, middle class, straight male or female brings many privileges that members of the LGBTQ community do not receive. Out of the ten members of our diverse group, all of us, on the surface, may enjoy the privileges of a recognized marriage, health care benefits for partners, job security, and the right to adopt children. However, if any of us chooses to make it known that we are non-heterosexual those rights disappear. The dominant cultural influence still seems to say that a homosexual lifestyle is not acceptable to be a family lifestyle or a lifestyle worthy of full legal rights. We do not support this influence, but it still exists nonetheless.*

*This is one influence that we will very likely encounter firsthand as teachers. It is almost impossible today to find a school where not a single student, teacher, or administrator is homosexual. It is also just as unlikely to find a school where not a single same-sex parent family sends their child. As teachers, we will have to face this dominant cultural norm head on as it not only affects our students as children, but will set the stage for their beliefs in the future. As Matt wrote on Whitney's journal, "We can not ignore social structures that create uneven power relations." The social structures in place currently maintain that Whites still have greater access to power in society over Blacks, and just as unfortunately straight members of society have greater access to power and representation over LGBTQ members. "Students come to the classroom with a past and a future. We cannot do anything about their past, but we can teach them*



*to use this past and be aware of the effect it will have on their future” (Jill’s dialogue journal). Said another way, we can create classroom environments that capitalize on the differences students bring with them in order to promote classrooms that confront not only heteronormativity but the many other social inequalities that divide our world.*

[F.C.D.-C.D.C.I. 5-20-03]

Like Amber, Lindsay, and Meredith’s final consensus document before, Jill and Whitney’s analysis begins by naming the significance of one’s life experience. They describe, for example, the importance of understanding one’s “cultural upbringing.” Their analysis, at the cultural level, encourages them to consider how “our knowledge of who and what we are has hidden the knowledge of who and what those around us may be.” They have come to understand how heteronormativity has affected their personal lives, acknowledging that the effects of heteronormativity impact the lives of heterosexuals and thereby suggesting a greater awareness of how heteronormativity impacts the realities of LGBTQ folks in negative ways as well. Student-participants’ group examination of heteronormativity helped them gain a clearer understanding of the privileges heterosexuals receive.

Jill and Whitney’s writing delineates the sociocultural and sociopolitical realities of our work. In the last of student-participants’ consensus documents, Dan and Jonathan describe more explicitly the ways student-participants have learned to respond to heteronormativity. They have come to believe that heteronormativity can be addressed through personal and political actions, creating shifts in thinking.

### ***Shifting Paradigms through Personal and Political Action***

*Ways of thinking. Simply put, a paradigm is a way of thinking. We each have a way of thinking that is formed by the many influences of our lives and the lives of those who surround us. Because our lives are fluid, time—continuous, and change—inevitable, we will each experience shifts in the ways that we think. In understanding diversity as a form of work, we must challenge our own ways of thinking by taking into account how heteronormativity shapes the experiences of all those who make up our dynamic world.*

*There are ways to shift paradigms; specifically, action, reflection, and advocacy. Change happens when current hegemonic thinking (like heteronormativity) is challenged through interactions, actions, reflective thinking, and research like ours. It is easy to proclaim to be open-minded and accepting of all people, but it requires action with reflection to really fulfill that commitment (Freire, 1970). Putting a personal face on the need for justice is the key to getting people to take action and get involved. This is what our LGBTQ Inquiry Group has attempted to do, both now, and as a goal for the future. However, as we have come to consider how heterosexism and homophobia shape educational contexts, political realities have jumped into the mix and sent our thinking into many spiraling cyclones of turbulence.*

*Ten educators. One common goal. A lifetime of future students and caregivers. Countless personal and political influences. This is our LGBTQ Inquiry Group. This seemingly similar, yet dynamically different group of ten has united together under the purpose of growing in awareness of heterosexism and*

*homophobia and how to better address them as educators who bear influence on the lives of many. Educational institutions are supposed to be venues of growth, awareness, and change. Somehow though, schools assume the same issues as many other institutions. Decisions are political, not compassionate. Actions are strategic, not personal. Changes are for the good of the mainstream dominant group, not the needs of the individual or the marginalized. All in all, the issues are politicized, not personalized.*

*The understanding that the works of those who advocate for change in any arena are intertwined within a world of hegemonic influences is an important realization. The members of our LGBTQ Inquiry Group entered into this endeavor with hopes of dynamic, earth-moving change. In reality, we are only eroding away small bits of earth. It will take years of dedicated work to smooth over the rough lands; years of work eroding away nearly invisible granules of soil at a time. We, however, cannot wait around for others to do this work. The influences of every action, every decision, and every inaction are simultaneously personal and political ones. Persistence and diligence will be the only way to override the depersonalized views of large political institutions. Time will be the only true showing of change.*

*When advocating for change, pushing thinking, or trying to encourage growth in any form, we have come to believe that gaining a better understanding of the issues through engaging in authentic experiences is the foundation to challenge personal and political realities and promote social change. While the reality may always be that every single decision, action, and inaction will be seen*

*in some political light, understanding the political with the personal will be the key to helping others become more enlightened about social justice issues. We believe as more and more individual personal stories are shared the broader political debates will change.*

*We must share our lives with others if we are to expect change. We must understand one another personally and politically. We must slowly, carefully, and diligently pick up our tiny granules of soil and persist in the process of eroding away the soils of intolerance, misunderstanding, and discrimination. After all, “tolerance is always age appropriate” (Beverly McLachlin, Canadian Supreme Court Justice). As educators of people of all ages and all sexualities, we must constantly keep this notion at the forefront of our minds. Tolerance, understanding, education, action, and advocacy are the tools by which we influence others and keep our goals personal with an eye on the political. If you focus on the personal within the political we believe the paradigms will ultimately shift toward acceptance.*

[F.C.D.-S.P. 5-20-03]

In this analysis of our group learning, Dan and Jonathan conceptualize ways to broaden the thinking of others. Our work has led them to believe that change in thinking is a result of intentional actions carried out on personal and political levels. Our work has taught them that hegemonic influences can be addressed, in schools and beyond, through their actions and reflection. Inferred, too, in their implications of our work is their heightened sense of responsibility to *do* this work. Their desire to take responsibility for social injustice demonstrates how our group met and exceeded the highest hopes

established for typical diversity courses in teacher education. Through our sustained collaboration, student-participants have come to see themselves implicated in an unjust system. Accordingly, they now see that “we cannot wait around for others to do this work.” They have concluded that they must be “persistent and diligent” in their ongoing efforts to play a part in dismantling heterosexism and homophobia.

***A Journey’s End (continued)***

*At our journey’s end, I am reminded of all the times I was positioned not as a teacher but as a learner. I struggled at times to let go of my “control” as your teacher. Yet, upon reflection, my most profound learnings are a result of this loss of control. I am a better teacher because of it. Our collaboration has expanded my understandings. In the spaces where you took control, I became the novice, the learner. You, after all, are the experts on your respective life stories. Your interpretations of your stories and the experiences we shared together, when scrutinized thoughtfully, are no less valid than mine. You shared with me your understandings of LGBTQ issues. Your perspectives have complicated my own. It is in this dynamic exchange, I believe, that teachers become learners and learners become teachers. This is one example of the ways our journey took me to new places and exceeded my expectations. This, too, will be added to my mental scrapbook.*

**Building a Theory of Exposed Pedagogy:  
Implications from a Teacher Educator’s Perspective**

‘Exposure’, in its simplest terms, means “to come in contact with.” This definition is in use when we say: *avoid prolonged exposure to the sun*. Exposure can also

mean “to make visible” or “to reveal,” as in: *she was exposed to the truth*. This definition implies a critical shift in cognition in which a learner moves from the unknown to the known. Through engaging in collaborative inquiry, we exposed our experiences, beliefs, and personal truths related to sexual diversity in academic spaces and beyond. We “came in contact with” diverse others and allowed their personal truths “to be revealed” to us. In doing so, we created, I believe, more nuanced, communal understandings of the issues that impact LGBTQ youth and families.

As previous chapters describe and students’ final consensus documents illuminate, sharing our own stories and listening to the stories of others, created for us a heightened sense of vulnerability. Indeed, there is a certain degree of vulnerability inherent in being exposed. As we bring our lives to bear in academic contexts, we do more than “uncover” our personal truths. Rather, we bare ourselves in ways that cause us, figuratively speaking, to stand “naked” before others. This type of ‘exposure’, I assert rarely occurs in teacher education.

‘Exposure’ in all its many definitions captures the nature of our interactions as an inquiry group. I use the term *exposed pedagogy* to describe the qualities that marked the teaching and learning that took place during our year of collaboration. Like student-participants before, exposed pedagogy is my final implication—my summative writing.

An exposed pedagogy, as I have come to conceptualize it, is a shared pedagogy created by teachers who are students and students who are teachers with the purpose of fostering new learning contacts/contexts and seeking more complex understandings through a process of heightened engagement and vulnerability. The exposed pedagogy we constructed together was made possible through several defining mechanisms. First,

our pedagogy followed an *emergent path* and was located in the questions, life experiences, and needs of those who constructed it. Accordingly, an exposed pedagogy is responsive to those who create it. It situates all participants as co-teachers/co-learners and co-subjects/co-researchers. These varied positions are fluid and interchangeable, reflecting a second aspect of an exposed pedagogy—*teacher/student parity*. The cultivation of greater parity was essential to the pedagogical process we employed. Teacher/student parity combined with emergent processes allowed us to enter into new forms of teaching and learning. Further, exposed pedagogy enabled us to scaffold learning for each other in productive ways. The naturally-evolving and non-hierarchical nature of our interactions facilitated this communal form of growth and development. *Collectively-guided scaffolding*, then, helped us make sense of our readings and experiences as we explored varying interpretations of our emerging understandings.

Exposed pedagogy, then, serves as a model for how to do similar work. For me, however, an exposed pedagogy is more than the respective “parts” that will be named here. Rather, it has become a conceptual frame for me to explore what worked and why. By describing what I mean by an exposed pedagogy, I hope to not only draw together my summative understandings of our year of inquiry but make this work more accessible to others in the teacher education community. The implications I delineate in this section incorporate many of the ideas explored in student-participants’ final consensus documents and reflect a synthesis of the themes presented in previous chapters. Next, I describe more fully three processes that I feel were vital to the teaching and learning that occurred in collaboration. They include the following:

- Emergent Processes
- Teacher/Student Parity, and
- Collectively-Guided Scaffolding.

Later, I outline what working within these pedagogical processes has taught me about engaging prospective teachers in LGBTQ-focused study.

### **Emergent Processes**

As a result of my work with students, I have come to see the importance of *emergent processes* in conducting LGBTQ-focused inquiry with prospective teachers. A willingness to allow relationships and curriculum to emerge can be seen across all the stories I have shared and data I have analyzed in this report. Therefore, I am hopeful that this aspect of exposed pedagogy is one that other teacher educators might find useful as they consider ways to integrate sexual diversity in teacher education programs.

An exposed pedagogy is characterized by an emergent process that places teaching practices in the open, thus inviting scrutiny and input from students. The emergent process we engaged in throughout our year together required that everyone contribute to the curriculum through shared decision-making. This joint decision-making was vital to our inquiry as evidenced, for instance, by our out-of-university experiences which were overtly student-driven and responsive to the ever-evolving group concerns and interests. Indeed, these events were not selected by me, the teacher, when designing the syllabus. That is, they were not “on the calendar.” Rather, emergent practices necessitate that teacher educators *under-prepare* by allowing for spontaneity and relinquishing strict control of the curriculum. However, under-preparing does not indicate a lack of planning. Seeking community resources and sharing teaching responsibility with students required careful negotiating, scheduling, and communicating.



Exposed pedagogy requires that teacher educators see curriculum as open-ended and dependent upon students' unique knowledges, interests, and needs. In this way, pedagogies can be tailored to better fit learning communities, being neither too snug as to prevent adequate movement nor too loose-fitting to prevent purposeful form. Knowing when and where to let out the seams is an initial and ongoing practice of shared, student-driven learning.

Rarely do we conceptualize pedagogy, in this way, as a co-construction built in collaboration with and truly responsive to students. Pedagogies are, conventionally speaking at least, constructed by teachers *for* students - not *with* students. Traditional pedagogies often work from a curriculum that is rigid and predetermined, denying students the right to active participation in their learning (Freire, 1970). An exposed pedagogy assumes students, like teachers, are capable of contributing substantially to a shared curriculum. Our inquiry-based approach to learning about LGBTQ issues demonstrated how learning "is not an achievement, but instead is an ongoing interpretive project" (Sumara, 2002, p. 154). An exposed pedagogy, then, asks both teachers and students to participate fully in the teaching and learning process in order to direct that project.

Our emergent processes demanded that we, as a diverse group, routinely shared our abilities (or lack there of), previous experiences, reservations, and hopes for our inquiry into LGBTQ issues. In one of their final consensus documents, student-participants explained that "we all came into the group....with what we thought was adequate knowledge of the issues to direct us in this work..." (F.C.D.-I.W. 5-20-03). This statement reveals that participants came to understand that we needed to take an inquiry-

oriented path to our collaboration because other “directions” were not available. We could not simply meet the first day and select a scope and sequence for our inquiry. Instead, we had to be open to an emergent path. This interactive and fluid pedagogical approach enabled us to construct a learning context that served not only our academic needs but also became an extension of our lives. I found that this was effective because it resulted in a more authentic union of our academic pursuits and our “real” lives. Lindsay, as you will remember, had emotional connections to *The Laramie Project*, citing familial connections. Dan’s and my life experiences and knowledge as insiders shaped our contributions to our collaboration in significant ways. Jonathan’s attachment to his church framed the personal lens through which he responded to our work and his peers. In this way, our lives promoted unique, targeted questions, integrating our educational commitments and our personal realities. An exposed pedagogy, then, hinges on teacher educators’ willingness to be flexible and allow curriculum to emerge from student’s questions and life experiences.

Working together to problem pose and problem solve around a shared educational agenda promoted a learning context that supported individual growth and development. Our problem posing took us off campus and perhaps—to the outsider’s eye—off track. However, the questions and problems we explored were our own. They were developed based on long-term interactions with each other and sustained consideration of the topic. Our explorations reflected the personal ownership as well as the group investment that emerged throughout our year of inquiring together. They reflect, too, I believe, the issues that were most pertinent to the students.

Unfortunately, prospective teachers and teacher educators are rarely afforded this kind of flexibility. Teacher education programs are not currently designed to accommodate emergent processes such as sharing decision-making with students and allowing for ventures into unforeseen curricular territory. Distributing shared responsibility among teachers and students changes the way we go about preparing for and participating in “class.” Exposed pedagogy means letting students show us how to make learning relevant and authentic to them.

### **Teacher/Student Parity**

Our work suggests that striving for greater teacher/student parity holds substantial potential for engaging with LGBTQ issues. As described in the previous section, allowing for emergent processes promotes an environment in which teachers and students can occupy new and more fluid roles. Through the careful use of power and authority, teachers can open up new learning contexts *with* their students. By loosening the constraints that have traditionally defined teacher and student, different kinds of relationships between students and teachers can be forged. For us, this commitment to parity resulted, I believe, in equal-status relationships that were empowering for each of the co-collaborators. Greater teacher/student parity pervaded all aspects of our LGBTQ inquiry. Accordingly, I am now convinced this dimension of our work might be beneficial to other teacher educators doing related work.

In relationship with one another, we created the bonds of trust to engage more authentically with LGBTQ issues. Through teacher/student parity, we were able to “forge new stories for ourselves and [create] a new vision of human possibilities” (Reason, 1994a, p. 16). Trusting relationships did more than foster feelings of friendship.

As described in chapter three, we gained intimate knowledge of each other which led to a closeness that is uncommon in educational settings. This closeness, I contend, is particularly important to LGBTQ-focused study—study which often encourages learners to assert themselves in both personal and political ways. For us, caring relationships influenced our pedagogical practices while our pedagogical maneuverings further supported our growing relationships. In this sense, our pedagogy was anchored in the personal while pursuing the political. Whereas traditional pedagogy may or may not create close personal relationships between teachers and students or among students, an exposed pedagogy is predicated on authentic, meaningful relationship-building.

The capacity of any group to learn from each other is dependent upon individuals' abilities to share their understandings—their personal truths—with the larger group (Palmer, 1983). Likewise, I have come to recognize that individuals' abilities to share their "truths" are dependent upon the respect, honesty, and openness of that group. For instance, in one conversation Whitney expressed her personal confusion related to how heterosexism and homophobia are upheld. She struggled to understand whether or not "silent acceptance" could be sufficient in bringing about social change. Whitney did not hesitate in her sharing despite an awareness that her views did not coincide with others in our group. She felt comfortable, however, exposing her misconceptions to us because she trusted us to be respectful and patient. We had established a tradition of being willing to "hear each other's truth" and of affirming and valuing truth telling of this nature (hooks, 2000, p. 49). As testified to in the final consensus documents, she had become accustomed to an environment that "fostered new friendships and honest discussions" (F.C.D.-C.D.C.I 5-20-03). Whitney's expectation of us and our response to

her was possible because we saw each other as equals and treated each other accordingly. Exposed pedagogy requires that teacher educators and their students recognize that each of us has gaps in our knowledge as well as areas of expertise, again positioning all participants as both learners and teachers.

Traditional pedagogies often situate teachers in positions of authority in ways that preclude honest dialogue and authentic exchange with students. An exposed pedagogy, on the other hand, aims to make visible the power differentials that separate teachers from their students. When an exposed pedagogy is practiced, students are asked to share aspects of their lives. Likewise, teachers engage in the practice of self-disclosure, revealing their personal histories, notable strengths, and limited views. In this way, teachers are not positioned as “all-knowing, silent interrogators” (hooks, 1994, p. 21). An exposed pedagogy views both students and teachers as unique contributors to the learning process. Learning, in this case, is not centered on teachers and text. In other words, the teacher is not the center. Rather, she is an active and fully engaged partner in learning. As a partner in our collaborative inquiry I learned that, like Palmer (1998), I would “need to spend less time filling the space with my own thoughts and more time opening a space where students can have a conversation with the subject and with each other” (p. 120). Accordingly, my role in our collaboration was not diminished because of teacher/student parity. Rather, I alternated between leading and following. As a leader, I discovered the importance of intentional problem posing; as a follower, I had to learn the ways of careful listening.

Through our work together, I have come to believe that traditional notions of authority can be diminished in ways that actually assist students in learning related to

LGBTQ issues. Authority is not abandoned in an exposed pedagogy. Rather, it is shared among all participants. Like Shor (1996) suggests, “by transforming unilateral authority, teacher and students begin creating a mutual learning process” (p. 18). For us, traditional teacher and student roles were diminished and, instead, each participant was seen not for the position they occupied but for the varied strengths they possessed. In other words, exposed pedagogy required non-hierarchical interactions among *all* participants. We made a concerted effort to treat each other with respect, to speak with greater honesty, and to be more open and vulnerable. Indeed, student-participants concluded in their final consensus documents that peer-supported learning was essential to their growth over the year. Student-participants agreed that much of their learning resulted from peer interactions, confirming that teacher/student parity enabled them not only to see each other as equals, but to actually see and experience each other as teachers.

Many teacher educators recognize that building classroom community benefits students and contributes to learning. Like community-building, striving for teacher/student parity nurtures an atmosphere of care and compassion in the classroom. By implementing teacher authority differently and allowing for more fluid roles, exposed pedagogy leads to more embodied and holistic teaching and learning. Our work suggests that teacher educators should consider more closely the ways in which they are opened to personal growth and honest discussion alongside their students. Within an exposed pedagogy, teacher/student parity leads to new understandings and perceptions of ourselves as students and as teachers. For us, as these roles became intertwined, we discovered new ways to lean on and learn from each other.

## **Collectively-Guided Scaffolding**

As a teacher educator, I now recognize that as participants and I scaffolded learning for each other, we developed more sophisticated understandings and commitments related to LGBTQ issues. The teacher/student parity we had achieved and the emergent nature of our work enabled us to learn from each other and teach each other in ways that rarely occur in teacher education. The LGBTQ communities we entered and the community we created among ourselves served, in a way, as scaffolds themselves. These community contacts/contexts structured interactions for us that ultimately made available to us texts and knowledge that we would not have had access to otherwise. The kinds of scaffolding we did for and with each other involved working simultaneously toward both group and individual understanding. In an exposed pedagogy, learning does not result from one interaction with one person; rather, learning occurs between people as they interact over time and in varied contexts.

Because the community-based work offered both implicit and explicit learning opportunities, the burden was on us to make these experiences make sense. As we engaged in reflection on these experiences, we supported each other in constructing and adapting interpretations. As student-participants described in their final consensus documents, “by engaging in experiences with others, writing about our experiences in our dialogue journals, and then discussing our reactions and thoughts, we as a group have helped each other become more aware and knowledgeable” (F.C.D.-P.S. 5-20-05). Indeed, understanding our community-based experiences and how we were located within them further required that we learn from the perspective of others.

It was not only engaging in community-based events, then, that facilitated our growth and learning, but the way we scaffolded these experiences for each other both before and after the experience. This occurred, for example, when student-participants proposed and facilitated our participation in beyond campus events. Jill, for instance, had “studied” Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*<sup>19</sup> and suspected we might all benefit from studying it as well. This positioned her as both a peer and a more expert other who would be able to help us make connections and structure our learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Because of her investment and expertise, Jill gave us access to a more informed perspective, “opening” the text to us and “opening” us to the text. In the discussion that followed the film, we relied on Jill’s knowledge of the text and of us to guide our learning. Indeed, in their final consensus documents, student-participants explicitly explained that they were fortunate to “have each other to lean on and learn from” (F.C.D.-P.S. 5-20-03). Practices like this provided opportunities to expand students’ understanding by depending on one another’s knowledge and taking up the role of “teacher” as the content and interactions demanded.

We as a group found ourselves engaging in collectively-guided scaffolding in other ways as well. We became skilled at responding to and interacting with each other in ways that supported mutual growth and development. Indeed, the shared analytic process we engaged in to develop the final consensus documents depended on this collectively-guided scaffolding. They are examples of how we scaffolded each others’ learning through a process of shared synthesis. This process, however, was not an easy

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<sup>19</sup> This Oscar-nominated film was at the local theatre at the time of our collaboration. Having read the book, Jill believed the portrayals of gender and sexuality issues in this movie would raise good questions for our group.



or straightforward undertaking. We had to bridge group and individual understandings. I believe we were successful because participants sought consensus but were unwilling to compromise honesty or relegate anyone's contributions. Seeking consensus required debate which, for us, was characterized by both care and confrontation. New expressions of knowledge, skills, and dispositions were brought to bear in this shared analytic space. Participants learned ways to support one another in developing new language to mediate their emergent understandings and abilities. The scaffolding we were able to provide for each other during the writing of the final consensus documents exemplifies how, as student-participants explained, our work "allowed us to rethink and reorganize our ideas about the world around us and the roles we play" (F.C.D.-C.D.C.I 5-20-03).

Rethinking and reorganizing are accurate verbs to describe how we, as a group, scaffolded learning for each other. Through this process of collectively-guided scaffolding, each of us had to be open to both criticism and encouragement. We facilitated each other's growth and development by jointly recalling salient stories of our time together, bridging gaps in one another's knowledge, and providing informed and reflective feedback. Perhaps, most importantly, we positioned ourselves as learners within community contexts and within our own community of inquirers.

### **Tenets of an Exposed Pedagogy: A Final Statement of our Collaborative Work**

Our pedagogy, then, can be characterized by emergent processes, teacher/student parity, and collectively-guided scaffolding. I attribute much of the success of our work to these overarching pedagogical maneuverings. Working within this pedagogical process led student-participants to name several significant learning outcomes. For them, learning about sexual diversity can be fostered through:

- Peer Supported Learning,
- Identity Work,
- Confronting Dominant Cultural Influences, and
- Shifting Paradigms through Personal and Political Actions.

After reviewing both student-participants' and my own set of "findings," several overarching tenets can be culled together. In sum, these tenets include the following:

\* \* \* \* \*

**1) An exposed pedagogy deliberately seeks out new physical spaces.**

From preschool playgrounds to college lecture halls, LGBTQ issues traditionally have not been "allowed" in school settings. Even in multicultural education courses, sexuality has not been fully integrated in discussions related to diversity. Educators at all levels have struggled to meaningfully include LGBTQ issues and perspectives in a selective curricular tradition that has denied LGBTQ representation. Increasingly, then, students and their teachers are called to go to where these conversations do exist. Abandoning the safety of the classrooms we know in search of new physical spaces is vital to an exposed pedagogy. Moving to such spaces offers the potential to participate actively in conversations that may seem new to some but have a long and thriving history to insiders. Exposure to these new and traditionally "unseen" environments is likely to alert us to what's been missing, what's been denied.

In new places we can be seen (or are more comfortable being seen) as whole people. The shift that occurs when we enter unfamiliar spaces asks us to question not only what we know but what *access* we have had to knowing. An exposed pedagogy asks, "Where do we as whole people really exist?" "Where can ways of knowing each other, despite difference, be cultivated?" Once outsiders enter into new physical spaces,

we increase our chances of engaging more authentically with diverse perspectives and points of views.

In our inquiry, seeking out new physical spaces was a powerful source of learning. These beyond campus experiences provided openings for the expansion of students' knowledge by placing them in new contexts and with new "teachers." Within new contexts, prospective teachers have the opportunity to observe social and cultural cues, to learn ways to decipher both verbal and nonverbal interactions, and to stretch their interpretations in order to encompass new situations (Rogoff, 1990). As an example, attending an active GSA at a local high school pushed our thinking as we interacted in a new physical space outside the university. In her dialogue journal, Allison described her learning.

What I was most impressed with with the students at [City High] was their honesty. One student wore rainbow beads and gay-related patches on his bag. Another one asked me directly what I would do if a gay student was "being bashed" in my class. It really put me on the spot. [. . .] I wished I had as good of answers for him as he had for me.

[D. J. 3-24-03]

Being in that space with that student made the realities of being LGBTQ in school more tangible for Allison. As Delpit (1995) reminds us, pre-service teachers should "be encouraged to interact with, and willingly learn from, knowledgeable" insiders (p. 56). It is through experiences like the one Allison recounts that teachers may develop the necessary humility and awareness of human connectedness to learn from and, in turn, teach LGBTQ children. These kinds of experiences—experiences that "put [us] on the spot"—can rarely take place inside the university.

\* \* \* \* \*

**2) An exposed pedagogy engages learners over a prolonged period of time and includes immersion within LGBTQ communities.**

Homophobia and heterosexism cannot be unlearned in a ten-week course. It is unrealistic to expect prospective teachers to learn ways to confront these forms of oppression in schools through short-term intervention. Accordingly, working within an exposed pedagogy requires a prolonged length of engagement. Only through sustained commitment can opportunities arise to see the lives of others from multiple perspectives. Ample time is necessary for breadth of curriculum and depth of interaction.

Sometimes, as we found in our work, time needs to elapse for learners to make sense of past readings and experiences. Over time, new questions became apparent, new problems took precedence, and learning continued to unfold. Since LGBTQ issues are entangled with gender and other biases, time must be allotted for trips down unexpected but integrally related paths. Through the passing of time and in light of new experiences, past exchanges, encounters, and beliefs often became clearer. With the benefit of time, histories (both our own and others) can be reinterpreted. In addition, long-term, sustained engagement is necessary to avoid voyeurism, exoticism, and romanticism. For us, the luxury of time allowed the potential we had for taking informed action to come into view.

For instance, by the end of our time together Jill had transitioned from a distanced position to a highly invested one. Her movement toward this more invested position would not have been possible without prolonged engagement. At the onset of our work, Jill indicated in a rather benign and detached way that she wanted to participate in this inquiry because “same-sex parenting is on the rise.” As the year unfolded, Jill’s motivations became clearer and more multi-dimensional, reflecting her initial reasons

while integrating a more personal stance. Through an exposed pedagogy, Jill had the time and opportunity to sort through both of these aspects that drew her to this work and how she might come to contribute in more substantial ways. By the end of our time together, Jill was able to merge both her personal and her professional motivations. She developed an impassioned and informed stance – a stance that empowered her to pursue acts of advocacy even outside the walls of our collaboration. Transformations of this nature require long-term support and extensive investments of time.

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### **3) An exposed pedagogy makes visible the intents of silence.**

Silence in its subtlety is often underestimated. Learning to detect and counter silence is an important skill for educators with commitments to social justice. I have come to believe that any pedagogy that attempts to address diversity must also address the silences that accompany oppression. Often in diversity and equity education, we talk about stories that have been erased, voices that have been quelled, and histories that have been denied. An exposed pedagogy not only considers these kinds of silences but attempts to equip students with the means to deconstruct the intents behind silence. In this way, silence is forefronted in an exposed pedagogy. We have to help our students learn to recognize, differentiate, and interpret the silences they hear. Troubling the silent spaces illuminates the ways heterosexism and homophobia are at work in our lives, in schools, and in society.

In our work, student-participants encountered silence in their respective cohorts, their field placements, and their personal lives. Paradoxically, as we voiced these stories, we came to understand the implications of these silences. Student-participants

experienced disequilibrium as they tried to make sense of how others were making sense of our LGBTQ inquiry work. For example, during various interactions, student-participants were surprised by what wasn't said. At times, the lack of response to our work confused and often angered student-participants. As previously mentioned, significant people in our lives such as professors, peers, and parents chose silence over recognition or affirmation. Through our button wearing experience, for instance, we learned that silence can be born out of fear or out of not knowing what to do. We learned how silence can signal passive approval or quiet disdain.

Working within an exposed pedagogy enabled us not only to hear the messages in the silences of others but called our attention to the messages in our own silences. That is, we became aware of the ways we were perpetuating homophobia through unconscious silencing. Even in our own stories, we discovered how silence can be an avoidance strategy or used as a way to remain invisible. Whitney's inability to affirm her lesbian aunt; my inability to honestly discuss my sexuality while teaching elementary school; and Jonathan's inability to see homophobia in play in his church all exemplify the significance of our silences. Furthermore, as we made decisions about whether or not and where and when to wear our ally buttons, we realized fear and silence were influential factors. We learned, as Audre Lorde (1984) expresses, that "we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us" ( p. 44). An exposed pedagogy aims to make audible the range of silences that we encounter and perpetuate related to LGBTQ advocacy.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **4) An exposed pedagogy opens the door to closeted stories by exposing the origins of our beliefs.**

Educators and their students often know no other way than to cling to their unexplored biases related to heterosexism and homophobia. Like an artificial Christmas tree each December, our LGBTQ stories have to be taken from the attic, dusted off, and given a place to be aired. An exposed pedagogy asks that we (re)collect those stories and be open to reconsidering them so that we might begin to distinguish the influential and important stories. When we reach backward to (re)collect those stories, we can begin to address our own misgivings and misunderstandings. Myths of deficiency and social biases can be named and addressed. Topics that once felt unsafe can be entered into. Beliefs once held can be altered.

For their part, teacher educators are called to share their pertinent stories, their insights and their shortcomings—in essence, the experiences that have shaped their beliefs. If we expect “students to respond with their lives,” then teachers should be leading with and responding with their lives as well” (Palmer, 1983, p.42). During our collaboration, significant LGBTQ-focused stories from my life were shared with student-participants. I exposed these same stories (and myself) to you, the reader, in the initial chapter of this text. In an exposed pedagogy everyone’s life experiences are seen as resources—as entry points to deeper understanding. Allison, as an example of this, discovered how she was relying on past media images in her understanding of LGBTQ people and issues. Meredith, too, drew on childhood experiences. Speaking intuitively about her best friend, Andy, Meredith stated, “I’m not sure when I knew [that he was gay] but it was so just a part of him. I knew it, and he knew I knew it.” Allison and

Meredith had never thought through these personal stories in this particular way.

Bringing these stories out of the closet through an exposed pedagogy helped them to

better articulate and understand their own perspectives. As Makler (1991) explains, “to recount the past is to reclaim it, to reevaluate our selves in relation to others” (p. 46).

Each co-collaborator, then, drew on a rich but incomplete history. When shared publicly, these partial histories not only exposed our “hidden” stories to one another but revealed the nature of our beliefs.

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**5) An exposed pedagogy nurtures relationships that allow others to strip away their defenses in order to let other people’s interpretations re-cloth their understandings.**

An exposed pedagogy welcomes the personal stories and understandings of participants and assumes respectful engagement. However, respectful engagement does not require that participants censor themselves or demonstrate false sensitivity. Instead, an exposed pedagogy opens the door to authentic dialogue among engaged participants who refuse to be stifled by political correctness. In an exposed pedagogy, the voicing of naïve understandings are thought of as learning points and the airing of (mis)conceptions are opportunities for greater self-examination. As community members learn to avoid dancing around issues and feelings, they find themselves more willing to make personal disclosures in less defensive ways. New interpretations can be developed as stories are shared through these acts of disclosure. As we found, these disclosures, at times, made tellers feel vulnerable, naked, and exposed. This resulted, in part, from an awareness of the risks involved in being honest—the risk of being perceived as naïve; the risk of being chastised; the risk of being misunderstood. In an exposed pedagogy, relationships are



constructed to enable students to feel safe enough to let down their defenses and let others' responses make a difference. As Palmer (1983) explains, "real learning does not happen until students are brought into relationship with the teacher, with each other, and with the subject" (p. xvii). Through dialogues of disclosure, we garner the strength to stand naked before others in an unapologetic way. This is how pedagogy is sustained.

Dialogues of disclosure were evident throughout our writings and the transcripts of our inquiry group conversations. For example, early on Shannon disclosed her rather simplistic understanding of LGBTQ individuals, describing us as having "kind hearts and compassionate souls." She proudly shared her childhood experience. It became clear that her understanding of LGBTQ issues was grounded in her understanding of these life experiences. Witherell and Noddings (1991) describe this when they suggest that "the stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and at every juncture" (p. 2). After letting her defenses down, engaging in authentic community-based experiences, and allowing her co-collaborators to reconsider the meaning of her understandings, Shannon, I believe, grew to see the limits of her previous interpretation. Meaning, for her, was changed.

Through our work, I have come to believe that each one of the co-collaborators went through a similar interpretive shift at some point during our inquiry. This process of relinquishing ourselves and our stories to trusted others is essential to an exposed pedagogy. Our understandings of our stories, and in fact the stories themselves, were not the same after the disclosures and discussions.

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**6) An exposed pedagogy opens up places for the sexual body and reinserts the body in a loving space.**

According to feminist scholar bell hooks (1994) “many of us have accepted the notion that there is a split between the body and the mind” (p.191). She explains that we often participate in classrooms as if only the mind matters, excluding the bodily importance. In academic spaces, the intellect usually takes precedence, eclipsing all other dimensions of our selves. We are missing something, I believe, in education when we omit the body, when we rely solely on the intellectual. As Palmer (1983) asserts, “true knowing involves more than a disembodied intellect” (p. 64). An exposed pedagogy opens up a space for the physical, the emotional, the social, and indeed the sexual self. By integrating these traditionally divided parts, we make room for the whole person.

Learning ways to support LGBTQ youth and families requires that prospective teachers engage in direct conversations about sexuality. Sexual identity must be named. Perhaps, it goes without saying that our LGBTQ-focused inquiry required that we be deliberate in our efforts to make the sexual present. The physical body—the sexual body—is essential to each of us in who we are and how we are read in relation to others. Routinely, pre-service teachers are asked to share relevant aspects of their personal histories in classes. Heterosexuality is generally taken for granted in this process. As such, sexuality often goes unnamed. For us, sexuality was named when Jill shared the story of her fiancé. Jill recounts, “I was expecting a proposal. Instead, he broke up with me and clear out of the blue came out to me the next day.” Similarly, Dan forefronted his sexuality in his sociocultural autobiography assignment. At the time, I was aware of the

number of questions his presentation of self elicited from his peers. Dan's presentation, which involved standing on a chair and systematically dropping names of significant relationships from his past relationships, alerted me to how we often diminish sexuality in academic spaces. Dan's presentation was powerful because it bridged the "split between the body and the mind" that hooks described above. These two examples show how we invited the personal and reinserted the sexual body. Isolating the intellectual from the sexual and compartmentalizing cognitive ways of knowing from embodied ways of being works against us as both learners and teachers. As Palmer explains, "education is not just a cognitive process, not just the transmission of facts and reasons. It is a process that involves the whole person, and so involves deep feelings" (p.115).

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**7) An exposed pedagogy reveals the particular institutional, cultural, and legal structures that marginalize and rationalize the way we construct LGBTQ communities.**

Given the nature of our heterosexist world, LGBTQ community members face many inequalities. Indeed, LGBTQ individuals are offered fewer legal protections than other marginalized groups. In our current political times, LGBTQ rights are debated and voted on by a heterosexual majority. Consequently, rights may come and go. An exposed pedagogy engages majority students in purposeful conversations that reveal the privileges and legal rights that are denied to others. Accordingly, an exposed pedagogy holds a critical position.

Examples of the ways privilege became more apparent to us are evident throughout our work together. Whitney's notions of heterosexual privilege, for instance, were problematized if not resolved in discussions related to her aunt. In fact, both Amber

and Whitney shared stories of aunts whose lesbianism was denied even in their respective families. Sharing and discussing these stories increased our understandings of how homophobia and heterosexism are upheld and perpetuated through both personal and institutional means. Jonathan, too, struggled with privilege. His challenge was not naming his privilege as a married, heterosexual man but realizing how this “played out” in the world. With a lot of enthusiasm and perhaps less thought, Jonathan (on his own and as a result of our activity) distributed dozens of LGBTQ-advocating buttons to fellow parishioners at his church. And although this display of advocacy was well-intentioned, it reflects a somewhat limited understanding of the risks involved in button-wearing for LGBTQ individuals. He assumed, I believe, that all members of his church had as little to risk by displaying advocacy as he did. Since our inquiry focused on the structures behind LGBTQ oppression, Jonathan, I believe, eventually grew to see how heterosexual privilege offered him, and outsider advocates like him, a more “protected” point to enter into this work. Indeed, we all became more aware of heterosexist structures when we discussed how Dan’s button wearing was significantly different from his co-collaborators. The reality that he could be outed—that by naming his sexual identity his rights could disappear—revealed the institutional and legal structures that threaten LGBTQ individuals. Lindsay’s comment, at the time, reflected this revelation.

*I applaud you Dan. You see, I thought this was a great experience, but it was really humbling too. Because I’m thinking of that guy at the conference, it was confrontational, but I knew at all times that I could take off my button and people would stop saying things. That’s really different I think, the difference between Dan and me. But if you have a certain quality or look, even if you’re not gay or lesbian, you can’t.*

This comment, I believe, reveals Lindsay's understanding of institutional, cultural, and legal structures that marginalize LGBTQ communities. Her sentiment also demonstrates how an exposed pedagogy insists that we face those structures without wincing, recognizing that we are all implicated in an unjust system and that prejudice and discrimination affect us all.

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**8) An exposed pedagogy does not just talk about what an advocate does but constructs opportunities for students to experience a position of advocacy firsthand.**

Teacher preparation programs often leave students overbooked, overextended, and overwhelmed. Under these conditions, and understandably, being apprenticed into teaching seems to be *enough* of a challenge for most teaching candidates. When pre-service teachers are presented with the challenges of diversity and equity education, they are most often positioned as *witnesses*. They may read statistics or learn new theories or reflect on their own biases. However, they are rarely asked to *participate* in social justice work. Too often we ask students to “take up” inclusive teaching and learning models without giving them the experiences and tools to do this work effectively. An exposed pedagogy attempts to apprentice students into advocacy by opening up supported spaces to move them toward activism.

Because of the cohort model and the structure of the program, the student-participants in this study were inherently positioned as advocates within their specific university context. In some ways, they “stood out” from their peers because they had agreed to make the commitment to engage in LGBTQ inquiry. By volunteering to become involved in this “extra” work, they were seen as being willing to go “above and

beyond” in their efforts to become teachers<sup>20</sup>. Specifically, in our work, student-participants were apprenticed into activism through wearing buttons, participating in the AIDSWalk, developing a website that reflected our work, and contributing to meetings of a GSA.

Indeed, Dan’s experiences at the GSA meetings reflect how firsthand experiences with advocacy influenced student-participant’s thinking. In Dan’s very first journal entry, he exposed an early motivation for joining our inquiry. He wanted “to explore how [he] might ‘out’ myself in school” (D.J. Oct. 28). Yet, by January, Dan was still struggling with what being an out teacher might mean for the students he teaches. Midway through our year of collaboration, Dan wrote, “I seriously doubt that there will be many first or second grade students who have come to terms with their sexuality. Sometimes I struggle with finding the point in all this” (D.J. Jan 27). However, by early April and after attending two meetings of a GSA, Dan’s sense of agency shifted:

When [Matt] first mentioned going to [City High to participate in GSA meetings], I was excited. It’s been a long time since I’ve been in an urban high school. My elementary [placement] is nearly 100% African American and I don’t have the statistics right now, but most kids in my classroom receive free lunch. Many of them are on the path to attend [City High] when they get older. I thought to myself is this what my kids have to look forward to? But then I started thinking about my own social bias. I guess you could say that I pushed my own envelope. I’m a gay man who’s pretty middle class and I’m white. The kids at [City High] are African American and by the looks of it rather poor. Add gay to the mix and then you really have something. Racism. Being poor. Gay. How many pressures can any one kid handle?

I generally always find life easier when I’m not concerned about who knows and who doesn’t know my sexual orientation. In schools I find this ease goes away. More to the point, I struggle with how I am going to out myself and how I can make a difference. So here’s where the students at [City High] helped make my decisions easier. I realized that students at [City High] started school in places like [my elementary field placement]. As a gay man, I can put a face on

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<sup>20</sup> I recognize there is a degree of arrogance and a bit of irony inherent this reality.

the term GAY. It's like if kids in second grade know their teacher as gay and learn from someone who is gay then they and their parents might follow the words spoken by one of the students in the movie, *It's Elementary* and say, "What's the big whoop?" I know coming out to my fellow teachers and students next year will be difficult (and I hope I have the courage to follow through) but the students at [City High] helped me see that I can't imagine being a closeted teacher for my sake or for theirs.

- Dan [D.J. April 3]

In a supported learning context at City High, Dan has gained firsthand knowledge of the need for LGBTQ role models in schools. Even as an insider, Dan's perceptions were altered as he engaged in conversations with LGBTQ youth. Accordingly, constructing opportunities for prospective teachers to experience a position of advocacy firsthand is vital to an exposed pedagogy. Creating spaces for our students to reflect on the perspectives and realities of others unveils the need for all of us to consider how our actions impact others—suggesting that all of us, as both insiders and outsiders, have much to learn from one another and suggesting, too, that our “journeys” can never be traveled alone.

#### ***A Journey's End (concluded)***

*Endings are not always marked by finality. Although our time together has come to an end, our work has the potential to go forward in myriad ways. Each of us, I think you would agree, has changed as a result of our collaboration; each of us has grown in our abilities to address heterosexism and to confront homophobia. The actions we take as we go forward in our careers as educators, however, will determine the extent to which our journey has ended. The choices we make in the future, the knowledge we seek out, and the relationships we foster will determine if this point in time is marked as an ending or if, in fact, it is a*

*beginning. Our journey's end can be seen, in this regard, as the point in which we make commitments to ourselves to continue to strive to be anti-homophobic educators—to be educational leaders related to serving LGBTQ youth and families. In essences, the future choices we make for our own lives reflect the degree to which we honor our “end” of the deal. That, I believe, is how endings become beginnings.*



**APPENDIX A**  
**CHRONOLOGY OF PEDAGOGY**

## CHRONOLOGY OF A SHARED PEDAGOGY

### Fall Quarter

#### SESSION ONE: *The Laramie Project*

**Activity:** We attended a local performance of *The Laramie Project* as our initiating activity. The *Laramie Project* tells the story of a young gay man, Matthew Shepherd, who was beaten and killed at the hands of two homophobic peers. Although both HBO and NBC had aired movies about Matthew Shepherd's murder, several student-participants were unfamiliar with the story. By chronicling the reactions of residents of Laramie, Wyoming to Matthew's murder, the play creates a multi-vocal text representing the diverse perspectives of the community.

**Journal Prompt:** What motivated me to join an LGBTQ collaboration? As part of your response to this question, you may wish to incorporate aspects of the play. For example, is there a salient moment that resonates with you . . . a particular line you remember? Did a particular character speak to you? Does the play impact your motivation for wanting to learn about LGBTQ perspectives and issues? What questions are you left with?

## SESSION TWO: Introductions and Motivations

**Activity:** *Crossing the Line Activity.* For this get-to-know-each-other activity I placed a long strip of blue masking tape on the floor, dividing our classroom in half. Then, on opposing sides of the blue line, I posted two signs on the wall. On one sign I wrote the words ‘I AGREE’. The other sign said ‘I DISAGREE’. Student-participants and I started out by standing on the blue tape. I then read aloud statements that prompted each of us to “cross the line” and take a position under one of the two signs. Without discussion I read the following statements:

- I identify as a man or male.
- I am a first-generation college student.
- I identify as or have a loved one who is LGBTQ.
- I have utilized public transportation in the last year.
- I can speak a language other than English.
- I believe English should be the official language of the U.S.
- I teach and/or live in an urban area.
- I have received benefits due to the color of my skin.
- I believe in the death penalty.
- I identify as Christian.
- I identify as middle class.
- I am an activist or am willing to work toward social justice.

**Discussion:** Conversation related to visible and invisible identity markers followed this activity. What associated forms of oppression accompany each of these markers (e.g. race/racism; gender/sexism, etc.)? Which, if any, of the statements caused confusion or conflict on your part? What does this activity tell us about the make-up of our group?

Additionally, we shared our reactions to *The Laramie Project* and traded journal entries related to our motivations for entering into this collaborative project.

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on today’s activity and discussion. What identity markers do you bring to our work? How do these markers shape your perceptions?

### SESSION THREE: Discrimination, Prejudice, and Socialization

**Activity/Discussion:** Based on the weekly readings and our school experiences, we discussed the questions below. In two groups of five, we recorded our responses on large sheets of paper to bring to a whole-group discussion.

- ✓ When is the first time in school that you remember talking about a sexual orientation other than heterosexuality?
- ✓ What were your early learnings about LGBTQ people? Were stereotypes involved? If not in school, from what sources did you get this information?
- ✓ How did you learn that you were expected to be heterosexual?
- ✓ How would your life be different if you were a sexual orientation other than what you are right now?

Questions taken from Adams, Bell, and Griffin's (1997) *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*.

We got in pairs to discuss our journal writing from last week. We discussed how written feedback from our peers is “pushing” our thinking and/or raising new questions for us to consider. We traded this week’s journal writing with someone “new.”

**Mini-Lecture:** I presented information about *ideologies*, *hegemony*, *discrimination*, and *prejudice*. The point of the presentation was to convey how ideologies, social institutions, and dominant interests create a form of cultural encapsulation that limits or colonizes our thinking related to LGBTQ issues.

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on today’s discussion. How has your thinking been shaped by heterosexism?

#### **Readings:**

Anyon, J. (1980). *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*,  
Blumenfeld, W. J. & Raymond, D. (2000). *Prejudice and Discrimination*,  
Harro, B. (2000). *The Cycle of Socialization*, and  
Pincus, F. L (2000). *Discrimination Comes in Many Forms: Individual, Institutional, and Structural*.

## **SESSION FOUR: Intersections and Multiculturalism**

**Discussion:** In small and later whole group, we discussed principles and dimensions of multicultural education.

Shared and traded dialogue journals.

**Journal Prompt:** What climate exists in your field placement for addressing multicultural issues, particularly LGBTQ issues? As a teacher, what strategies can you develop for building an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum?

### **Readings:**

Banks, J. (2001). *The Dimensions of Multicultural Education*,  
Carlson, D. (1995). *Gayness, Multicultural Education, and Community*,  
Gay, G. (1983). *Retrospects and prospects of Multicultural Education*,  
Pohan, C. A. & Bailey, N. J. (1998). *Including Gays in Multiculturalism*,  
Pope, M. (1995). *The Salad Bowl is Big Enough for Us All: An Argument  
for the Inclusion of Lesbians and Gay Men in Any Definition of  
Multiculturalism*, and  
Sleeter, C. (1992). *Multicultural Education: Five Views*.

## SESSION FIVE: Examining Privilege

**Activity:** Small group LGBTQ definitions activity. In three groups of three, student-participants were given chart paper and markers and asked to define the following terms:

- Heterosexual Privilege
- Sexism
- Heterosexism
- Sexual Orientation
- Heterosexual Ally
- Gender Identity
- Biological Sex
- Transsexual
- Transgender Person
- Drag Queen

Next, groups taped their definitions on the board and we, as a large group, discussed variations in their definitions.

**Discussion:** What freedoms and privileges do you have that are denied to others? How do *language* and our understanding/use of terms and definitions contribute to our (mis)conceptions of LGBTQ issues?

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on the personal stories shared today. Begin to think about our sociocultural autobiography papers. A key question to explore for this assignment is: How have I come to be who I am? Consider how the influence of broad social and political factors such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and geographic location shape your knowing of the world. Additionally, you may wish to entertain the question: How have my experiences with diversity influenced my identity?

### **Readings:**

- Herr, K. (1997). *Learning Lessons from School: Homophobia, Heterosexism and the Construction of Failure*,  
MacGillivray, I. K. (2000). *Educational Equity for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer/Questioning Students: The Demands of Democracy and Social Justice for America's Schools*, and  
McIntosh, P. (1989). *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*.

## **SESSIONS SIX AND SEVEN: Identity Work**

**Activity:** Over the course of two meetings, student-participants and I shared our significant sociocultural and sociopolitical identity markers in the form of autobiographical presentations of self. We shared our autobiographies through art, poetry, stories, and photographs.

**Journal Prompt:** How has your experience with/in LGBTQ communities impacted your understanding of LGBTQ people, issues, and concerns? If you do not have LGBTQ-inclusive experiences, describe the barriers that have hindered your potential to engage in these experiences/relationships.

### **Readings:**

- Raymond, D. (1994). *Homophobia, Identity, and the Meanings of Desire: Reflections on the Cultural Construction of Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Sexuality*,  
Sears, J. T. (1995). *Black-Gay or Gay-Black? Choosing Identities and Identifying Choices*, and  
Tatum, B. D. (2000). *The Complexity of Identity: "Who Am I?"*

## **SESSION EIGHT: Gay Men's Chorus Winter Concert**

**Activity:** We attended the Columbus Gay Men's Chorus Winter Concert as a culminating activity for fall quarter. The Chorus performs holiday music annually at a local Methodist church. We extended an invitation to friends and family members to join us in this event. Afterward, we had dinner at a nearby vegan restaurant.

## Winter Quarter

### SESSION NINE: *It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in Schools*

**Activity:** We went to Amber's home to view *It's Elementary* (Chasnoff and Cohen, 1996). (I supplied pizza. Amber's mom made homemade egg rolls. Allison brought drinks.) *It's Elementary* is a documentary film that showcases teachers, administrations, and schools in the United States that have made it a priority to teach about LGBTQ issues within the framework of their curriculum. Through examples, the film demonstrates how practicing teachers are integrating LGBTQ issues into their curriculum.

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on the film *It's Elementary*. What did you learn about LGBTQ inclusion? In what ways does the film enhance your understanding of inclusive practice?



## SESSIONS TEN AND ELEVEN: Curriculum and Schooling

**Discussion:** “Taking up” multiple positions and perspectives, debate the inclusion of LGBTQ issues in school curriculum from the point of view of administrators, parents, and students.

**Activity:** *Button, Button, Who has the Button* - We initiated a button-wearing experience developed and described in Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997).

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on today’s discussion/debate. Keep a log of your experiences related to your button wearing this week.

### **Readings Session Ten:**

- Casper, Cuffaro, Schultz, Silin, & Wickens, (1996). *Toward a Most Thorough Understanding of the World: Sexual Orientation and Early Childhood Education*,
- King, J. R. & Schneider, J. J. (1999). *Locating a Place for Gay and Lesbian Themes in Elementary Reading, Writing, and Talking*,
- Kozik-Rosabal, G. (2000). “Well, we haven’t noticed anything bad going on,” said the principal: Parents speak about their gay families and schools,
- Rofes, E. (1999). *What Happens When the Kids Grow Up? The Long-Term Impact of an Openly Gay Teacher on Eight Students’ Lives*, and
- Wickens, E. (1993). *Penny’s Question: I Will Have a Child in My Class with Two Moms—What Do You Know About This?*

### **Readings Session Eleven:**

- Lipkin, A. (1999). School Change. In *Understanding Homosexuality: Changing Schools*. (pp. 230-262) and
- Lipkin, A. (1999). Curriculum. In *Understanding Homosexuality: Changing Schools*. (pp. 327- 367).

## SESSION TWELVE: *The Hours*

**Activity:** We went to see the Oscar nominated film, *The Hours*. *The Hours* tells the story of three women across three generations as they experience sexism and grapple with issues of gender and sexuality.

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on the film. What are your thoughts on how the three women relate to the men in their lives? Historically, how have gender roles changed or shifted? What do you make of the *implied* but not named lesbian content/relationships in the film? What questions remain with you?

## SESSION THIRTEEN: Gay/Straight Alliances

**Activity:** We participated in Gay/Straight Alliance meetings with local high school students. This out-of university experience took place at a nearby urban high school during their lunchtime meetings.

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on the GSA meeting. What did you learn *from* LGBTQ youth?

### **Readings:**

Blumenfeld, W. J. (1995). *Gay/Straight Alliances: Transforming Pain to Pride*,  
Rofes, E. (1995). *Making Our Schools Safe for Sissies*, and  
Uribe, V. (1995). *Project 10: A School-Based Outreach to Gay and Lesbian Youth*.

## **SESSION FOURTEEN: Ally Work**

**Activity:** We took a *pop quiz* related to common conceptions of LGBTQ issues. (Modified from Sears, 1992).

**Discussion:** What does it take to do good ally work with others? Were you surprised at your “score” on the quiz? Does your score say anything about how you would go about entering cross-sexual relationships?

**Journal Prompt:** Reflect on our discussion and the readings.

### **Readings:**

Anzaldúa, G. E. (2000). *Allies*,

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Toward a New Vision: Race, Class and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection*, and

Washington, J. & Evans, N. J. (2000). *Becoming an Ally*.

## Spring Quarter

### SESSIONS FIFTEEN AND SIXTEEN: Contemporary Issues

**Activity (Session Fifteen):** We attended Ellen Degeneres' standup comedy act.

**Discussion (Session Sixteen):** Response to Ellen's concert. Is humor an effective tool for dismantling homophobia? How significant are reading/hearing the actual voices of LGBTQ individuals when it comes to interrogating homophobia/heterosexism?

**Readings:** (Taken from *The Advocate Magazine*)

Allen, D. (2002). *The Adoption Option*,

\_\_\_\_\_ (2002). *Young and Gay in the USA: Stories from the Coming-Out Front*, and

Dahir, M. (2002). *Transgender Breakthrough*.

### SESSION SEVENTEEN: Jenny Finney Boylan on Oprah

**Activity:** We watched Oprah Winfrey's interview of Jenny Finney Boylan. Boylan spoke of her life as a male to female (MtF) transgender person as written about in her book, *She's not there: A life in two genders*.

**Discussion:** We engaged in discussion related to transphobia.

### SESSION EIGHTEEN: Steps toward Activism

**Activity: AIDSWalk**

Lindsay described: On Sunday, May 4, we partook in the AIDSWalk. This was an act of advocacy for the support of individuals with HIV/AIDS, as well as a way to help raise money for AIDS research. This was important for us because it was an act of advocacy, and we know that we were helping further our understanding of other issues that our society, including LGBTQ individuals, faces.

## **SESSIONS NINETEEN, TWENTY AND TWENTY-ONE: Analyzing our Growth and Development**

**Activity:** These class sessions gave us the opportunity to synthesize our learning. During one session, we generated a list of terms that we had used/acquired throughout our year of collaboration. From this list we, as a group, generated overarching themes related to our learning. In small groups we selected one theme to explore and write about more fully. These writings resulted in what we came to call Final Consensus Documents. During these sessions, we also developed a website as a means to represent the work we had accomplished.

## **SESSION TWENTY-TWO: Sharing What We've Come to Believe**

**Activity:** As a culminating activity and as part of student-participants' final capstone project, we presented our work to faculty and fellow cohort members. This gave student-participants and me the opportunity to share how our year of inquiry was personally transformative as well as what we had come to believe about serving LGBTQ youth and families in schools.

**APPENDIX B**  
**INVITATION TO INQUIRY**

## Invitation to Inquiry Handout

### **Edu. T&L 815 Diversity Inquiry Group: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Issues and the Early Childhood M.Ed. Program**

\*\*\*\*\*

Group Facilitator: Matt Conley    [conley.27@osu.edu](mailto:conley.27@osu.edu)

\*Meets requirement for Edu. T&L 815 and fulfills partial requirement for capstone

We will be involved in discussing readings and media, journaling, and self-reflection.

#### Some guiding questions to consider:

- ❖ What are our wonderings and concerns about LGBT issues in schools?
- ❖ How can we nurture anti-homophobic practices in children and in school communities?
- ❖ What do teachers know/need to know about LGBT youth?

Below I have listed some possible directions our work could take. Your input will guide our ultimate destination.

#### FALL: Gaining an understanding of LGBT issues

*Together we will explore questions generated by our group. For example:*

- ✓ How have our personal experiences shaped how we respond to LGBT concerns in the schools?
- ✓ How do values, beliefs, and attitudes influence our abilities to effectively interact with LGBT youth?
- ✓ How are heterosexism and gender roles enforced and reinforced in your field placement and at OSU?
- ✓ What would it be like to be a lesbian or gay teacher in your teaching placement?
- ✓ How do LGBT issues “fit” into a multicultural curriculum?

#### WINTER: Learning from/with LGBT-Advocating Adults

*Together we will explore questions generated by our group. For example:*

- ✓ In what ways can adults (teachers, parents, community members) make a difference in the lives of LGBT youth or families?
- ✓ How do organizations such as OSU’s GLBTSS office work to fight homophobia and promote equity?
- ✓ How can teachers become LGBT allies and work in community toward social change?
- ✓ In your placement, who might be an advocate for LGBT youth?
- ✓ What changes need to be made to make schools safer and more affirming for LGBT youth and teachers?

#### SPRING: Learning from/with LGBT Youth. (Kaleidoscope Youth Coalition/Brookhaven GSA)

*Together we will explore questions generated by our group. For example:*

- ✓ What do we need to know about how children from LGBT families experience school?
- ✓ How can we better understand what it is like for LGBT youth to negotiate social and academic endeavors in and out of school?
- ✓ What would it be like to be a LGBT youth in your school placement or other school settings?
- ✓ As justice-seeking teachers, how can we build relationships with LGBT youth in order to change the homophobic and oppressive nature of school environments?

**APPENDIX C**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**



### Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Socioeconomic Background <sup>21</sup>	Undergraduate Major	Sexuality
Allison	23	Middle	HDFS <sup>22</sup>	Heterosexual
Amber	23	Working	HDFS	Heterosexual
Dan	50	Working	Agriculture	Homosexual
Jill	24	Upper-middle	Hotel Mgt.	Heterosexual
Jonathan	26	Working/Middle	Systems Mgt.	Heterosexual
Lindsay	23	Middle	HDFS	Heterosexual
Matt	31	Middle	EMCE <sup>23</sup>	Homosexual
Meredith	24	Middle	Elem. Educ.	Heterosexual
Shannon	22	Middle	HDFS	Heterosexual
Whitney	23	Upper-middle	HDFS	Heterosexual

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<sup>21</sup> Student-participants self-reported their socioeconomic backgrounds

<sup>22</sup> HDFS = Human Development and Family Sciences majors

<sup>23</sup> EMCE = Early and Middle Childhood Education

**APPENDIX D**

**SHARED ANALYSIS: WORDS AND PHRASES**

## Shared Analysis: Words and Phrases

Acceptance vs. Tolerance	Heteronormativity
Action	Heterosexism
Awareness & Reflection	Homophobia
Taking a Stand	Inclusion
Advocacy	Inclusive Environments
Advocate	Identity, Identity work
Agency	Ideologies
Alliance Building	Capitalism
Ally	Christianity
Articulation	Heteronormative
Bias	Meritocracy
Bisexual	Inequality
Categories	Invisibility
Coalitions	Knowledge Acquisition
Coalition Building	LGBTQ
Communication	Labels, Stereotypes
Authentic	Language
Open & Honest	Limitations of
Community	Harmful implications of
Confrontation	Lesbian
Content Integration	Love
Critical Theory	Care, Respect
Cultural encapsulation, influences	Mediation
Dialogue	Multicultural Perspectives
Discrimination	Mutuality
Individual	Perception
Structural	Perspective taking
Cultural	Multiple Perspectives
Diversity	Politics, Political Realities
Dominance	Power
Drag Queen	Issues of
Empowerment	Prejudice
Self Empowerment	Prejudice Reduction
Equity	Privilege
Equity Pedagogy	Heterosexual Privilege
Exposed Pedagogy	White Privilege
Shared Pedagogy	Male Privilege
Mutual Pedagogy	Queer Theory
“Out in the Open” teaching	Racism
Families, Diversity within	Reflection
Feminism	Past experiences
Hegemony	Current thinking

## Shared Analysis: Words and Phrases

### Relationships

Mutually Beneficial Relationships.

Relationship Building

Reciprocal Relationships

“Schools as the Great Equalizer”

Silence

Self Awareness

Sexual Orientation

Sexism

Misogyny

Social Change

Agents of Social Change

Social Justice

Support

For one another

For others

### Teaching

Anti-Status Quo Teaching

Multicultural Teaching

Inclusive Practices

### Thinking

Paradigm Shifts

Critical Shifts in Thinking

Transgender

Transsexual

Voice

Developing

Having

Using

Vulnerability

Personal Risk-taking

Sharing Personal Stories

**APPENDIX E**

**SHARED ANALYSIS: THEMATIC SCHEMES**

## **Shared Analysis: Major Themes of our Work**

- Identity Work / Awareness of Self
  - Non-exploitive relationship building begins by knowing your own position(s)
  - The privilege of staying dumb
    - Amber, Lindsay, and Meredith
- Personal and Political Realities of doing LGBTQ-inclusive work
  - What does Action and Advocacy mean to us?
  - Critical Awareness
    - Dan and Jonathan
- Dominant Cultural Influences that inform/influence LGBTQ issues in education
  - The hegemony of heterosexism
  - What have we learned about heteronormativity?
    - Jill and Whitney
- Peer Support / Learning in Collaboration with Others
  - Interconnectedness
  - Being open to the perspective of others
  - Listening
    - Allison and Shannon

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